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Using Facebook to Engage SAS® Users

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become a regular and common platform for organizations and businesses to engage relevant stakeholders. This is a very surprising phenomenon given that social media has taken its current form within the past few years. Because it is a new technology, there is no proper literature on how social media should be used to achieve designated objectives. As such, the use of social media is by trial and error, gaining lessons from the usage experience.

Here we would like to share our experiences in using Facebook to engage members of the Singapore SAS Users Group (SUG). We have not reached a stage where we are considered successful, but we hope that such sharing can help other SUGs around the world.

INTRODUCTION

In Singapore, Analytics have just picked up pace in its adoption, with the banking industry and public sector as the largest 'consumers'. It has also found its way to the radar of the Singapore Government and they have defined Analytics as a capability that it wants to develop in Singapore. With that in mind, Singapore SAS User Group (SSUG) was set up to engage SAS Users in Singapore, to develop their capabilities and to form a community where ideas and knowledge can be exchanged. With engagement of the SAS Users as the main focus, naturally social media comes as one of the more 'effective' channel of engagement. With Facebook being the most common social media platform in Singapore, this is where SSUG would start to engage Singapore SAS Users.

In this paper, we would like to share our experiences in using Facebook to engage members of the Singapore SAS Users Group (SUG). We have not reached a stage where we are considered successful, but we hope that such sharing can help other SUGs around the world.

ANALYTICS ENVIRONMENT IN SINGAPORE

In Singapore, the largest 'consumers' of analytics are Government and Banks. Industries that are starting to use analytics are Telcos and Hospitality. Most of these companies in Singapore are still using SAS, mostly for business intelligence, generating reports that the management uses to make decision on. Predictive analytics are not commonly seen except in the Banks and even among the banks, the adoption rate of analytics varies greatly.

The research environment with regards to analytics and SAS are just starting to gain traction with the set up of the Living Analytics Research Center in Singapore Management University. The Singapore government has also just embarked on their journey in Analytics, identifying Business Analytics as a capability that the government wants to develop ⁽¹⁾.

With the increasing need for compliance in banks because of Basel Accord and other large companies in Singapore realizing the benefits of analytics, there is a huge surge of demand in analytics professional that the current supply of manpower cannot meet. With the increasing demand for analytics professional especially those that are experienced, the SSUG was set up with the objective to raise the level of understanding of SAS software and business analytics in Singapore.

STRUCTURE OF USER GROUP IN SINGAPORE

SSUG was set up in 2009. It consists of the Executive Committee, the Working Committee and ordinary members. The Executive Committee (ExCo) consists of leaders in their respective industry who strongly believes in Analytics. They generally come from the banking, hospitality, government, manufacturing and IHLs. The ExCo would generally set the direction for the SSUG.

The Working Committee consists of mostly end users who are passionate about Analytics and SAS. This group of people is the 'hands and legs' of the SSUG, planning the events and coming up with activities to engage the local SAS Users.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Given that Singapore has a high broadband penetration rate of 195.3%⁽²⁾, going on the Internet has become the favorite past time of most Singaporean and as such most Singaporeans would have a Facebook (FB) account and needless to say, FB was the first social media platform that the SSUG used to engage the Singapore SAS Users.

The first page that was set up for SSUG was the FB Group page. The Group page was chosen because we wanted to restrict access giving exclusivity to SAS Users who have signed up to be a member in the SSUG. We planned to put up materials such as slides from our talks and relevant materials in the Group page to encourage signing up of membership.

Given such a plan, any SAS User who is interested in the materials provided would first have to sign up to be a member, make a request on the Group page to indicate interest in joining and after verification by the SAS Singapore Office or members of the Working Committee, we would add the applicant in. As you can see from here, the process for a SAS User to reach the Group page is quite tedious and takes a long time. Because of this, the take up rate for the Group page was very slow.

At around the same time, FB started the Fan page much to the delight of many marketers as it becomes a very conducive platform for advertisers to engage all online traffic, especially those that have FB accounts. The Fan page adopted an opt-in approach for FB account holders to keep track and be updated with news of their favorites by "Like"ing the page. Given the slow take up of the Group page, the Fan page becomes an alternative to engage the SAS Users in Singapore and also around the world.

CONTENT STRATEGY

With two pages, both the Group and Fan page, a content strategy is needed to ensure that SAS Users are constantly engaged in both pages. The initial strategy would be that the Fan page would provide contents that are of a more macro level, showcasing companies that have successfully implemented Analytics, news update from SAS and so on, while the content for the Group page would be at a more technical level, contents about SAS programming, statistical methods and so on. Analytics and SAS was not the only contents that we post up to the Group page. To raise the level of professionalism of SAS Users, we also post up other relevant articles that increase other relevant skills such as presentation and management skills. In addition, we also add in articles that can help them manage their Analytical careers.

Considerations were made to see if the Working Committee can come up with our own articles. Such arrangement would ensure that the content for the FB pages are relevant and original, and thus able to capture the attention of our local SAS Users but that would need a substantial amount of effort and time for research and writing, which is a very scarce resource for people working in Singapore. To cut down the time to produce postings that are useful for SAS Users, we decide to use existing contents from various Analytics resources such as past SAS Global Forum proceedings, blog posts from SAS.com, articles from AllAnalytics.com and many more. Using such a strategy to have relevant postings in the FB pages would bring the internet resources on SAS and analytics closer to the local SAS users.

The objective of the content strategy was to first get SAS Users to like the Fan page, be engaged on the latest happening in Analytics and from there encourage them to join the SSUG and join the Group page so as to increase their technical skills.

