

The Power of Social Media: Creating Extraordinary Messages

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In this article, Sanghera explores the power of social media and individual voice. By conducting a writing experiment to create her own website, Sanghera discovered how important goals are to any piece of writing. Her purpose of this article is to stress how powerful social media can be, how the voice of an individual matters, and the impact people can have on others through social media.

Starting from nothing and building something is a miraculous process and one that many people do not realize they are even participating in. When you sit down and create a product, no matter how big or small, it instantly becomes something unique. The power and capability that each of us have of creating something of substance is very strong, especially when it comes to writing and communication. I feel as humans we have a tendency to underestimate how much power our words have. What many people need to realize is that what they say and do matters. In contemporary society, we have a powerful tool that can help us make a statement: the Internet. Social media makes the process of “being heard” so much easier than in the past. Social media allows individuals to express their ideas, start a movement, and have a creative outlet to utilize for a variety of purposes.

Earlier in my college career, I was given the opportunity to create a non-fiction project for my English 145 class. This project was open-ended and gave all of us some creative freedom. Our professor gave us the options of going the traditional route by writing a paper, but we could branch out by creating a scrapbook, website, or anything else we could imagine. When we were first given the assignment, I knew I wanted to choose a creative way

to put my project together. There are not many opportunities in college to create a project that allows creative freedom. I wanted to take advantage of this. First, I decided to come up with an objective, and then I brainstormed good ways to execute it. The goal I chose was showcasing artists. Many of my close friends from high school create music. They have been doing this for a long time and have somehow managed to stick with it in college, even with their busy schedules. I have been fortunate enough to see each of them grow exponentially through this expression, so this was my way of giving them the recognition they deserve. I decided to create a website that revolved entirely around their work and their stories. Creating a website seemed perfect to me because it was a creative way to put the piece together. I also felt like creating a website would allow me to show readers more than other genres I could use. I knew that a website would be accessible to a wide audience, so this would mean the most possible recognition. I wanted the readers to be able to feel a connection to the artists and their stories. Creating a website would encourage those feelings.

When I first came up with the idea of making a website, I was not sure where to begin. Although this medium was a new one for me to work with, it did not scare me off. There are so many different social media networks available, and chances are that people are not even aware of the range of tools to use. Furthermore, not everyone will know how to use them or will even know their purpose. The key is to not let these factors intimidate you, because in the long run, social media can help you express yourself in new ways. First, you have to do some research. The first thing I decided to do was research websites that revolve around music. I researched *Pitchfork* and *Spin Magazine's* websites, both of which are sites I read on a regular basis. I had never sat down and analyzed them, so seeing them from a new perspective was a learning experience. The websites do a great job of showcasing new and old artists. They are seen as respectable music websites and make sure to include important aspects about bands and artists that people would maybe not always think about including.

Even after studying some examples of what I wanted to create, when I started writing, I felt a little overwhelmed, because I was not sure where to start or how to start for that matter. So, I decided to research different ways I could set up the website. I did this by examining websites I liked and taking notes about their layout. I began to think of different ways I could implement these unique ideas. The main way I did this was by drawing out how I might want the layout of the site to look. Eventually I found a format that matched my drawings, and I started thinking about other ways that I could keep the presentation alive and interesting. After surveying so many examples, I knew I wanted to incorporate important features about the bands, like how they got

started, their biographies, interviews, music, and pictures of them to make the site feel more personal.

Looking through examples was just the first step in my research, though, and I realized that I needed to do some content research too. Since the point of this project was to showcase my friends and their music, I wanted to make sure that when I interviewed them and gathered research that I was getting some of the most important information for the website itself. One of my main goals was to make sure that their biographies and pictures showcased the essence of their personalities and really made it so the readers felt like they knew them. Making the audience think about music and local artists in a different way was also a goal of mine. Local artists sometimes get the reputation that they are untalented or that they will not make it big anywhere. This is not true; everybody starts off at square one and works their way up. The image that I wanted to relay with this project was that these people are passionate individuals. Even though this project was about my friends, there was still a lot of information that I did not know about their bands or how they got started. I can safely say making the project was a learning experience.

In thinking about my own goals, I realized how important a person's objective is, whatever they are writing or producing. As I worked, my goal also became narrower. In addition to showcasing the artists, my goal in making this website became to help people be aware that all musicians start for a specific reason. Whether that reason is as simple as "I was bored so I picked up a guitar" or "I wanted to make music so people could connect and not feel alone all the time," it all just depends on the people making the music and what their objective is. I quickly discovered that just like my website, goals drive the texts that musicians create as well. I think that as listeners we sometimes forget that these artists have more to them than just what we hear, and like all writing and creative expression, they have certain objectives that drive what they produce.

