



THE 2022 *Social Media* AWARDS

CStore Decisions highlights the convenience store chains performing best on major social media platforms and shares tips and tricks for maximizing engagement in the year ahead.

Erin Del Conte • Executive Editor

CStore Decisions, for the 10th consecutive year, is recognizing convenience store chains standing out on social media.

For the second year running, CStore Decisions partnered with Rival IQ to determine the c-store chains going above and beyond on social media. Rival IQ, which was recently acquired by global consumer and market intelligence company NetBase Quid, is a social media analytics software company based in Seattle that helps brands measure their social media engagement and benchmark that performance against their competition and their broader industry.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted customers' relationship with social media. As lockdowns began in spring of 2020, social media usage skyrocketed by 61% during the first wave of the pandemic, according to data, insights and consulting company Kantar. Misinformation has also increased on social platforms throughout the pandemic. A World Health Organization (WHO) study from late October 2020 to early January 2021, found 59.1% of global Gen Z and millennials surveyed are "very aware" of "fake news"

surrounding COVID-19 on social media and can often identify it, but 35.1% chose to ignore it.

But misinformation hasn't slowed customers' social media engagement. Pew Research Center's report, "Social Media Use in 2021," found seven in 10 U.S. adults use social media, with YouTube (81%) and Facebook (69%) as the most popular overall, followed by Instagram (40%). Some 23% reported using Twitter, and 21% listed TikTok. When looking at 18- to 24-year-olds specifically, they reported using Instagram (76%), Snapchat (75%) or TikTok (55%) at much higher rates than the general population.

While Facebook's demographic is skewing older today, its users are active, with 49% using the platform several times a day and 22% using it once a day, Pew Research Center reported. Comparatively, some 38% of overall Instagram users use the platform several times a day, and 21% use it once a day. But brands need to do more than post to reach customers on these platforms today.



Social Media



WhatsApp



Instagram



Twitter



TikTok



Viber



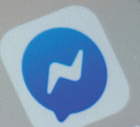
Snapchat



Facebook



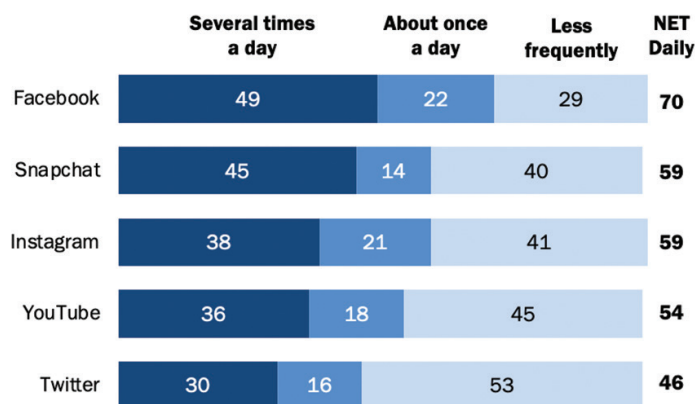
WeChat



Messenger

7-IN-10 FACEBOOK USERS SAY THEY VISIT SITE DAILY

Among U.S. adults who say they use _____, % who use that site...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. "Less frequently" category includes users who visit these sites a few times a week, every few weeks or less often. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.

"Social Media Use in 2021"

Source: PEW Research Center

TRACKING THE TRENDS

"One of the big conversations happening around social media with some of our older platforms, like Facebook and Instagram, is a conversation among social media marketers about the push to paid (content)," said Seth Bridges, founder and head of product for Rival IQ. "Organic reach has dwindled on Facebook ... and on Instagram, we're seeing that trend continue. I think brands are really waking up to the fact that, unless you are just completely outstanding at your organic social media on some of these channels, you're going to need to spend some dollars to reach your core audience."

Short videos are trending across platforms, spurred by the popularity of video-focused social media platform TikTok. Influencer marketing is also continuing to grow. Today, some brands have dedicated budgets and teams that manage influencer relationships and campaigns.

"We are going to continue to see more brands realize in 2022 that social media is not the intern's job," Bridges said. "It is a real profession. It takes real skills, platform awareness, analytical capabilities, content creation, and brands really have to invest at making a big impact using these platforms if they want to see results."

Over the past decade that CStore Decisions has been tracking c-store chains' social media performance, algorithms have changed the way retailers must engage with social media platforms.

