2020 trends in social media

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Key takeaways

- Lighthearted content that humanizes your brand and spotlights your employees will continue to perform well on social media.
- Stories will become more popular on Instagram and Facebook, as their format and page placement make them easily consumable.
- Customers are using chat and direct messaging as private communication channels.

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If you want to remain relevant and engage with your customers on social media platforms, you have to keep up with social media trends.

But we know that's a daunting task. So we did the work for you.

In this report, we identify the top five social trends for 2020 to help you stay ahead of the curve all year long. We include examples of great content from utilities and nonutilities to inspire you to integrate these trends into your own social media content strategy.

Trend 1: Humanize your brand

Your utility is made up of people, not poles, wires, bottom lines, and rate structures. Your social media content strategy should show your human side. According to the Forbes article Three Social Media Marketing Trends To Watch In 2020, "If you want to connect with consumers, then you need to humanize your brand and create relationships beyond your products and services." Be funny, be quirky.

Replace utility jargon with lighthearted posts and memes to make your content more approachable and sharable (**figures 1** and **2**).

Figure 1: Post lighthearted content to bond with your customers

Don't get stuck in a rut by posting only about outages and rebates. Sharing interesting stories, collaborating with local celebrities, or just having a little fun can go a long way toward humanizing your brand and inviting followers to interact with your content.

ComEd hired a herd of over 200 goats to clear vegetation under transmission lines

Peoples Gas invited two local hockey players to compete in a quesadilla-cooking competition

Wendy's released a fast-food-themed mixtape on Spotify that went viral on Twitter

> Wow this really blew up. Make sure you check out my mixtape: https://t.co/8GGxjfbeL0
>
> Or my TableTop RPG if that's more your thing: https://t.co/7fMLDcNQLm
>
> — Wendy's (@Wendys) January 24, 2020

Colorado State University made a cheeky video with the president of the university to welcome students back after a long winter break

View this post on Instagram

A post shared by Colorado State University (@coloradostateuniversity) on Jan 17, 2020 at 11:22am PST

Figure 2: Use memes to show your wit and boost shares

Memes are an entertaining and highly sharable way to communicate almost any message. Using stock images and a little creativity, you can create your own viral memes, as "Friendly Power" has here. Or, add your caption to an already-popular meme.

Friendly Power reminds us that Chad is hot but air-conditioning made cheaper through rebates is hotter

Friendly Power jokes that even Glen has enough sense to participate in time-of-use rates

Friendly Power knows kids are lousy at cooking, especially on outdated appliances

Friendly Power snarks that wasting money on old refrigerators is a bad joke

Friendly Power thinks babies are keeping cool in the pool because they're not wasting money on air-conditioning

Charmin used an animated gif for this timely Thanksgiving-related meme

> The actual wake up call the day after Thanksgiving. pic.twitter.com/8EcARlh1eA
>
> — Charmin (@Charmin) November 29, 2019

Pop-Tarts used a humorous meme to illustrate the brain power behind different toasting methods

> **pic.twitter.com/58eVhcpDdB**
>
> **— Pop-Tarts (@PopTartsUS) November 7, 2019**

Trend 2: Interact with customers

Use social media as a conversation starter, not as a loudspeaker. Reply to and repost customers' comments; interact with them to create trust and cultivate authentic engagement that goes beyond the obligatory like (**figure 3**). Metrics such as engagement rate and engagement quality are becoming more important because they represent real human connections, according to Entrepreneur magazine's article 12 Social Media Trends to Watch in 2020.

Figure 3: Respond to customers and amplify their posts

Reply to customers and repost their content to foster a relationship with your social media followers and encourage brand-building interactions.