While working on this project, I started thinking more about goals in writing and creativity. Passion and drive are important factors of any creation, including making an effective piece of social media. I was able to realize this intense sense of motivation and passion when I worked on this project. Working on my website brought up many nostalgic memories, considering a majority of my high school years were spent going to shows for these individuals and listening to them talk about their music or just hearing what they were currently working on. While I was working on my project, I got so completely submerged into the entire site that I forgot I was working on it for a class. This definitely made my writing and creating process much more meaningful. I had a goal I wanted to achieve, and that was exciting. I found myself writing for me and my friends and not necessarily my professor. My writing was genuine, and I

was able to write from a place I hadn't written from before. Once I started writing about everyone and their music, I found that my thoughts and ideas were actually overflowing, and I had so much to say about each of them. That was when I realized that if you are passionate about something, it will not feel like a chore to educate others. Writing gives a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment that cannot be received from anything else. Everything came back to my goal. I realized that I wasn't really even trying to change someone's perspective, but rather just help people understand that there is always more to things than we think there are. That's the case with my friends and their own goals in music, and my goal was to get that across in my writing.

Once I had written the biographies, I had to actually assemble the website. Again, this came back to my objectives. I had to put it together in a way that was appealing and easy to navigate and read. This was definitely the most challenging aspect for me. First, I was not sure how I envisioned the website, so starting was very difficult. This was my first time creating a website, and my immediate thought was to go to Wordpress.com. This was my first choice because it seemed like the most popular website to use for what I wanted to create. After doing a little more research into the site and discussing the project with my professor, I decided it wasn't the best medium for my goals. I decided to take my professor's suggestion and went with a site called Weebly. These sites are different from one another in many ways. Weebly is a lot easier to navigate and put together and also allows the creators to do more with the site. The templates are not set in stone, which was refreshing. Most of the features that are provided to you with Weebly allow creative freedom, and this fit perfectly with my goals. The templates were made to accommodate adding pictures, music, or text.

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a page titled "ALEC'S BAND" on the website "armaansinghara.weebly.com". The page layout includes a header with the band name, a photograph of three people on a motorcycle, and several text sections. The "MEET THE BAND" section provides a detailed history of the band's formation and members. Below this, there are two interview-style sections: "FEW WORDS WITH THE BAND" and "Me: What artists have influenced you the most?", followed by "Me: What was the first album you ever purchased?" and "Andrew: Nirvada - Green Day".

ALEC'S BAND

MEET THE BAND
 Contrary to the name of the band, there is no Alec in Alec's Band. The band first formed with Brian Meyer on drums and Andrew Smykowski on guitar. The band started off just as something to do, nothing more than that really. There was no serious aspect to the band or to the music. Soon after Brad Mautz and Chris Keckler (also known as Dick Reynolds) joined the band. After the band's first practice Brad was quickly kicked out, because he was not that great. Soon after Brad was kicked out, so was Brian, one of the founders of the band. This left Andrew and Chris alone and in need of a drummer. Which is how the band that is together today formed. Connor Boyle took Brian's spot as drummer and the band soon after started to play seriously. The Alec's Band that is what it is today has been together for about 3 years now. The band has grown exponentially and has had a few releases. Their most recent release was *Three Guys on a Motorcycle*.

FEW WORDS WITH THE BAND
 Me: What artists have influenced you the most?
 Chris: First and foremost on that list is Blink-182. I'll spare you the long story and suffice to tell you that Blink-182 influenced me by telling me that music should never be taken too seriously. Second on that list would definitely be The Cribs, who influenced me by showing me that there are some people that truly like music, and then a whole lot of people who are just lying to both society and themselves about liking music. Finally, Sum 41/The Pains of Being Pure at Heart. That might seem like an absurd pairing of bands, but both bands taught me that there is absolutely no reason to make music unless you have your friends to be involved with it with you. Andrew: Tons of stuff. Like tons! However, recently this is what I've been into: The Smashing Pumpkins, Nirvana, Ride, Silverstein Pickups, Slowdive, Wild Nothing, Lotus Plaza, +44.

Me: What was the first album you ever purchased?
 Andrew: Nirvada - Green Day
 Chris: The first album I was ever GIFTED was Nickelback's *Silver Side Up*. I only include that because I received that long before I ever bought an album of my own. The first album I ever bought with my own money had to have been *Does This Look Infected?* by Sum 41, which consequently was confiscated by my parents. They cut up the back of the CD so that it was unusable in an act of censorship.

Figure 1: General Layout of the Articles

Once I found that Weebly's features matched my goals, I returned to the idea of examining examples to further investigate this kind of writing. After looking through a few Weebly sites, I finally managed to choose a template that looked sleek and simple. I needed something that would not draw too much attention away from what I was trying to put together. While I was doing research on websites, I realized that I wanted to make sure the website had more than just text. So I included pictures of the artists, links, or attachments to their music, and pictures that I had taken from previous years. I decided to do this because I think that when readers are only given text they do not get drawn in as much. A website with just text is less appealing to readers. I wanted to make sure that the readers were entertained, as well as felt a personal touch throughout the website. The pictures of the artists were included so readers could put a face to the name, and breaking the biographies into sections also made it easy to read. (See Figure 1 for an example of my layout, which starts off with a biography about the band and then moves on to an interview). I decided to utilize the layout in this way because I felt like it was the easiest on the eyes.

