

The Ultimate Guide to **SOCIAL MEDIA** for **PROMO**

Getting the most out of Instagram, Twitter, Facebook,
LinkedIn and more for your promo business

By Sarah Semple

Social media is great for personal use, but it's also a key tool for business. Think about it: What's a better way to connect with potential customers than through a channel millions of people use everyday? Social media can (and should) be used for any business looking for a (mostly) free way to connect with their audience and reach new customers—which is to say, every business. Learning to market yourself and your services on social channels, where people are already spending their time, can be seriously rewarding. But you have to be willing to really commit. "To be successful in social media management is to be agile, innovative and a little bit fearless," said Tarrah Godish, director of audience development at NAPCO Media, Philadelphia, Promo Marketing's parent company. "Don't be afraid to test the waters and think outside the box."

So here's what we're going to do. First, we're going to give you a rundown of some overall tips and strategies for effective social media use for your business. Then, we're going to get into each of the four big social media platforms—Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn—with some channel-specific ideas. (Jump ahead to page 20 if you want to skip to those.) But before we get into all that, there's one key principle that stands above the rest while using social media for your business: content creation. How do you create content your audience will view as beneficial? What are you going to post about? There's no one right answer—it's all up to you and what aligns with your brand. But, in order to make the most out of each channel, thinking about what's really going to drive viewers to your business will make it all the more successful.

Annie Dimock, social media editor for Printing Impressions, Philadelphia, Promo Marketing's sister publication, gave us some insight into how she creates content for the brands she works with. "Make sure to always tag companies you are mentioning in your social post, switch it up between link and image posts, and use an engaging tone," she said. "Talk to your audience, post daily on a consistent schedule, repost evergreen content; [and] just switch up the copy."

Think about how you view posts by your favorite brand. What about the content is interesting to you? It's a safe bet that the posts are not only intriguing, but they probably don't sound robotic either. Don't be afraid to experiment, have fun with social media and, most importantly, learn about your audience—that's where you'll find out how to create the right content.

With that out of the way, if you're curious to know how to get the most out of social media for your business, how to get started and what to know about each channel, take a look at these next few tips and tricks. We're going to start with general best practices for most social channels, but if you're looking for strategies on a specific channel, read through or scroll down for detailed advice for Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

Ready? Let's go!

GETTING STARTED

This step might be the first and most vital piece of advice for any social media channel: Create a username that not only allows people to easily find, follow or add, but also says something about your brand. As an example, when people go to look for a username, are they more likely to type in @JoesPromoBusiness or @OfficialSocialMediaPageForJoesPromoBusiness? Chances are, it's the former, and not just because of character limits. A simple but straightforward username is essential.

The second part of launching a channel is filling it with content that represents your brand and the audience you hope to attract. If you're primarily selling apparel, you'll want content that's relevant to people searching for apparel. If you're posting content that isn't relevant to you or your brand, potential customers aren't going to find what they're searching for on your page, and they're likely to move on without a second thought. And make sure your channel stays updated.

"Having a social media page on any of the platforms for the sake of simply having it does more harm than good," said Evan Tarakjian, social media and content creator for Spector & Co., the promotional products supplier based in Montreal. "If a client lands on your account, you want to make sure that there's some value there! Make sure your account is presentable and up to date right out the gate."

Have a goal with your platform and give it your all. It doesn't work unless you put in the time. "Set a precedent for all your future posts—start off strong," said Tarakjian. "Have a strategy in mind before going into it, and don't go in blindfolded. Do some research on other accounts in the industry and see what works for them. It may not necessarily work the best for you, but at least it will give you the lay of the land."

Dana Zezzo, vice president of marketing and vendor relations for American Solutions for Business, the distributor based in Glenwood, Minn., had similar advice. Zezzo is extremely active on social media, regularly appearing on our annual Online18 list of the promo industry's top social influencers. When he talks about it, it's easy to see why.

"I'm pretty passionate about social media, and I think it's the communication of the future," he said. "I think that email inboxes are daunting. People open their inbox and they're normally not in a great mood. They're like, 'Oh my gosh, I've got to get to my emails.' People open social media to be happy, to catch up, to get a window into people's lives. You have an opportunity to play in that space. It's a good place to be."

