

# Capturing Social Momentum

## A Case Study with *The Journal News*

*The Journal News* uses Chartbeat Publishing to monitor its online traffic sources in real-time. The staff keeps an eye on the dashboard, watching for signals that might indicate an opportunity for action. Here's how *The Journal News* harnessed social momentum to develop a new story cycle.

### A HUMAN INTEREST STORY

In October 2012, *The Journal News* published a human interest story about Luke Moretti, a 19-year-old freshman at Vanderbilt University who'd been instantly paralyzed in a diving accident. After breaking the fifth cervical bone in his neck, Moretti was sent to Burke Rehabilitation Hospital in White Plains, New York—the Gannett newspaper's hometown. The article told the story of Moretti's remarkable recovery, and his own efforts to raise money for other patients with spinal cord injuries.

### OFF TO A SLOW START

The original 1,200-word feature story about Moretti's recovery, though inspiring, didn't immediately take off. "It was a wonderfully written article, but the traffic numbers weren't anything notable," says Jill Mercadante, multimedia editor at *The Journal News*. "Initially, we didn't have it on the homepage for long." Mercadante and the staff were surprised, then, to see the feature story make a resurgence a few days later, reappearing in the "Top Pages" section of their Chartbeat Publishing dashboard.

### OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

With Chartbeat Publishing, Mercadante was able to dig into the article's referring traffic sources. She was surprised to find that a student from nearby Scarsdale High School had shared a link to the article on Facebook, which was putting a second gust of wind into the story's sails. "We'd never seen anything like that happen before," says Mercadante. "But we

## Takeaways

- Keep an eye out for extraordinary audience behavior.
- Look for important clues in the composition of your traffic sources.
- Use the opportunity and your insights to take action.
- Don't be afraid to resurface old content if it's engaging your audience.
- Write follow-up articles to keep your audience coming back for more.

didn't want to miss our opportunity, so even though the story was a few days old, we put it back on our homepage."

That decision was quickly validated, says Mercadante: "Right away, we saw readers clicking on the story, engaging with the content, and sharing it more and more on social media outlets—all because we found the right audience at the right time." But *The Journal News* wasn't content to let that be the end of it—there was more they could do. The newspaper, now with an audience's attention, published a follow-up article a few weeks later.

The follow-up story—about Moretti's benefit concert, which drew 600 people and raised more than \$150,000—dominated the homepage right after publication. A second follow-up article would also come a few months later, after editors fully realized their audience's huge interest in the story. "The follow-up articles helped us nourish traffic and grow our audience. We would've missed this entire story cycle without Chartbeat," says Mercadante.

## MAKING OLD NEW AGAIN

For ages, timeliness has been a key criterion for journalists when evaluating the newsworthiness of a story. But journalists might stand to benefit from thinking about timeliness in a completely different context, too, says Mercadante: "If the mantra in real estate is location, location, location, the mantra for us is timing, timing, timing." *The Journal News* was successful, she says, because they connected the right content with the right audience at exactly the right time.

Because *The Journal News* was monitoring Chartbeat, staffers were able to pick up on signals calling them to action. Not only did they use insights to inform their decision-making process, but they were also able to quickly validate their decisions. And by following up with more content, *The Journal News* was able to nourish traffic, develop a story cycle, and attract a returning audience. Now, says Mercadante: "We always have one eye on the homepage, one eye on the dashboard."

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