Pacific Gas and Electric Co. took an active role in the comment section of this Facebook post about the utility's public safety power shutoff

ComEd consistently replies to customer comments, like in this Facebook post about grid improvements

JetBlue replies to customers on Twitter and gets a little goofy

> .@Smoov_Monkey But you'd still swipe right... right? https://t.co/i1SIeQDcy1
>
> — JetBlue Airways (@JetBlue) January 22, 2020

Netflix retweets customer comments to start conversations about their favorite shows

> Me trying to explain the stranger's plot to my friends.
> Trust me, this meme has never been more accurate. Watch and see, it's on netflix
> pic.twitter.com/lYk9zPYI9r
>
> — L*v (@nothinmatters13) February 1, 2020

Trend 3: Post Stories

Instagram Stories generate around 300 million daily views, according to the Influencer Marketing Hub article 11 Instagram Stories Hacks You Need to Know. Stories may be available for just 24 hours, but they reach a larger audience and drive higher engagement than traditional posts. And you can save them to your profile for customers to watch anytime. The Business Insider article The Stories Slide Deck: How Stories stack up across social platforms says Stories afford companies more ad opportunities

and create immersive user experiences.

On the Hawaiian Electric Co. Instagram page, the utility uses Stories to welcome new employees and inform customers about new technologies. ComEd has an extensive library of Instagram Stories. On the ComEd Instagram page, the utility promotes its many products and services. The Efficiency Vermont Instagram page features Stories that encourage efficiency-minded customers to interact with the organization.

On the nonutility side, sports retailer REI posts Instagram Stories to give gift ideas, spread climate awareness, and answer customer questions. Check out REI's Instagram page for examples. On the Arc'teryx Instagram page, the sportswear and equipment company posts Stories to share its history, adventure content, design process, and event memories. The Banana Republic Instagram page gives style advice and seasonal tips through its Stories.

Trend 4: Feature your employees

Your employees are the reason you're able to do what you do every day. Feature the faces that make it all possible by celebrating their wins and thanking them for a job well done. Customers will appreciate the human touch and relate to your staff's stories, further humanizing your brand. Employees function like beacons of trust for your company, according to the webinar How to Prepare for the Future of Customer Engagement from Hootsuite, a leading social media management software company. **Figure 4** shows some examples of how utility and nonutility companies are showcasing employees.

Figure 4: Show employees at work

Your employees do some pretty cool things within their communities, and social media is a great place to show off their accomplishments to strengthen your positive culture.

NorthWestern Energy posted a photo of town manager and utility employee Dan C. and his grandson dressed as line workers for Halloween

View this post on Instagram

Sheridan, Mont. town manager Dan C. was #twinning with his grandson for Halloween! #linemanlife #nextgeneration

A post shared by NorthWestern Energy (@northwesternenergy) on Nov 6, 2019 at 9:15am PST

Pepco thanked its employees for volunteering during the holiday season

NV Energy featured line workers who took a snowmobile to get to a hard-to-reach site

View this post on Instagram

Winter is here in northern #Nevada. ——————————————————— #snow #snowmobile #linemen #linemenlife #lineman #IBEW #ibewlocal1245 #thankalineman

A post shared by NV Energy (@nvenergy) on Dec 3, 2019 at 4:50pm PST

Hydro One shared the story of two line workers who helped save a life while on the job

Yoga apparel company Prana shared what positive change means to several of its employees

View this post on Instagram

Positive Change Equals... prAna employees are taking the challenge and sharing what Positive Change means to them. Join the conversation by posting an image to your feed, tagging @prana and #c4pc. We'll be selecting our favorites to score a Spring prAna look and be featured in our Community Takeover series!

A post shared by prAna (@prana) on Jan 24, 2020 at 9:09am PST

Hootsuite shared photos of some of its teams from around the globe to ring in the New Year

View this post on Instagram

This week we had the pleasure of kicking off 2020 with Hootsuite teams around the earth Get to know our owls #hootsuitelife

