

Activate the archive and let the content breathe

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The story of Michael Jordan and the great Chicago Bulls team of the '90s has been resurrected (and, dare I say, immortalised) in 2020 through the acclaimed Netflix series, *The Last Dance*. This won't come as news to most of you reading this, but the basic ingredients to this success story show us how to really deliver value from archived and alternative content.



After bringing the release date forward to coincide with a global lockdown as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the 10 episodes that made up *The Last Dance* garnered over 23.8 million unique views according to Netflix. These are numbers that any rights-holder, brand or broadcaster can only dream about. But there are significant insights that can help us understand that there is a ton of opportunity (and value) to be unlocked by dusting off those old tapes.

Indeed, *The Last Dance* certainly doesn't sit in isolation as a case study for the effective use of your archives. A couple months into 2020, fans across the globe were left deprived of live events, an eventuality that no-one could have foreseen. Through inspiration, luck or a bit of both, the first movers out there converted this harsh reality into an opportunity to unlock their vaults and re-purpose some of the most memorable moments in their history. What came to them quicker than most, was a forced realisation that they had underutilised what was sitting right beneath their noses for so long. This has paved the way for a re-invigorated category of storytelling that will live long after this rotten pandemic has left us.

What is also really key to note (and contrary to what some futurists out there will have you believe), is that we are debunking the myth that content and storytelling needs to be exclusively short-form in order for it to have the desired levels of reach, engagement and efficacy.

Two key take-aways from this emerging trend serve to provide the creators out there with more opportunity to bring rich and entertaining content to an audience that is now, more than ever, looking for escapism and entertainment through their passions.

1. It doesn't *have* to be a Netflix showrunner

The Last Dance was a coming-together of exactly the right ingredients. Archived games, championships, off-the-court drama, all access behind the scenes footage, an A-list post-production team and, well, Netflix.

But if we accept the reality that fans around the world are responding to this category of content, we can bring moments from the past to life in more tactical and business-as-usual executions. We have seen multiple executions of this.

Leading broadcasters have resurfaced World Cup archives, record labels have re-published iconic musical performances. With the right angle, these archives give an immense boost to your content arsenal. It has driven home a real truth for us in that fans both new and old are craving this emotional connection to moments in time from the athletes and entertainers that they love.

Takeout: You don't need to create a masterpiece in order to deliver impact

Okay, so the raw content is at your disposal, but where to start and how?

Rights-holders and broadcasters house reams of footage that has the potential to be resurrected in the right way. The big problem is that the ocean is vast and access is often not easy. Trawling through archives can be a messy and arduous process, but worth the slog when you stumble on that perfect moment, sound-bite or shot.

Organisations that have an intricate knowledge of the subject matter are at an advantage in knowing what has come before and, therefore, what to look for. Couple that with a production resource with a bit of staying power and you can put out straight forward archive content that works. Typical tactical examples of this are 'on this day' or birthday tribute pieces brought to life by a well-treated archived clip.

As with everything else in our space, the most creative use of your material is going to stand out. Give this your attention

and your audiences will thank you.

Takeout: Commit to some kind of consistency and a personality in how you deliver your archives and you're going to start seeing the uptake.

2. Integrity dictates duration

“ If it's longer than three minutes, no one's watching it. ”

We are glad we're not hearing this so much anymore. The bottom line is if your content is good enough, then it's the right length. A recent Nielsen research report even dares to suggest that longer-form video is outperforming short-form video optimised for quick and easy consumption. We're seeing more winning examples of content being allowed to 'breathe' with a higher value placed on the right story being told as opposed to pre-empting the length of content to match what you imagine your audiences' attention span to be.

The Last Dance had a total duration of over eight hours of footage. *F1: Drive to Survive* was almost double that across two seasons. *Sunderland Till I Die* was a 14-part Netflix series of hour-long episodes. The *Resurfacing* documentary on Andy Murray's return to tennis plays out for almost two hours. These examples add to the incredible depth of Amazon's *All or Nothing* series, tracking the progress of teams across multiple sports worldwide, including Manchester City and now Tottenham Hotspur. Not only have these been phenomenal PR exercises for the parties concerned, with audiences hanging on to every minute, but the likes of Amazon and Netflix are now charting a way forward for sports broadcasters that is forcing them to re-evaluate their entire business models.

Too often decisions on content style and length are governed by an approach dictated by traditional media buying. This is based on audience responses to brand advertising content that often starts with the assumption that your audience is trying to avoid your ad. For brands with clear associations with customers' passions, this approach can become obsolete as you have permission to communicate with them on that basis.

What's going to keep audiences and fans coming back for more will depend on the emotional response you're eliciting when they watch. People's passions provide brands with the best chance to achieve this. If you respect this with good content, your consumers will thank you and keep engaging with you.

More time can give your story more authenticity. We've had wonderful content pieces and TVCs destroyed because we've needed to create a 30-second edit optimised for prime-time TV. Lessons learned!

Takeout: There are no rules when it comes to time. Let your content breathe and allow the story to be told in the

right way, not the right time limit.

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