

How to Win the Facebook Engagement Game



The second-best-performing post in the study, by 350.org.

Since we first observed [the downward trend](#) in Facebook pages' organic reach, community managers have been in a panic. The number of users who see the average post from your Facebook page is half of what it was a year ago.

For most Facebook users, that's good news because they're likelier to see higher quality posts in their Facebook feeds. But, for charities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that can't afford to buy attention for Facebook posts, it's a worrying trend.

There is all the more pressure, then, to maximize your supporters' engagement on each and every Facebook post. When we ask, "what's engaging", we're really posing this question:

What content earns the most likes, comments and shares on your page?

I first wondered about this in 2012, and [answered it by ranking the engagement of 1000 Facebook posts](#) by prominent environmental NGOs. In my current work with [the United Nations Framework on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#), I had the chance to repeat the study this summer. This time I focused on organizations in the UNFCCC's orbit—NGOs, other UN agencies and foundations. On average, these pages had about 450,000 likes, and none had fewer than 40,000.

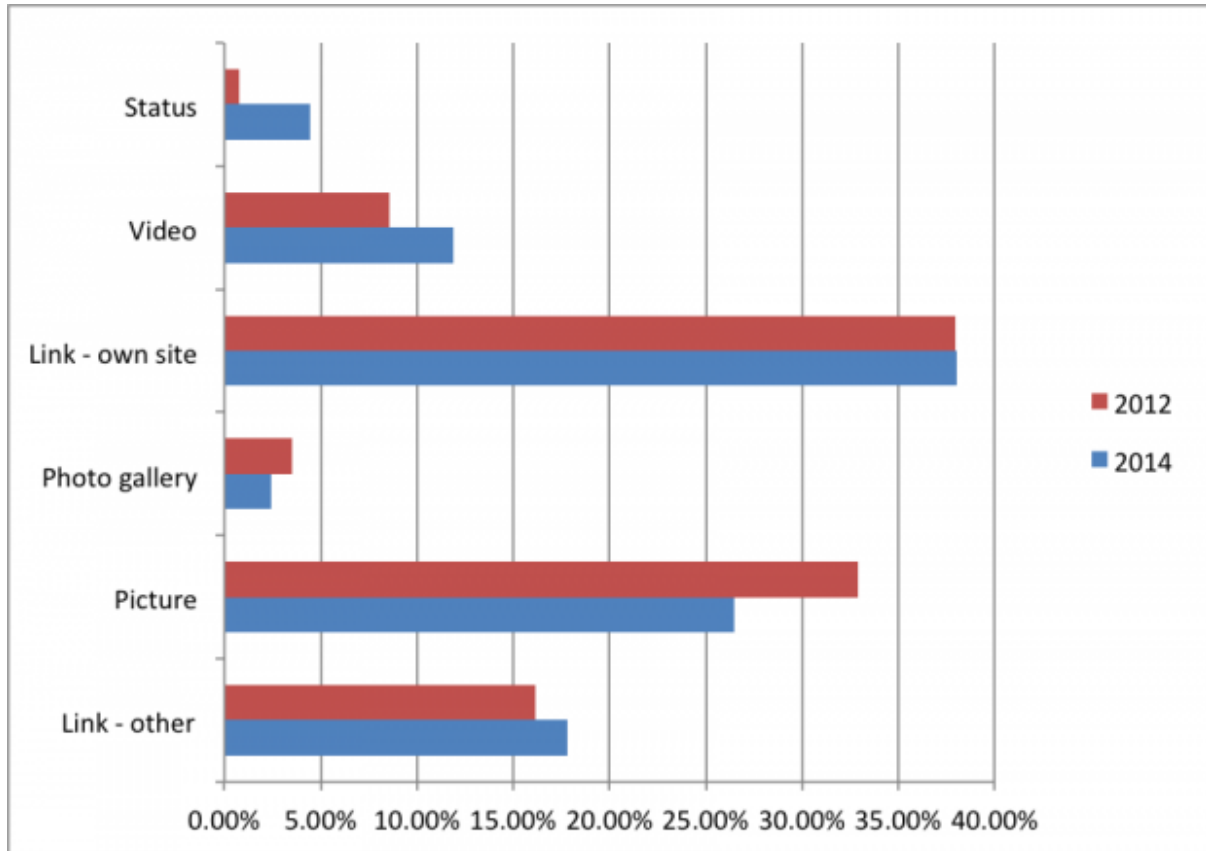
With the help of some diligent interns, I collected data on the 50 most recent Facebook posts from 20 organizations. I then calculated an engagement score for each post and an overall engagement score for each organization's page. This allowed me to rank all 1000 posts and to understand not only which posts were most effective, but also which organizations are winning on Facebook. This latter observation is more valuable than it sounds, because it's always helpful to have successful pages to learn from and emulate.

