Vice Media: The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

Founded in 1994, Vice Media has become an expert in making and distributing exciting, provocative content for the millennial generation.
Initially a magazine business, Vice is now a $2.5 billion business reaching 150 million people each month across every conceivable platform in 36 countries. The power of Vice's content – along with the company’s strong bond with young trendsetters – has been rewarded with investments from A+E Networks, 21st Century Fox and WPP, among others.

So what makes the Vice system so effective and powerful among its target audience? How does it create such engaging content and what can brands learn from its distribution strategy?

James Morris, Global Head of MediaCom Beyond Advertising, gets the answers to these questions and more from Vice’s UK managing director, Matt O’Mara.

James Morris [MediaCom]: Matt, tell us your elevator pitch for Vice?

Matt O’Mara [Vice]: Vice is the most relevant media company for young people in the world. We create and distribute content that people genuinely want to consume, and brands can be a big part of that. If you want to reach Gen X/Y and you’re not working with Vice, we need to talk.

MediaCom: Shane Smith (Vice CEO) has said that you create content that you yourselves think is cool. But how do 40+ -year-old managers interpret “cool” for younger audiences and remain an evolving and iconic brand?

Vice: Shane is very hands-on and drives a lot of what Vice is. However, he’s the first person to say that what makes Vice great it that the brand is for and by young people. The vast majority of our staff is below the age of 30 and they are incredibly switched-on, smart people. They know first-hand what their generation wants, and it’s not the sanitized view of the world that many media outlets promote.

We intend to be the biggest premium content creator on the planet, so we’ll keep producing formats as long as there are new places to present them.
brands or names rather than have them all under Vice?

**Vice:** Vice is a network, and we wanted to create digital destinations around the cultural areas most interesting to young people. “Young people,” though is a very broad category, and to suppose that everyone under, say 30 years old, is into everything would be naïve. That said, Vice.com is essentially the mothership: an aggregation of the very best content from all our verticals. A site re-launch later this year will make this even more apparent.

**MediaCom:** Condé Nast says it is spending as much on distribution as content creation. How much does Vice invest to promote its content?

**Vice:** We spend money on content activation, both for ourselves and for our brand partners, but there is less reliance on paid distribution for premium content. Our engagement rates on YouTube, where we have the best ratio of likes vs. dislikes, and Facebook where Vice has 55% higher engagement rates than average, prove that social advocacy is still at the root of what we do. Technology is critical, but – at the end of the day – being creative is still the most important thing we do.

**MediaCom:** Vice isn’t the biggest when measured by views or monthly unique visitors, but the company still engages audiences at a very high valuation. What is unique about your offer to advertisers?

**Vice:** Vice reaches more than 150 million people per month across all platforms. This reflects not only our scale, but also the diversity of our business: a network of 10 online channels, 10 global YouTube channels, multiple linear shows and franchises (like our Emmy Award-winning show on HBO), mobile, a record label, book publishing and, of course, our magazine. Coupling this level of distribution with sought-after content makes us hard to beat.

**MediaCom:** Describe your success on YouTube.

**Vice:** We have debunked the myth that content needs to be bite-sized. Audiences are watching our content from beginning to end, even though our shows can be more than 30 minutes long, and millions are subscribing to our YouTube channels.

The engagement rates are off the charts, we have the fastest-growing subscriber channels, and our content has the best ratio of likes to dislikes. This is what we bring that others don’t: truly premium content and real engagement. We help brands shift consumer opinion, which ultimately translates into sales.

**MediaCom:** What do you think about advertiser content at the moment?

**Vice:** Some of it is pretty depressing. Everyone is having a go at it, but it’s tricky to do well and much of it is throwaway, with clients having to pay massive amounts to get it seen. That’s not good for anyone. Clients need to learn that you can explain what your brand is or showcase a product benefit without artificially forcing it into the narrative.

**MediaCom:** What do advertisers need to remember about creating engaging content?

**Vice:** Make your content entertaining, thought-provoking and authentic. Whatever you deliver has to be something audiences love and want to share with others.

**VICE News,**  
Ambushed in South Sudan
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