

CHAPTER FOUR

Engagement Increases Visibility



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“Whether it’s in person or on social media, there’s something dangerous about thinking that the people who support your art aren’t worthy of your time. Be careful to not fall into this way of thinking.”

One of the easiest ways to create more successful social media posts is to engage with the people who are commenting. This is because every social media platform values comments. The more comments a post has, the more visible their algorithms will make it. Consequently the less comments a post has, the less invisible their algorithms will make it. Therefore, it’s in every artist’s best interest to not only create content that inspires people to comment but to also actively engage with the commenters. The more comments the better.

It’s such a simple thing, but many artists avoid engaging with their fans altogether simply because they don’t know what to say. So in this section I’d like to break down

some simple tips for engaging with your fans in the comments. Once you master a few of these strategies, engaging with people will become much easier, and your posts will be more visible.

Let's first talk about why artists don't engage with their fans as much as they should.

WHY ARTISTS DON'T ENGAGE MORE

They Have Antisocial Tendencies - While performing is very social, the act of creating art is not. Artists typically spend a lot of time alone, creating without the assistance or input of others. And even though time alone is great for creating, it's not so great for interacting with others. As a result, their social skills tend to get a little dull when they don't use them. This has an impact not only on their personal lives but also on the way they engage people online, often causing them to not engage at all because they're "not in the mood" to deal with people. As artists we must always remember how important people are to what we do. It's ok to create alone, but make sure you're always comfortable around people, or your artistic career will suffer the consequences of isolation.

They Don't Understand the Algorithms - Just because artists use social media platforms every day doesn't mean they understand their inner-workings. In general, they have no idea what types of behavior is rewarded or punished on each platform. And to be honest, many artists have no idea

that algorithms control how many people see their content. But if they understood that certain things they were doing were causing their fans to not see or engage with their material they would probably change their ways. We don't need to be experts on every detail of these algorithms, but we do need to understand that they reward and punish certain types of posts. Knowing this helps us feel more comfortable and creates incentive to engage with our fans and followers.

They Think They Are Above It - Several years back I played a show with an artist who asked me the wildest question. He said, "How are you able to stand here at the merch table all night and deal with these people? I don't have anything in common with them!" I told him that I could do it because I didn't think I was above them. In fact, getting to speak to different people at the merch table is something I find extremely rewarding. It's the only time I get to speak to my fans face-to-face and thank them for supporting me. Because they all have different and interesting stories that are fascinating to me, I never looked at it negatively like he did. He felt like interacting with them was a punishment because all he wanted to do was perform, get paid, and go home. Meanwhile, I looked at speaking to them as a privilege. I wasn't too good to speak to them and they weren't beneath me. Whether it's in person or on social media, there's something dangerous about thinking that the people who support your art aren't worthy of your time. Be careful to not fall into this way of thinking.

Laziness - There are a lot of artists who legitimately think that their job ends as soon as they finish creating their art. They legitimately believe that they shouldn't have to do anything they don't feel like doing--like marketing and promotion--because they're so talented. And that their talent alone is enough to make them successful. They have plenty of time and opportunity to engage, but they don't, simply because they're too lazy. The worst part is that these artists are typically the most naturally talented artists. But there is nothing more common than an extremely talented artist who isn't successful. We all get lazy from time to time. But never let your career be defined by laziness. Your decision to not engage with people can cost you dearly, and the last thing you want to do is look back on your career and wonder what could have been had you just tried. Engaging with the people who like what you do costs you nothing. Don't be lazy.

Lack of Planning - Several years back, I started taking my album release days more seriously because I noticed that the posts I made on those days always created a lot of conversation. Seeing this inspired me to start planning for those days in advance. I decided that on my album's release day, I would spend as much time as possible speaking to my fans online, thanking them for their support and answering their questions. It was much easier to do because I planned it months ahead of time. Unfortunately, many artists fail to engage with their fans because they don't plan on it. They create amazing art, never thinking that people will want to

engage with them if it's successful. If people want to speak to you about your art, you're doing something right. You're making art that matters. As such, you should always plan on engaging with your fans about it. If you believed in it when you made it, then you should always have plans to speak to people about it online.

Here are some tips on how to engage better.