For Zezzo, getting off to a good start is critical. And his most important piece of startup advice is to go in with the mentality that no one can really know your business or brand if you don't provide all the necessary information.

"Fill out your profiles completely—it's the biggest downfall," said Zezzo. "People just jump on there and start making connections, which is the whole point. But when you're sending people a connection and they don't recognize your name and

you don't give them any more information, that's a problem. Facebook, the biggest downfall is people don't put where they work. LinkedIn, the biggest downfall is people don't put their work email. They make some really basic mistakes.

"When you're trying to connect with people, you have to go under the assumption that they don't know who you are, and you'll be a lot more successful," he continued. "If you go into social media making connections assuming everybody knows you, you're going to fail."

CHOOSING YOUR CHANNELS

While social media might be a little intimidating, it doesn't have to be. And you don't have to do every channel all at once, or even at all. Consider what platforms work best for your brand, and focus on those. What works for some might not work for others, which is perfectly fine.

Godish said the best brands start by identifying the channels that provide the most opportunity and focusing on those. Then, once they've mastered them, they can expand from there. Don't try to do it all, or you may end up with "zombie accounts," as they're known, that go too long without updates and deter people from engaging with your business.

"Take time to determine which platforms make the most sense for your brand. If you're a B2C brand selling a beauty product, LinkedIn probably isn't the right distribution channel for you," she said. "Understanding your target audience's behavior, such as the social channel where they are the most active, will provide the insight needed to get started."

BOOSTING ENGAGEMENT

One of the main goals of social media is getting people to engage with your business or brand. But how do you get started and build up to a place where your audience is interacting with the content you're putting out there? Don't expect it to happen immediately—instead, take your time and build a clear picture of your audience.

"Spend time getting to know and understand your target audience," said Godish. "How do they interact with you, each other and your competitors on each platform? What content are they engaging with the most? Whether you're striving for growth organically or through paid advertising, understanding your audience is the key to success."

Another idea? Get everyone involved. While your business or brand channel can be the main hub for your content, your staff can also share content on their personal channels. This matters more for large businesses than small ones, but any additional shares always help.

"Don't underestimate the power of leveraging your internal team by turning them into brand advocates," Godish said. "Develop a strategy and process for thought-leaders, influencers and go-getters within your organization to easily find and share your brand's content."

One obstacle to engagement that every business faces on social media is short attention spans. With the way social

media works today, you don't have much time to grab someone scrolling through their feed. That's why Tarakjian advised getting to the point.

"Keep it short and sweet, for the most part," he said. "Unless the platform calls for longer videos, like YouTube or Vimeo, try your best to keep your videos under 30 seconds. This allows for a higher engagement rate of your content, but what you'll soon realize is that it also helps you determine and showcase what's most important to communicate to your clients. Authenticity and consistency are also key when beginning to start out on social media and creating a strategy."

POST FREQUENCY AND CONTENT

Posting irregularly or too infrequently can be an issue, but so can posting too much or too often. You don't want to overdo it, especially with certain types of content. Jay Busselle, marketing director for Equipment Zone, Franklin Lakes, N.J., said that many businesses or brands go too heavy on one specific kind of post, diminishing the overall value of their social channels.

"Resist the urge to clog the channel with constant sales messages," he said. "Imagine a radio or television station that only played or showed sales commercials. For how long would you stay tuned in and listen or watch? It's not called 'sales media,' it's called 'social media.' Each of the social media platforms you are involved with is like your channel. What will you share? Who would want to listen or watch? Figure out ways to help your audience! Teach them, share with them and let them know you have solutions to challenging problems. Share some proof, and give some value first, and it will attract the right audience."

Josh Storey, social media writer for SanMar, Seattle, previously weighed in on the topic of what to share when posting content for your audience. "This is an evergreen piece of advice for all social media: inform, reveal, entertain—but do not advertise," he told *Promo Marketing* in October. "If a customer wants to see your catalog, they'll go to your website."

Tarakjian added to that. "The juice must be worth the squeeze," he said. "You have something new and innovative that you want to release to the world? You must put in time to make it awesome and engaging. Daily product photo posts? Make it look good, but don't kill yourself trying to make it look like the Mona Lisa!"

And while creating compelling content is key, you also want to make sure that you're sharing it in the appropriate place. If you create an image designed for Instagram, share it there, but don't reuse it on Twitter. Don't share the same image or post to each channel. Zezzo said that for him, it's important to think about where the content you're creating would fit best.