"Ten years ago, there was strictly a chronological feed," Bridges said. "Your strategy was to post as much as you

can so you're on the top when your users open the app, and that's been dead on every platform now for many years. Things continue to get more sophisticated. We're seeing shopping and commerce happening directly in some platforms now. And yes, it's different than it used to be, but there's still a ton of opportunity for those marketers who know how to use the platforms."

AWARDS METHODOLOGY

For this year's social media awards, Rival IQ analyzed the social media practices of more than 70 c-store chains across the top three platforms — Facebook (FB), Twitter and Instagram — from Nov. 1, 2020, through Oct. 31, 2021, and created an engagement ranking for each c-store chain.

"We examined each one of those channels individually, weighting scores for engagement and engagement rate — how much engagement do they get relative to how big their audience is — and put all that together to get both their final rankings on each individual channel, and then blending those channel scores to come up with our overall winners," explained Bridges.

TOP TAKEAWAYS FOR 2022

1. Listen to your audience. "Figure out what makes them tick," said Seth Bridges, founder and head of product, Rival IQ. "If you don't know who you're speaking to and what makes them laugh or what makes them buy, give or care, you've got to dig into it and understand how you can provide that value in a form of a little bit of levity."

2. Test new approaches. This doesn't necessarily mean new channels, but if what you're doing isn't bringing in the results you want, change course. "Try something new, or dial it down," Bridges suggested. That said, brand consistency is key even when trying new things. If content is too different, fans won't realize it's from you. As you run tests, ensure the content still feels on brand.

3. Learn from your platforms. "Instagram isn't Twitter isn't TikTok. Each one of them has their own language, their own customs, their own best practices," Bridges said. "You've got to invest in learning how these platforms work."

THE AWARDS



BEST OVERALL | WINNER: KWIK TRIP | RUNNER UP: DAILY'S

LaCross, Wis.-based Kwik Trip (KT) is once again the overall winner for best performance across all three major platforms — FB, Twitter and Instagram. KT's interplay with other brands earned it the top spot in 2020, and that same playful banter continued to elevate the chain's social media engagement in 2021.

"They have continued to go with what works and entertain folks," Bridges said. KT operates more than 800 locations in the Midwest in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois, and it uses Midwestern humor to engage fans.

"(In the Midwest) there is a lot of passion for the individuality of various states and the particular retailers associated with those states, so that really shines through," he said. "Six of their top 20 FB posts are poking (fun) at some other Midwestern c-store. And then there's the Midwest jokes, like jokes about how people talk, the mentality, etc."



It all comes down to knowing your audience and what resonates, which KT clearly does. It also works to amplify creative and funny posts from its fans.

CStore Decisions caught up with Kwik Trip Digital Marketing & Loyalty Manager David Jackson to find out what's been working for the chain on social media. "Our team has done an incredible job testing new ideas and new platforms/features this past year," Jackson said. "In particular, Instagram Reels, Stories and TikTok (while not new to us in 2021) have been a bigger focus this past year, which has resulted in better engagement and new ways to reach our guests."

Still, he noted KT has also made it a point to hold true to its core strategy, which is to create fun, humorous and engaging content that its fans can relate to. Jackson credited KT's ability to adapt to changes on how social media platforms serve content without sacrificing its over-

all social strategy as one of the keys to its success.

"Ultimately, this means our focus is to continue producing fun, engaging and relatable content, but test new ways of delivering that content, whether it be through a meme, video or even a plain text post with no images," Jackson said. "As we see success, we track it and will eventually come back to that another time to duplicate the success."

One of KT's top-performing posts on FB this year was a video that gave a behind-the-scenes look at its Glazer doughnuts being made.

"This video had over 1.3 million views and allowed our fans to see just how their most beloved product at KT was produced in our very own bakery," Jackson said.

While the behind-the-scenes access of a popular product contributed to the post's success, Jackson said having the content in video form allowed for better engagement and reach.

Jacksonville, Fla.-based Daily's is our runner up for overall social media success. Although it has a smaller presence on social media compared to KT, Daily's audience is majorly engaged.

"Daily's big secret to success in driving overall engagement all ties back to their biggest campaign on social, which is their '12 Days of Giveaways' campaign that they executed across FB, Twitter and Instagram — so simultaneously a cross-channel blitz. Their December was huge — just phenomenal."

Daily's maintains above-average engagement throughout the year, in many cases using additional giveaways to keep customers engaged.