HOW TO CREATE MORE ENGAGEMENT

Don't Wait - Several years ago, long before I understood how social media really worked, I would try to wait until the end of the day to respond to the comments. My plan was to handle them all at once so I wouldn't have to go back and forth on social media all day. What I didn't know then was that by waiting until the end of the day to respond, I was hurting my engagement. By simply responding to the comments earlier I could have doubled the total number of comments on the post, thus forcing the algorithms to make it more visible when traffic was the highest. If you've got a post that people are commenting on, engage with them as soon as possible. Otherwise you'll miss an opportunity to organically boost the visibility of your posts.

Be Thankful - In most instances, people just want to let you know that you did something that they think is dope and thank you for doing it. And since their comments are complimentary, your response should be gracious. Tell them

thank you. Tell them that you appreciate their support. If they are spreading the word about you to other people, thank them for sharing your work. Thank them because it's the right thing to do. It just so happens that doing the right thing also helps your post be more visible to the platform's algorithms.

Ask questions - Interacting with people doesn't have to be a one-way street, where they thank you and ask you questions. You're allowed to ask them questions too. Ask them where they're from, how they heard of you, and what's their favorite thing that you've done. Showing that you actually care enough to ask them a question creates a deeper connection and also extends the conversation. You can also invite them to ask you questions.

Have Fun - The easiest way to be liked is to have a pleasant attitude. This goes double for social media where the tone or context of a written comment can so easily be misinterpreted. But take my advice: don't take yourself too seriously. If you go into it with the right attitude, interacting with people can become a lot of fun. But if you're too serious, it can be a drag. Have fun out there.

Have Links Ready - Personally, it's common that a conversation with a fan about one song or album leads them to ask where they can purchase a completely different album. I used to miss these opportunities in the past, but not anymore because I make it a habit to always have links to my most popular albums ready. I use an application named bit.ly for

link shortening, but there are many other similar programs that do the same thing: shorten, store, and track activity on your links. At a minimum, you should always have a link to your most recent project easily accessible.

People Aren't Perfect - Before I log onto social media and start interacting with people, I find it useful to remind myself that people aren't perfect. They say things awkwardly, make bad jokes, and misspell words. And that's ok, they're human. It's important to remember this when you're on social media because if you get on there looking for perfection, you're going to be sorely disappointed. I find it more useful to remind myself that people aren't perfect. That way, when things go wrong or somebody says something I don't like, I don't lose my cool and make things worse. They may appear to be just avatars on a screen, but they're real people, and people aren't perfect. Moreover, you're not perfect either. You're going to make some mistakes and those same imperfect people will likely give you the benefit of the doubt because they know you're not perfect either.

Share the Spotlight - One thing I've always loved about social media was how it attracts people who are into a wide range of interesting things. You name it and you probably have a follower who is into it. I've realized over the years that the more I engage with my followers, the more I learn about them, as they share their interests and work with me. But instead of being selfish and thinking that it has to always be about me, I take the opposite approach and try to

share what they do with my followers. For example, I had a Twitter follower recently share some of his wood carving work in a post I made. But instead of replying to him directly, I chose to retweet the picture of his work and comment so everyone could see it. Not because I wanted anything out of it but because his work is cool and inspiring. People like to see cool things no matter who does them. You don't always have to put yourself in front. It's ok to shine the light on others.

Remember, these tips are here just to give you some ideas and guidelines for engaging with your followers, but they're not all encompassing. You may find your own unique way of engaging with your followers that is completely different. But as long as it works and stimulates conversations, then do it. The more you engage, the deeper your fan connection will grow, and the more visible your posts will be.

CHAPTER FOUR EXERCISES

- Go back through the last 30 days of posts you've made on social media and identify your top five most popular posts. View those posts and see how many comments were made by your followers and how many of those comments you responded to. If you notice that there are a decent amount of comments you didn't reply to, brainstorm on how you could have replied to each comment to have kept the conversation going. Do this for every platform you have a profile on.
- Create one post every week with the intentions of creating and practicing engagement with your followers. The topic doesn't matter as much as selecting something that a wide range of your followers will have an opinion about. Then respond to every comment and reply. Practice the techniques I've laid out in the previous section like thanking people and asking them questions to push the conversation forward. Also practice responding as soon as possible and not waiting.

CHAPTER FOUR EXAMPLES



FIGURE 4-1: The above post is a simple example of me engaging with my facebook followers in the comments of a post. The first response is addressing a fans comment about a recent episode of my podcast and the second is simply saying thank you.

