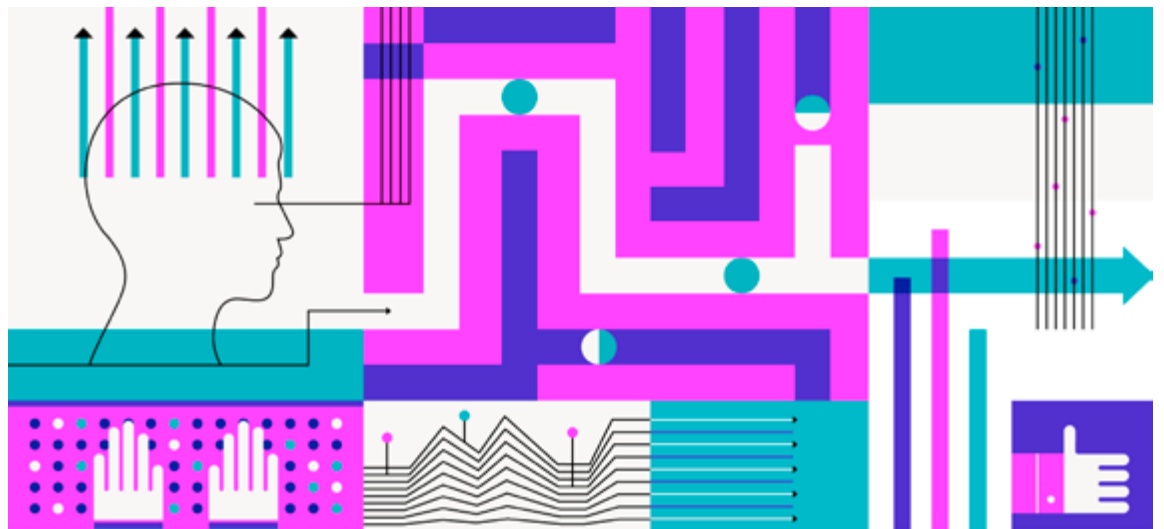




Breanne Thomas, Big Spaceship

The Rise of the Community Strategist



As the role of social continues to grow, it's becoming more and more challenging for brands and their agencies to navigate the seemingly endless number of opportunities for marketing wins. You could find one meme is ripe for your brand to remix on a Monday and by that evening, the online masses have moved on to something else entirely. Or say you do put out a timely post, but the community reacts negatively because you've misunderstood a crucial nuance of the trend. This constant evolution and the intricate meta-history of the Internet deserves full attention and a full-time, dedicated team member.

Enter the community strategist.

The idea for this role didn't materialize overnight. It evolved out of necessity. At Big Spaceship, community strategy has become the singular thread that brings an idea from strategy to ideation to publication to analysis and back again. The role did not replace any of those other job functions. Rather, it served as a way to elevate the team's collective work by grounding everything in community insights from start to finish. We prevented the creative vacuum that can appear so often when brands

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and agencies attempt to create relevant and timely work without considering all community implications.

Let’s take a look at what happens when a community strategist is absent from your social team — the infamous Red Lobster / Beyoncé tweet.

After Beyoncé unexpectedly dropped her latest single, “Formation,” which features a direct shout out to the restaurant, the internet was buzzing. Not only was Beyoncé’s community in love with that particular lyric, but the broader Twitter community was eagerly awaiting what Red Lobster might say in response. Hours passed, which in social may as well be years, and finally Red Lobster tweeted this:



Red Lobster 
@redlobster

 Follow

"Cheddar Bey Biscuits" has a nice ring to it, don't you think?

#Formation @Beyonce

6:46 AM - 7 Feb 2016

  14,523  15,583

All that buildup and excitement came crashing down in a matter of seconds. The communities lashed out at the brand, calling it lazy, boring and uninspired.

If Red Lobster had hired a community strategist, the outcome would have been very different. They would have understood the political tone of Beyoncé’s song, and they would have recognized the connection between her lyrics and the importance of the restaurant within the black community. But they didn’t. They took a pun (one that had already been floating around Twitter by that point) and ran with it, disregarding every cultural context in a single tweet.

In fact, context might be the best way to describe what a good community strategist provides. Given that they live and breathe internet culture (and have since the days of dial-up), a good community strategist can bring unique context that spans the entire history of almost any internet happening. And if they can’t, they know exactly who to ask in their network or how to dig up insights in a matter of minutes. This means countless new and uncovered opportunities for brands and agencies that previously might have gone unnoticed because no one else saw the communal link.

If by this point, you’re ready to expand your efforts and bring on a community

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strategist, you’ll need to take your time and be open to alternative hires. That means looking beyond existing talent on the agency or brand side, and starting with creators and curators on the platforms themselves. These people might not have an answer for what their favorite branded social campaign is so far in 2016 and they may not have won at Cannes, but they can definitely tell you about their favorite micro community on social, how Peach rose to the top and died within days, and why “weird Facebook” is the next big thing.

Your future community strategists are not difficult to find if you know where to look and how to incorporate them into your team. They’re hiding out on Tumblr or Reddit, waiting for the right opportunity to share their love of all things Internet, on a team where their insights are heard. After all, their goal is to simply do right by your brand and your community, and make the best possible content. So if you plan to win at social this year, now is the time to evolve and to embrace the rise of the community strategist.

***About the author:** Born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, Breanne attended the Robert D. Clark Honors College at the University of Oregon where she received dual Bachelor of Arts degrees in Advertising and International Studies with a focus in Scandinavia. Following graduation, she moved to New York to work in tech and hopped around for two years before landing her current position at Big Spaceship in Brooklyn. In addition to helping establish the agency’s community discipline, Breanne has also led content and community strategies for Samsung Mobile, Dannon, and various new business projects.*

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