TIME AND SCHEDULING

If you treat social media like a part-time job or just another task on your to-do list, chances are you're not going to get as much out of it as someone who views it as an opportunity. But that doesn't mean you have to sink a whole lot of time into it. There

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are some helpful ways to schedule posts and keep you on track. These include Hootsuite, Buffer, Later, Feedly, Tweetdeck and dozens of others, all of which offer varying degrees of features and functionality. (Some are even free.)

“Hootsuite is a great way to schedule posts if you’re active on multiple platforms, but there are many other solutions that work just as well,” said Tarakjian. “It allows you to write thoughtful copy and prepare your hashtags all in advance, so you don’t need to worry about rushing your social media post the day of. Your copy is a lot more important than you think, and you should take the time writing it! It supplements the hard work you put into visual content. If you have content already created for the week, take time to schedule so everything is automated, allowing you to focus on other areas of your business.”

And, of course, the ability to schedule posts in advance makes it easier to develop a social media strategy, rather than just firing off a random tweet whenever you remember to do it. For Godish, that’s important.

“Have a plan! Once your social media strategy is outlined with the types of content and formats, outline a process for creating each of those,” she said. “Know where your content is coming from (a place on your website or person in your organization) along with the production time. Once that’s ironed out, you’ll be ready to start planning ahead for scheduling.”

How far ahead should you plan? It’s different for everyone, but Godish advised scheduling posts a day or a week in advance while leaving some flexible time slots for anything timely or spontaneous. Busselle, meanwhile, shared some research findings that suggest long-term planning is key.

“Research from the Content Marketing Institute says that having a documented content strategy is a main factor that separates the most successful and least successful performers in content marketing and social media (62 percent versus 16 percent),”

Busselle said. “Create a 60- to 90-day calendar for social media marketing, and include content themes that support your goals and marketing objectives. I would suggest spending one to two hours setting up and working on a rolling 60- to 90-day calendar. Then spend 30 minutes a week monitoring, measuring and fine-tuning the message for maximum engagement.”

As Busselle noted, you don’t have to spend hours every day working and managing your social channels. Depending on how much time you want to spend, it only has to take 30 minutes out

of your work week. And the more you plan ahead, the less you’ll need to worry about in the day-to-day. But, as with most things, the more time you put in, the more you’ll get out of it.

“If you don’t allocate the time, you won’t do it—we all get busy,” said Zezzo. “What percentage that is, [is] probably somewhere between 10 to 15 percent of your time if you want to embrace the platform, and it’s a minor investment when you think about [the fact] that it’s actually free,” he said. “The only investment is time, versus writing a marketing strategy or an advertising strategy, [where] you have to spend your time, write that, then spend the money to do it. In the big picture, that 10 or 15 percent is a really good use of your time.”

USING HASHTAGS

They might seem basic, but they work. Hashtags, when used effectively and with purpose, can help you reach audiences who may not have found your page otherwise.

“Learn hashtags,” said Zezzo. “That would mean, for example, if you’re a distributor and you want to sell or you’re going to promote a product, [or if] you’re going to tweet about a product at a show, take the time prior to your tweet to figure out the hashtags that would get their way into the vertical. In other words, if you have a promotional product item that’s great for health care, go and figure out what hashtags health care people are using, so that you can get more views.”

Hashtags are mostly associated with Twitter, but they’ve fast become a big deal for Instagram, too. There, Storey told us that hashtags are essential, almost as important as the actual images you’re posting. He also suggested trying out a website called Hashtagify, which helps users to research hashtags specifically for Instagram and Twitter.

Just make sure you’re using them properly. Sprout Social, a social media management solutions provider, found that on Twitter, the average engagement per post was highest when using one or two hashtags, with a steep drop in engagement when using three or more. On Instagram, it’s the opposite, with nine to 12 hashtags resulting in the highest engagement per post, and more being general better than fewer. Also, LinkedIn, which recently enabled hashtag use, might call for different tactics than the other channels, given its more professional nature. Ultimately, it’s up to you how you use hashtags—just keep it channel-appropriate.