Having done the same research twice, it was also illustrative to understand how user engagement had evolved over time.

Old Habits Die Hard

When I compared my 2014 data with the analogous 2012 results, I found many similarities. For example, the

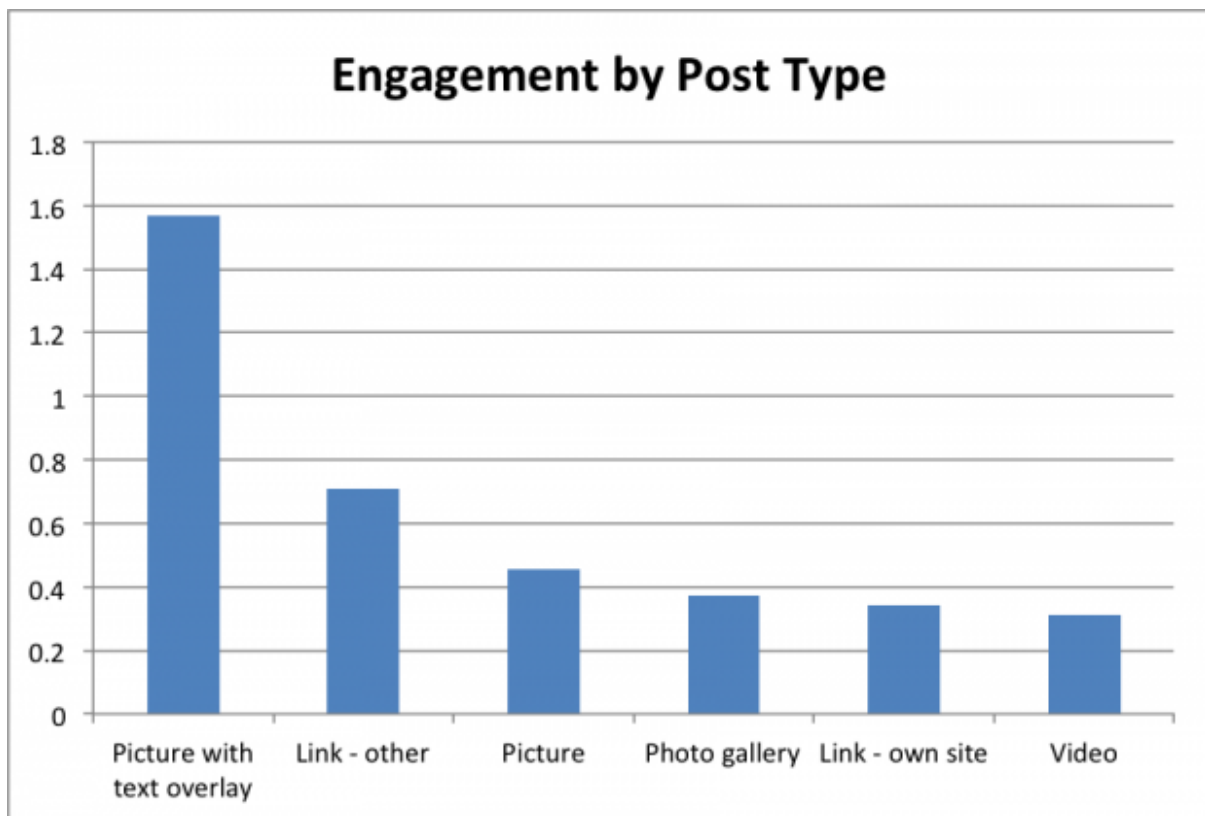
breakdown of content types for the pages was very similar. I found a preponderance of links back to organizations' own websites and plenty of images as well.



