

DIGITAL, MEDIA, NEWS

Jenny Chan 陳詠欣 | Sep 9, 2015

Video: The rise of the non-celebrity in Hong Kong

HONG KONG - Tapping into the trend of audiences moving online and everyday folks creating original content, VS Media has collaborated with Disney's Maker Studios to market and monetise these content creations.



Video: The rise of the non-celebrity in Hong Kong

The growth of YouTube bloggers and vloggers is giving birth to a new generation of non-celebrity content creators whose reach is rivalling that of traditional stars, according to VS Media.

"YouTube and other social networks are the modern world's movie lot and TV sound stage—they're producing a new generation of bonafide stars, with the influence and selling power of celebrities," commented VS Media CEO Ivy Wong (pictured right in video).

The company is not the first multichannel network (MCN) in Greater China. MCNs help creators in areas such as programming, sponsor funding, digital rights management, audience development, cross-marketing support, social media and search optimisation while making revenue for themselves, naturally.

"When the creators make money, VS Media makes money," said Wong. "We take a cut ranging from 10 to 50 per cent, depending on how far the creator has come along. It is a dual-tier system. In the beginning, we try not to take too much of a cut but allow the creator to grow an audience and to concentrate on creating".

Thoughtful Media and CommercializeTV are predecessors in the user-generated content (UGC) market, but VS Media wants to differentiate itself from the former two as the "largest locally driven content creation service in Greater China". Currently it still predominantly caters to the Hong Kong market, but started scant China operations in July.

In an exclusive video interview with *Campaign Asia-Pacific*, Wong pointed out that her company focuses on Chinese-language creators, as opposed to other MCNs driven by English content.

In fact, packaging, promoting and monetising someone else's online video is becoming such good business that VS Media has built fake bedrooms, imitation kitchens but a real recording studio on its Kowloon Bay premises as "production facilities" to up the game for these grassroots celebrities.

This essentially upgrades the UGC monetisation model into a PGC (professionally-generated content) one. This is a requisite for picky Hong Kongers, who spend 1,309 minutes watching an average of 264 videos per person in a month, according to comScore's June 2015 data based on more than 4 million unique YouTube viewers.

Advertisers who wish to work with these content creators are equally as picky, said Wong. They want engaging content that does not look like it is produced out of a teenager's bedroom, and they prefer not to associate their brands with rawer, lower-quality videos—despite the industry's call for authenticity from spokespeople.

In fact, for these reasons VS Media does not care for the 'MCN' label. "We prefer to call ourselves a next-generation video and social-media company," Wong said.

Before its official launch in August, VS Media had already established working relationships with a pool of 150 creators from Hong Kong with a total of 3.8 million subscribers among them.

See some of the recent creator-brand collaborations below:

From Fiveson (伍妞有伍仔) for Reebok:



From Dai Wing for SK-II:



From Smiling Boris for Universal Pictures:



A strategic collaboration with Disney's Maker Studios also means that VS Media's creators can build their profiles internationally and benefit from the commercial sales services of both networks.

We had doubts about whether a US audience will be able to 'get' esoteric Cantonese- or Chinese-language jokes, but Johan Wong, VS Media regional VP of marketing and creator partnerships (pictured left in video), assured us that Western audiences have an inherent curiosity about such content.

"Besides, we have different content genres that transcend language barriers, such as music, food and comedies," he said. "One quick way to bridge cultural gaps is to use subtitles. Of course, there are some cultural differences that will never be bridged, even within Greater China (mainland versus Hong Kong), but there are some universal truths and basic instincts that will appeal. We have yet to find out that balance, but we are here to explore."

In the bilingual Cantonese-English video interview above, the two Wongs elaborate on:

- How to bank on video-on-demand consumers for branded entertainment and a simple ROI calculation to substantiate their case
- Why to use creators instead of celebrities for an 18- to 34-year-old target audience
- VS Media's core competencies and business focus for the next six months

Source: *Campaign Asia-Pacific*

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