A post shared by Hootsuite (@hootsuite) on Jan 31, 2020 at 10:01am PST

Trend 5: Offer a private communication channel

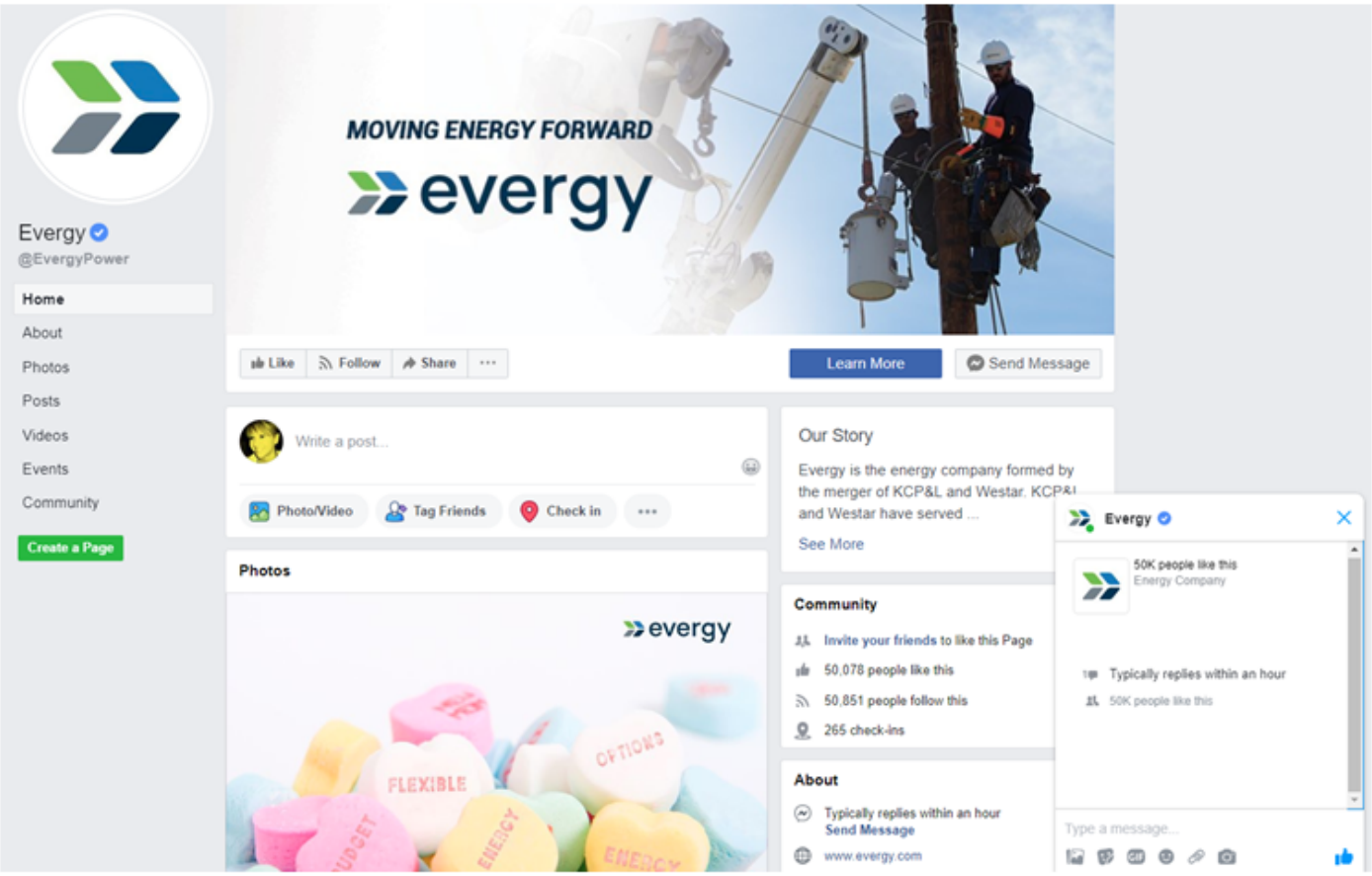
It can be overwhelming when customers take to social media with their questions. Anticipate your customers' needs and provide an outlet for their questions by integrating an automatic chatbot on your social media pages. Marketers can reach new customers through public channels and build deeper relationships using private ones like chatbots. Hootsuite's Social Media Trends 2020 e-book says that a seamless combination of the two is crucial. Many utility and nonutility brands use Facebook chatbots to talk to customers on the platform where they spend the most time (**figure 5**).