EXECUTION OF CONTENT STRATEGY

For the first few months, a series of videos titled “Living with SAS” was created and uploaded to YouTube and placed in the Fan page to bring in traffic to the Fan page. The videos showed interesting aspect of Base SAS for instance, playing of video, playing of Christmas Carol (Yes, no need to rub your eyes, you read this correctly) and playing of games, all in Base SAS. With the videos made, it is easy to forward the video to other SAS Users and given the ‘interesting’ angle to the video, it might go viral among Singapore SAS Users easily. From the initial start with the videos, it did bring in some traffic to the Fan page and subsequently to the Group page but as the video series ended it was back to the drawing board to devise new strategy to rein in more traffic.

In 2011, SAS Institute Singapore then decide to take up the Fan page given the synergy between their marketing plans of using Social Media to engage their corporate clients and also attracting more members to join the SSUG. With that, the Working Committee focused on the content for Group page. As all the Working Committee members are SAS users, we are familiar with the ground and thus we focus on the technical knowledge that is relevant to the SSUG members. After discussing within the Working Committee, we decide to focus our contents for the Group page on past proceedings from SAS Global forum, with the aim of introducing the SAS Global Forum to our SAS Users and articles that are found from websites like “AllAnalytics” and “SAS Blogs”. We are now focused on getting technical and relevant contents onto the Group page. The slides from our SSUG meetings were also uploaded to the Group page so as to encourage sign-ups.

We decided on posting weekly so that SAS Users would think that the Group Page is ‘alive and kicking’. Having a Group page that has postings regularly would continue to send ‘reminders’ to SAS Users that there is a resource in FB that they can turn to for more information. We assign not one but two of the Working Committee members to be responsible for the weekly posting. As such, each Working Committee members would just need to do a posting every fortnight. To add some ‘randomness’ which most Analytics professionals thrive on, the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Working Committee would post articles as and when they come across it during their readings on Analytics. The random posting of the articles would encourage SAS Users to come over to Group Page regularly to be the first few to read the new postings, postings that might have positive impact their work.

MARKETING OF THE PAGES

Throughout our journey in the social media world, we have marketed both the Group page and Fan Page through SAS User group events (that are held monthly in 2011) and major local SAS events. Even the Technical Helpdesk team in SAS Institute Singapore uses every opportunity that they have to help us market our pages. We also spread it through word-of-mouth by the Executive Committee and Working Committee members. But because of the tedious sign-up process that we mentioned earlier, the growth in the members was not significant.

With that, the current membership in the Group page stands at 153 members (Jan 2012), a small achievement given that we started the Group page and posted actively from the mid of 2010, a period of 18 months.

SUBSEQUENTLY...

Within a year of taking over, the SAS Institute Singapore decide to take down the Fan Page as they think it would be better to synergize their marketing effort with the Asia-Pacific office with the Fan Page. Whereas for the Group page, the membership has remained stagnant despite constant marketing through the SAS User Group events (now held bi-monthly) and updates are sporadic as the Working Committee members are tied down by both work, family and study commitments.

During the first meeting for the year 2012, the roles and responsibilities are reiterated to the Working Committee members again and updates are coming back more regularly.

In March 2012, a new marketing team has been formed and there are talks to have a new Fan Page. The direction and content strategy for both the Group Page and new Fan Page are still in discussion.

VALUABLE LESSONS

Although it is only slightly more than a year in terms of using the Group page to engage SAS Users, the Working Committee have learnt valuable lessons on using Social Media, namely Facebook to engage SAS Users. Below are the valuable lessons we have learnt.

- 1) Having a content strategy is very important. The content strategy must be
 - a. Regular so that SAS Users will make regular visits to the page and be engaged. Our current aim is to have new content posted once every week. SSUG Working Committee have two members that work to put up relevant content while other members would update with relevant content if they stumble upon it during their research or work.
 - b. Content must be relevant thus adding value to the SAS Users. The content besides staying relevant, must also be able to update the SSUG members of new developments or introduce 'new' techniques.
- 2) The updates of the Group Page or Fan Page have to be regular. As for the frequency, it should normally be dictated by the resources available. Having regular updates serves as a reminder that there is a resource they can turn to seek answers/solutions or be updated.
- 3) The sign-up for the Group page (if you are using one) should be as fast as possible. Other SAS User Groups should consider carefully the pros and cons of using the Fan or Group page and how they fit into their Social Media strategy before they go about setting up the pages.
- 4) Be it Group or Fan page, there is still a need to actively market to SAS Users through SAS events and gatherings of SAS User Groups to improve sign-ups.
- 5) We have the Technical Helpdesk people in our Group page to improve engagement. SSUG members can choose this channel to ask questions to the Technical Helpdesk and the other SSUG members benefit from it as well since the conversations are published.
- 6) There is a need to set the right expectations on the FB pages. If the time period to see the FB pages to be successful would take a long period of time, it is important that the Working Committee members help and encourage each other to post more

frequently, even though Members have been assign responsibilities to make regular updates.

COMING UP

The SSUG Working Committee is working on the feasibility and details of creating Special Interest Groups given that the Working Committee has grown to strength of six members. This Special Interest Group are to be used to engage SAS Users during the months where there are no SSUG meeting.

SSUG Working Committee is also working on organizing a competition to encourage interactions between SSUG members. The details are still being hammered out but the format that is decided would be in the quiz form and to be held at the major user forum.

CONCLUSION

SSUG have come a long way in using Social Media to engage SAS users in an environment where Analytics and SAS has just started to pick up traction. Like any organizations that are using Social Media, there were a lot of trial and errors. Given the unique environment that we worked in, it also help us to set our expectations better, to know that it would take a while before the Group Page is successful (defined as higher number)

The purpose of this paper is to share our learning experiences with regards to Social Media with other SAS Users Groups and also be a rally point to attract other SAS User Groups to get together, share ideas and experiences to engage SAS Users around the world.

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