"Giveaways are a great way to get a pop on social media," Bridges said. "If it's all you ever did, it would get boring ... but doing them periodically and leveraging the fact that you're consistently getting a bump is a very helpful technique in terms of maintaining audience engagement for your other content that's not necessarily a giveaway."

In addition, Daily's is doing well with user-generated content, such as resharing photos or memes where customers have tagged the chain.

"They do a nice job of tagging people back and acknowledging the contribution," Bridges said.

Daily's also excels with product promotions.



INSTAGRAM
WINNER: KWIK TRIP
RUNNER UP: BUC-EE'S

KT also came in first place in the Instagram category. What worked for KT overall in 2021 also drove its success on Instagram. Humorous content and Midwestern jokes are resonating with fans on the platform. It also featured a number of giveaways, which trended well on Instagram — more so than similar giveaway posts on FB.

“Their top post on Instagram during the study was one of these giveaway posts, but it barely edged out the humor posts, so it was sort of neck and neck,” Bridges said.

As KT interacts with brands or users on Twitter, and those tweets are successful, KT screenshots those tweets and uses them as content on other platforms, such as Instagram, Bridges explained.

“It’s almost like they’re using (Twitter) as the high-speed test ground. And then when something pops, they go, ‘Yup, we got one. Let’s bring it to FB, let’s bring it to Instagram,’ but they’re being smart,” Bridges said. Rather than just copying and pasting, KT is reformatting the post with attention to details like the borders, spacing and font size.

“The formatting looks like Instagram ... they’re doing a different crop that works better on that platform, so they’re being really smart both in terms of their strategy and how they’re thinking about moving content between platforms,” he said.

Our runner up, Lake Jackson, Texas-based Buc-ees, with more than 40 locations in four states, may only have posted on Instagram about three times a month, but drew big numbers for engagement by posting fun and unique photos of its loyal fans.

“Over 118k photos featuring the hashtag #bucees have been shared over time, and fans are looking for their shot to get featured on the Buc-ee’s profile,” Bridges said. “The social team at Buc-ee’s does a nice job of giving credit to the original creator, too, and the captions are always clever and concise.”

During the report period, Buc-ee’s almost doubled its following from 55k followers to 102k followers. “On a percentage basis, no other brand grew more last year,” Bridges said.



FACEBOOK
WINNER: FAVTRIP
RUNNER UP: KWIK TRIP

FavTrip is wowing fans by tapping into the trend for video content. Featured videos include shoplifting videos with voiceovers that discourage theft. Its ‘Sunday Fun Day’ videos share different products and what’s happening that week in various stores.

“Its FB page posted over 800 posts in the last year,” Bridges noted. “That’s like 16 times a week, which is a lot of FB posting. But the key to its magic was it posted 120 videos over the year, and about 70 of them were the shoplifting videos done in collaboration with the YouTube channel Gas Station Encounters.”

The voiceovers are what make the Gas Station Encounter collaboration videos funny and engaging for fans. The collaboration elevated the content, and it’s paid off — with 20.5 million views.

FavTrip’s non-video content is also focused on entertaining with humor photos, memes and information on things happening at the stores.

Babir Sultan, FavTrip founder and CEO, noted the chain has made an effort to post more videos at a consistent rate. “Our Facebook Live shows have done really well. Brittany, who’s carrying the tradition of Sunday Funday, has done an amazing job.”

“Don’t look for perfection and numbers,” he advised other chains, “just post stuff you really like, and encourage staff and customers to like your page and advertise at your store, as well. Lastly, talk less about promotions and more about the customers.”

In second place, KT continues to succeed with its cross-channel strategy. One of KT’s favorite FB posts included a meme of celebrity Dan Levy making faces, with the caption “Me walking into literally any gas station besides a Kwik Trip.”



This top-performing FB post featuring celebrity Dan Levy resonated with fans and brought “humor, relatability, embracing fan love and a little sass,” noted David Jackson, digital marketing & loyalty manager for Kwik Trip.



TWITTER
WINNER: KUM & GO
RUNNER UP: KWIK TRIP

“During the report period, Kum & Go, grew its Twitter following by almost 50%,” Bridges said. “We don’t see accounts really grow that quickly these days on Twitter. They also grew their engagement by almost 60%. In a world where things are kind of flat, and audience growth is relatively slow on some of these older channels, tremendous job.”