Figure 5: Use chatbots to build personal relationships

Chatbots are a simple and effective way to show your customers great customer service without having to pick up the phone or write an email. Many companies enable a chatbot to appear as soon as

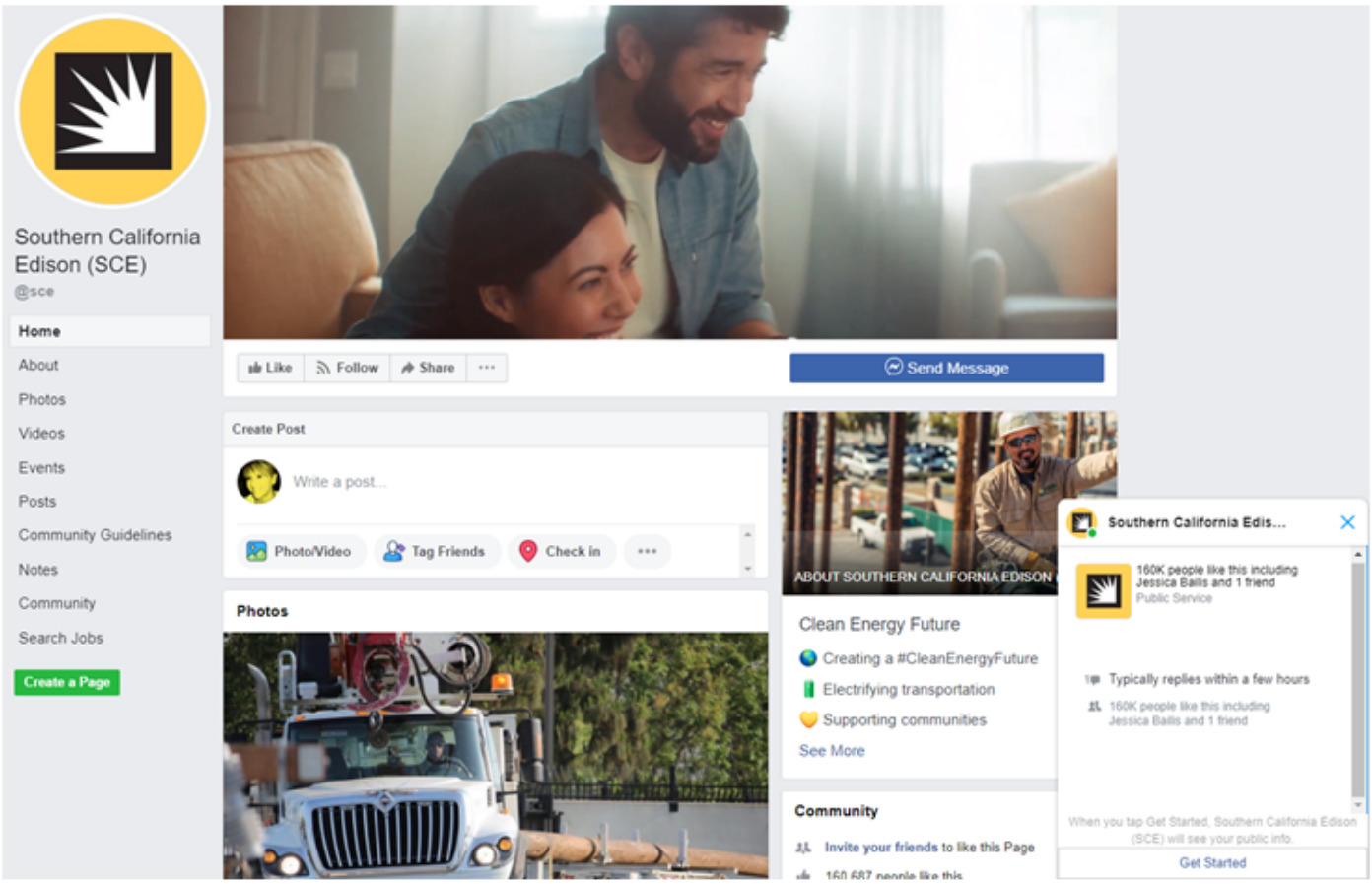
customers visit their Facebook page.