There's a strong correlation between organizations that 'link out' to other sites more often than they link to their own. In essence, the less selfish an organization is, the more engaging it's likely to be.

Web Postcards are So Hot Right Now

One area where I did find a disparity between 2012 and 2014 was the explosion of web postcards. Also known as image macros or memes, those are the now ubiquitous images overlaid with text. In 2012, only 25% of all the picture posts we looked at were web postcards. In 2014, 45% of all images were web postcards.



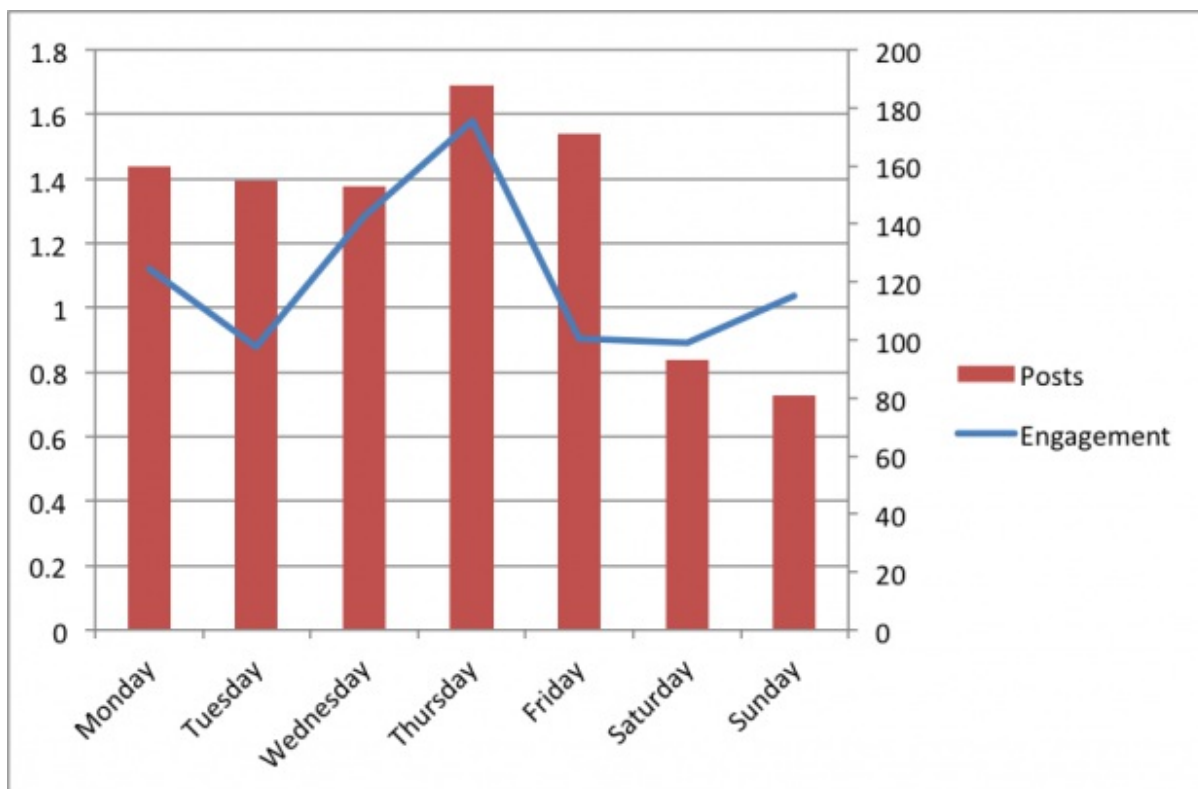
Not only that, the top 31 posts overall, and 68 of the top 100, were web postcards. That shouldn't come as a surprise, because web postcards were also the most engaging type of content, nearly four times more engaging as images without text.