Des Moines, Iowa-based Kum & Go, with 400 stores in 11 states, has found success on Twitter, embracing the inuendo of its name, Bridges explained. It is also interactive with fans and other brands, doing a lot of the playful banter that has won KT success. Kum & Go also highlights its food and merchandise. The brand knows its voice, has clear values and isn’t afraid to champion them. It’s clear that the people running social media have the trust of their leadership team, which allows them to be edgy in terms of their content, Bridges noted.

“They’re all about the quote tweet, trying to get attention, trying to create that conversation. One of my favorites for the year was they even managed to get (celebrity) Dionne Warwick to write their Twitter bio ... But I think the coolest thing about their brand ... when they go viral, they always share (a link) to a nonprofit organization they support. This year, some of the big ones went off to the Transgender Law Center, or Iowa Safe Schools, which is an LGBTQ organization for students in Iowa.”

Matt Riezman, director of brand marketing for Kum & Go, noted the chain grew its organic following by more than 50% and organic impressions by even more across platforms in 2021. “We stood out on Twitter through a combination of culturally and platform-relevant conversation, in-the-moment responses (provoked and unprovoked) and just plain old fun — usually involving our brand or egg bites,” he said.

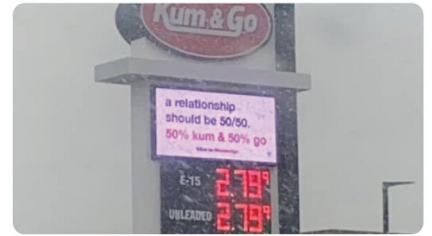
“We focus on being in the moment on Twitter and finding opportunities to link what’s going on with our brand and business to what’s happening on the platform,” he said. “Without that link to what’s going on in the Twitterverse, posts can go unnoticed.”

Kum & Go also collaborates with creators who align with the brand. “One that stands out from this year is when we partnered with professional gamer Justin Moore to create a Kum & Gay Rights shirt that raised over \$30,000 for the Trevor Project,” Riezman said.

One post that stood out to Riezman involved Kum & Go’s sign. “We posted a tweet on one of our store’s exterior signs, and a fan took a picture that ended up going viral across multiple social platforms. When we posted that picture on our Twitter, we garnered over one million



more tweets on signs i say



9:45 AM · Apr 27, 2021 · Twitter Web App

7,117 Retweets 333 Quote Tweets 80.4K Likes

organic impressions, which led to a fun series of tweets where we gave our fans the chance to write the next tweet that went up on the sign.”

LOOKING TO TIKTOK

While we don’t have a specific award category for TikTok, Kum & Go, Wawa and KT are three brands that are active on TikTok and generated millions of views in 2021.

“I think there are a couple key things that really matter (for TikTok success), and I see KT and Kum & Go both doing these things really well,” Bridges said. “First, they are using consistent characters or creators in their content.”

In other words, the people running the accounts are in front of the camera regularly, so much so that followers recognize them.

“You have so little time to catch the viewer’s attention. Your content has to be instantly recognizable as yours, and that does not come from having your logo in it. It comes from knowing that, ‘Oh, that’s the (person) that does the TikToks for Kum & Go, and (they’re) really funny,’” Bridges said.

For brands set in older social media traditions, transitioning to TikTok could be more challenging, he noted. TikTok is also its own platform, so repopulating content from other platforms won’t work on TikTok.

“Content on TikTok is its own thing, whether it’s using the text to speech, the right overlays, the caption formatting, using the hot sounds, the trending sounds, all of these things,” he added.

Most c-store brands aren’t yet on TikTok, but it’s a platform to watch in 2022. Even if you haven’t set up a TikTok account for your brand, customers may already be making content about you, even if you’re not making content yourself.

“Can you help amplify it? Can you help participate in the conversation? Absolutely,” Bridges said. “If I’m a c-store retailer, the thing I’m really thinking about out in 2022 is, ‘Should I be on TikTok? Can I find a way to be successful, given my brand, given our budget, given our goals, to find a way to create a community and a bit of a presence there on TikTok?’”

To be successful, you have to be a big consumer of content in order to execute posts in a way your audience will find funny.

“You have to find a creator or a team of creators that you’re going to support to be the face of your brand on TikTok,” Bridges said. **CSD**

For more, check out the social media podcast at CStoreDecisions.com/2022/01/06/podcast-2022-social-media-awards/.