Evergy Inc.



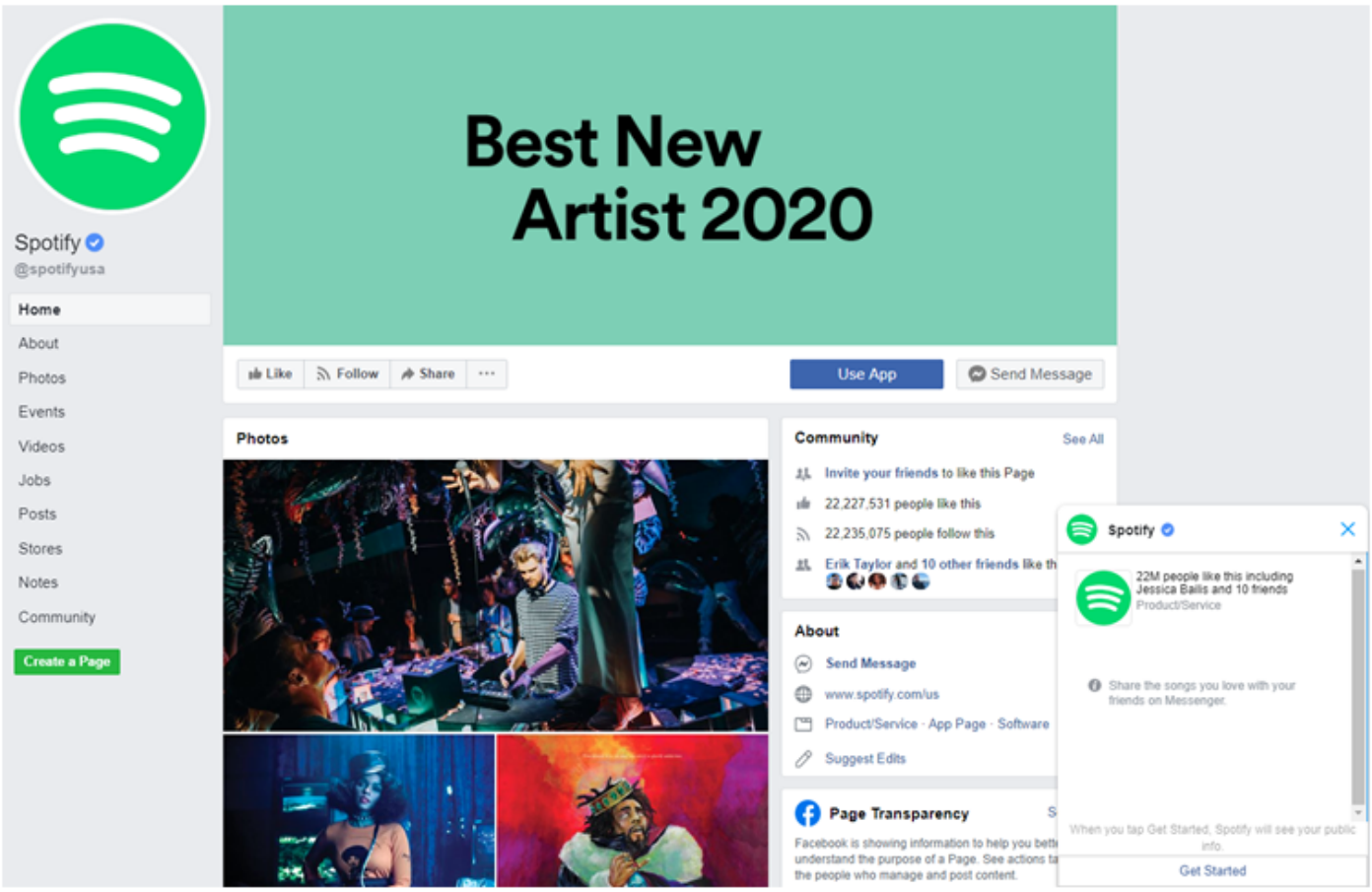
Source: Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/EvergyPower)