CHANNEL GUIDE

INSTAGRAM

We previously covered Instagram with an in-depth look at how the ever-popular social media channel allows brands to promote their business and stay in front of audiences. Not all kinds of content work on Instagram (although, we'll check back in on that in a bit), but it is a great place to share images, videos and even Instagram Stories where your audience can view anything you share in one spot.

1 Post captivating images and videos

Instagram is the spot where users go to see visual content, but it also provides a prime chance to share videos with your followers. Unfortunately, since Instagram is all about quick visuals, it can be a challenge to hold people's attention. The time you put into creating captivating content, both image and caption, will ultimately be the difference between a post users see and engage with and one they just scroll past.

Angela Morris, a promotional product sales consultant for Geiger based in Nashville, Tenn., previously told us that for her, being sincere in your posts is big, and something your audience will notice. "For me, I like to post about products that I personally like and would use, because no message is worth posting if it's not based in sincerity and authenticity," she said. "The old saying 'a picture says a thousand words' is true and will be felt by your audience as they scroll on by. #BeReal."

"Post visually engaging content—content that catches the eye," said Tarakjian. "People scroll through their feeds quickly. Make sure your content stands out. How? Tell a story with your content. Instagram offers you the ability to pair video with still images. Mix it up, and don't be afraid to think outside the box. Make sure the

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—Angela Morris, promotional product sales consultant, Geiger

look and feel of your content stays consistent. Use similar colors, and try not to mix styles from post to post. When someone lands on your Instagram page, the grid needs to look polished and consistent."

If you're interested in posting videos on Instagram, Tarakjian suggested using subtitles, since most people prefer to keep sound off for social media feeds. "Also, be sure you have linked your Instagram account to your Facebook business page to access the Instagram Insights," he added. "This will allow you to determine valuable information about your audience and the best times to post."

2 Use the Instagram Stories and Highlights functions

Instagram Stories don't have to be meticulously crafted images or videos—they can be brief updates better for "real-time" interaction with users. They're especially useful during trade shows or events, or even if you want to directly address your audience. Stories disappear after 24 hours, but you can always add them to your Highlights section if you'd like your audience to be able to go back and view them later.

TWITTER

According to Statista, Twitter has 326 million worldwide users. That's more than the entire population of the U.S., making Twitter one of the top social media platforms based on active users. While not all 326 million people are going to be relevant to your business, the numbers put into context the kind of reach and impact Twitter can have for businesses. Here's how Business 2 Community put it in a 2018 article by Bonnie Harris: "Your profile is the face of your business on Twitter. It is the first thing anyone scrutinizes whenever they bump into your handle on the platform."

Of course, there's a lot of competition out there for businesses on Twitter, so you need to find ways to stand out.

1 Follow the right people

When you're planning your Twitter strategy, ask yourself the following questions:

- Who would benefit from my business's tweets?
- Who would connect with posts my business retweets?
- Who would find my content interesting or helpful?

Then, follow people or businesses that fit those descriptions. Unfortunately, following someone on Twitter doesn't automatically mean they'll follow you back, but at least you've taken the initiative and put your brand out there, and it gives you further chances to engage with their posts, increasing the likelihood you'll get on their radar. It will also help you see the kind of content they engage with, giving you ideas on what to share yourself.

Dimock touched on why following people and businesses within your industry is so essential to having a successful channel. "Only follow companies relevant to your brand," she

said. “You don’t want an oversaturated timeline with content that isn’t of value to you.”

2 Utilize Twitter chat functions (or jump in on a Twitter chat)

If you’re already using hashtags on Twitter to drive people to your tweets, you’re off to a good start. But hashtags serve another purpose that may not be as widely known: Twitter chats. These are scheduled events where likeminded individuals, well, chat about a certain topic, with a preset hashtag tying the whole thing together and allowing people to follow along.

They’re great for networking online. And the promo industry has one, called #promochat, which happens every Wednesday at 3 p.m. ET. Busselle, who has more than 4,000 Twitter followers, happens to be its founder. But there are plenty of others. He noted that, through a website called Twubs, you can find a number of topics and calendars for when each is happening.

“Once you find a chat that interests you, make note of the associated hashtag. Then simply make sure you are online and logged into Twitter at the scheduled time, and search for the hashtag to find the latest tweets,” Busselle said. “Twitter chats provide amazing networking opportunities and give you and your company a tremendous amount of exposure. You can participate by answering some of the questions that the chat moderator has shared. You can also respond to or retweet with comments on how you feel about other people’s answers.”