Post 5 to 7 times a week

Nineteen of the 20 organizations I evaluated posted an average of 5.7 times a week, or roughly once every weekday and once on the weekend. The outlying organization—an international body whose name you’d recognize—posts 35 times a week.

I can imagine their thinking—there’s a sports cliché about missing all the shots you don’t take. However, as a rule of thumb, spammy behavior on the web tends to get punished.

On a related note, mid-week posts were most frequent and received the most engagement.



Emulate Oil Change International, They Won By a Landslide

One organization I looked at was a superstar. Oil Change International’s fan page received 12 times the engagement as the average page in the project. I asked David Turnbull, Campaigns Director at Oil Change International why he thought his organization was tearing it up on Facebook:

When big news hits we try to be first out of the gate with an image if possible. Images do best and need to look polished but not overly so. We’ve got a good style to our images, I think, and people seem comfortable and excited to share them. We’re also a bit snarky at times, which I think people like on Facebook. Lastly, we have a few great partner organizations that like to share our stuff that helps with getting more engagement.

Oil Change’s posts dominated the upper echelons of the project’s rankings. Here’s the top post overall:

Timeline Photos

Back to Album · Oil Change International's photos · Oil Change International's Page

Previous · Next



Oil Change International

Despite millions in dirty energy money, Big Oil couldn't get their vote on Keystone: <http://bit.ly/21MillionKXL>

Like · Comment · Share · 13 May

👍 2,479 people like this.

📄 18,409 shares

💬 View previous comments 48 of 231



David Benjamin More evidence we that we live in a world gone mad. And our legislators vote AGAINST our interests. Doomed. 15 May at 22:17 · Like · 📄 2



Steve Windisch The word "idiot" should actually be reserved for people who try to turn important environmental issues into liberal hate fests.

Album: Timeline Photos

Shared with: 🌐 Public

Open Photo Viewer

Download

Embed Post

Report photo

95% of Oil Change's posts were web postcards, more than any of the other organizations I looked at.

One very reasonable critique of this project is that I can't know if any of these organizations are spending money to 'boost posts' and reach more fans. I did check with Oil Change and several other participants, all of whom confirmed that they don't regularly make a practice of buying "boosts".

The runner-up was 350.org. This was their top-ranked post:

BP admits: Lake Michigan tar sands spill twice as big as first reported.



Like Comment

350

350.org

BP just quietly admitted their tar sands spill into the drinking water supply of 7 million people was twice as large as first reported.

They would love to see this covered up. Please SHARE to keep the spotlight on them.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-horn/bp-doubles-initial-size-e_b_5046562.html

Album: Timeline Photos

Shared with: Public

Open Photo Viewer

Download

Embed Post

Report photo

I expect that you're curious, so here's the lowest ranked post in my project:

GREENING THE SILVER SCREEN

Parceria:
CONNECT 4CLIMATE
WORLD BANK GROUP

CRACKLE ZOOM EDIÇÃO ESPECIAL:

PROJETO CRACKLE GREEN

Like Comment

Connect4Climate
Brazilian film students show how we can all work to protect the climate:
<http://ow.ly/w7KYJ> #ProjetoCrackleGreen
Like · Comment · Share · 29 April · Edited

Album: Cover photos
Shared with: Public

Open Photo Viewer
Embed Post

6 people like this.

If your page's declining organic reach is keeping you up at night, take a page out of Oil Change International's playbook.

© 2014 HootSuite Media Inc. All Rights Reserved.