Southern California Edison



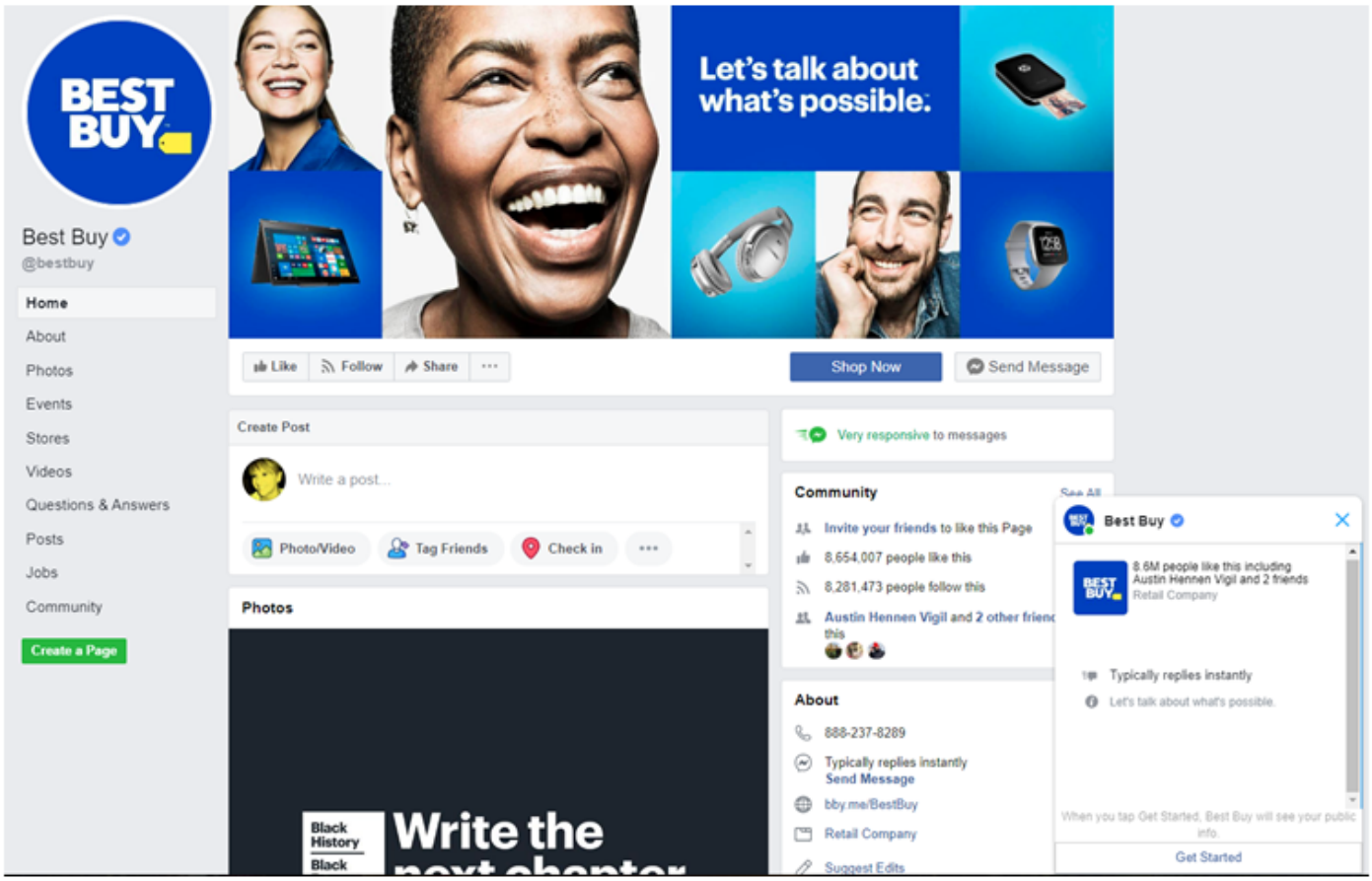
Source: Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/sce)

Spotify



Source: Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/spotifyusa)

Best Buy



Source: Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/bestbuy)

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