Busselle had a power tip for using Twitter chats: “Monitor and engage in specific Twitter chats where your clients are or should be engaged. There is a chat for every industry and thousands of business topics.”

3 Keep your content short and to the point

Twitter changed its original 140-character limit to 280, giving users twice the real estate for their tweets. While this does change things for people who want to write posts that are on the longer side, it’s good to keep in mind that Twitter is meant for shorter updates. Tarakjian explained that shorter tweets are more likely to get noticed.

“Create updates that are short and sweet,” he said. “It’s true that tweets that are shorter get retweeted more often. Expand your audience with the use of hashtags. Have a good mix of tweet types. This mix can consist of retweets, images, links, quotes or short videos.”

FACEBOOK

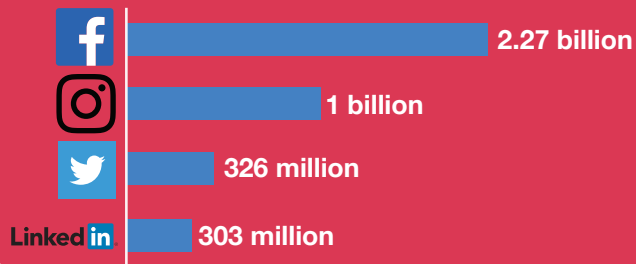
Facebook has been around for what feels like forever, and for many, it’s the first social media channel they used. It’s a great tool to connect with friends and family you haven’t seen in a while (or to remind you about upcoming birthdays). But, if you’re not using it for your business, you might be missing out on a great opportunity.

1 Get friendly

Our social media experts agreed that, owing to its more personal nature, Facebook is a place to connect more

How They Stack Up

Here’s how four of the most popular social media channels rank in number of active users as of January, 2019.



(Source: Statista)

as a friend and less as a business. That atmosphere allows you a little more freedom with what you post, so you can create content that’s less limited and more open. For Tarakjian, Facebook is a good way to give people a glimpse into your company culture, and it’s among the top three social media platforms he considers the most effective for businesses.

“Creating shareable content that your employees will want to share will open your posts to reach broader networks,” he said. “Employees who are proud of the environment that they work in want to share that, and that creates brand awareness and highlights positive brand recognition. This is a solid strategy to consider for Facebook.”

For Morris, it’s all about getting to know people beyond the facade of their business. “What we do is really not about product at all, it’s about people,” she said. “Facebook is a place of valuable insight into the lives of your customers, colleagues and other relevant business connections. Do not be afraid to connect and engage on deeper levels, not because your client friended you on Facebook, but because you truly care about them and what is happening in their life.”

2 Use groups

For personal use, Facebook groups are awesome when you want to stay on top of events going on around you. As a business tool, they’re equally awesome, serving as a way to communicate easily with groups of people. Zezzo counts Facebook as the most effective platform, and believes Facebook groups are a big reason for that.

“A private or a closed group is a community within Facebook, and it has all the same functionality of Facebook, including events,” he said. “But it’s the ability to drive your messaging within a set number of people that you designate, instead of just posting out to the general public.”

With a private group, you can easily add vendors or customers from all over the country, says Zezzo, and it makes it much easier to share ideas and connect people within the different groups.

3 Try going live

Zeppo spoke highly of Facebook's events functionality, but he's an even bigger fan of Facebook Live, the platform's built-in live-streaming capability. It's free, it's easy to use—just tap the “Live” button at the top of your News Feed—and it's great for getting additional visibility on the platform. Zeppo called it a “game changer.”

“When you play friendly in Facebook's world, they make sure you're seen,” he said. “If you're approaching it from a selling perspective, like a distributor or salesperson selling out to the world of promotional products or print or whatever, if you learn to use the tools—the little buttons that Facebook is trying to promote, like Facebook Live—Facebook rewards you and really gets you noticed. It's just like playing friendly in somebody's sandbox. I think if it's about views and impressions, I still think that Facebook provides the strongest tool. It's where the most people are the most often, so it's really a numbers game.”

LINKEDIN

If you're a fan of Facebook's familiar user interface, but are ultimately looking for a space to post about more professional topics, LinkedIn is your pick. It bills itself as “the world's largest professional network with more than 562 million users in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide,” and as such, it's a good place to find people and build business relationships. That makes LinkedIn less about brand awareness and more about direct connections, though it can certainly do both.

1 Create a visible profile

If you don't have a company page on LinkedIn, make one. It's easy—all you need is a personal LinkedIn account and a verified email address. That may sound a lot like setting up a company website—Zeppo even referred to LinkedIn as an extension of your website—but LinkedIn gives brands or individuals greater opportunity to interact with visitors than a website can. To avoid wasting that opportunity, Busselle advised making your profiles, both personal and business, as complete and detailed as possible.

“In order to get more leads on LinkedIn, you need to be more visible and engaging,” Busselle said. “The No. 1 way to be more visible is to have a current and complete profile. First, you need to use the banner or header for branded information about you and your company. Resist the urge to post a picture of your favorite vacation spot or cool scenery. That space should help tell your story and make me want to stop and check you out. Please do not leave that prime real estate blank.”

Busselle said that your personal profile picture should be a current professional photo of you, citing a study that found these types of profiles to be 21 times more likely to be viewed over profiles without professional images. As for your headline, he suggested coming up with a unique spin on your job title. Use this as a way to express yourself and, of course, have fun.

“‘Marketing Director’ is boring compared to ‘Chaser of

BIG IDEAS, Marketing, Social Media, Branding & the perfect TACO, Founder of #promochat,” he said. “Yes, that's mine. Think of your LinkedIn profile as a presentation about you. You are the presentation—so use strong visual aids, multimedia and links to articles to prove that you are an expert.”

2 Share industry-related news and articles

Tarakjian considers LinkedIn an education platform, so it should be your top choice for finding and sharing content related to the industry and seeing what people within the industry are posting about. He advised keeping content to blog posts, articles, case studies and infographics. “It's all about education and the sharing of important industry information,” he said.

“I think the No. 1 thing you can use in LinkedIn that is just a touch advanced would be is that you should have a steady cadence of what I call PR news,” Zeppo said. “If you win an award, if you were published, you were quoted somewhere, you made a new hire, or you landed a new contract, you should write that PR, house it to your website, and then always post that to your LinkedIn.”

3 Referrals and recommendations

LinkedIn also has huge potential for direct business, given how easy it makes networking. In December, we interviewed Linda Miller Seder, principal for Innovative Promotional Concepts, Watertown, Mass. She had a breakthrough on LinkedIn, using connections to gain referrals that helped her double her sales in the financial market.

“I was watching LinkedIn, and I saw that somebody in an accounting firm connected to somebody else that I knew,” Seder told us. “And I reached out and said, ‘I see that you just connected with this person. I've worked with this person. I also know somebody else that you're connected with. I would welcome the opportunity to talk with you.’ And shortly after that, I did a \$33,000 order with her, and she's the one that's really helping me get into the financial industry.”

Recommendations also help. While it may be tougher to get those, since you'll need a client to go out of their way to give you one, they can solidify your reputation and be the deciding factor in whether or not certain prospects choose to do business with you.

“All things being equal, if I'm looking at your profile and comparing you to another local competitor and you have two recommendations from co-workers (or worse, you have none) and your competitor has 20 recommendations from clients, guess who I'm going to call first,” said Busselle.

Don't have any, or enough, recommendations? It can't hurt to ask for some. If you're already connected on LinkedIn with any clients you know were happy with your service, see if they'll give you a recommendation. At worst, they'll politely decline or be too busy to actually do it. At best, you'll have added some serious cred to your profile. [▶](#)

WHO WE ARE



Promo Marketing provides engaging and authoritative coverage on industry trends, sales and marketing strategies, and the latest news for promotional products distributors and suppliers. Our goal is to connect our readership with cutting-edge solutions and provide stories of success that will drive the future goals of their organizations. Our magazine, website, e-newsletter and multimedia content offer a one-stop shop for information and insight into the promotional products industry.

NAPCOMEDIA

NAPCO Media, Promo Marketing's parent company, is a leading B2B media company specializing in creating community through content via integrated media programs, video services, marketing services, events and event management, custom content, eLearning and market research. NAPCO Media has rapidly expanded its portfolio to include NAPCO Video Services, NAPCO Events, NAPCO Marketing Services and NAPCO Research.