I also attached music so I could actually showcase my friends. Without the music and the pictures, these individuals would not have been fully showcased. Then I decided to add pictures that I had taken from previous years because I wanted the website to have a personal side. Since the project was really nostalgic for me, I included pictures from different memories I had with these individuals, just to show that the website was more than a project for me. I wanted readers to understand that the people I was writing about were not strangers. I wanted to make an impact with what I was saying and maybe even a statement to provide insight into my main point. (Figure 2 is an example of how I included pictures from experiences I had with these individuals, but again these choices all came back to my goals).



Figure 2: First Page of My Website

In addition to thinking about what I wanted people to take away from my website, there was another audience that played a crucial part in my goals and the choices I made to achieve them: my friends. While I was putting this website together, I was very concerned with how my friends would perceive it. I wanted to make sure that I did justice to each of these individuals. This played a big part in the pictures I chose, as in the example of Figure 3. Although the specific circumstances of these pictures wouldn't mean much to the audience, I wanted to incorporate them to give readers an insight to how much these individuals have grown and how hard they have each worked. The picture I chose had a lot to do with how I wanted my friends to perceive the site, in addition to my greater audience.

I used pictures as headers throughout the entire website. I wanted to make it a point to have a universal message for the rest of the potential audience: anyone who cared about music. I wanted to make sure that people knew they could read this even if they did not know the individuals that it was about. It was supposed to showcase artists, but beyond that, I also wanted to get people to possibly look into the music they listen to themselves a little bit more. I wanted the website to center around my own experience and the individuals' experiences, but also explore a generalized idea of how some people experience music. This was my way of using the Internet as a tool to make people more aware of something that they may have not even thought about before, just to change their thinking a bit. This was not necessarily my primary motive, but it was still a small motive that I wanted to achieve.



Figure 3: Headers Featuring Pictures of My Friends

Once my website was finished and finalized, I posted it on Facebook for my friends to see. I had barely posted it for ten minutes when the likes and comments came pouring in. I did not realize how much people cared or paid attention to things posted on Facebook or any social media network, really. This moment made me realize how powerful something like creating your own website could be. The fact that I could make people read something, just because I made it on Weebly, was really incredible to me. I found that the most interesting thing to keep an eye on was the stats on the actual website. Weebly has a feature where you can see how many views your website is getting and how many of those views are from individual computers. I was completely shocked; people had started to share the website on their own band pages, with their friends, and with their families. I couldn't believe how many views the site was getting. To be completely honest, I was feeling pretty overwhelmed. All my purposeful choices resulted in my website actually meeting my goals. It was after that point though that I realized how big of a difference all of us can make. Sometimes the Internet can be seen as a horrible thing that is addictive. Yet there are also some cases in which we do not realize how good we have it. Many of our parents were not fortunate enough to have access to the Internet. They never had an opportunity to immediately share thoughts or have someone listen to what they had to say. There was no way to have something you made go viral. Exposure and recognition like this, which was one of my main objectives, was not a realistic goal for generations before ours.

While I started making this website, I actually had the mentality of thinking that the Internet was ruining my generation. I could not think of a valid reason for why social media networks were beneficial for anyone. In my opinion, social media had just become something that was making people my age anti-social and lonely. It seemed it was starting to become something that was preventing people from living their lives fully and appreciating the people that surround them and the world outside the Internet. Seeing the feedback after having my website posted for a few minutes made me change my mind a little bit. It really started to put things into perspective for me. I started thinking about how important it was to me that my message got out to people. Whether they agreed with it or not, I just wanted people to take a second to take in my message. That was another goal I did not realize I had; I wanted a reaction to what I was saying. Even though this was not a goal I was aware of having, my choices helped me achieve it too. I started to see how big of an impact the Internet and technology can have on people, and I realized that it can be used in a positive way to make a difference. The person using technology to write has to want to make that difference.

When you think about it, many artists or musicians that get famous do so because of social media networks. Once you send something out, it is there

for others to share or send to their peers. The power that this generation has is outstanding, and I think that it is something that everyone should try to use. This website was only for my English class, but by the end of it I had learned much more than I expected. I achieved a sense of fulfillment that I can safely say no other project has given me. I was able to get a grasp of the importance of our opinions. I also learned that identifying your goals for a project can be the cornerstone of what you create. As I was creating my website, I started to realize how much I was actually capable of doing, as long as I had a goal to guide me. When I was done with the project, I was very concerned with how people would perceive my work. I was not even sure if I wanted to post it on the Internet for anyone to see. Now that it has all been said and done, I am very thankful that I did. Although, the website did not go viral or anything close to that, I still got the attention of many people that I did not think I would be getting attention from. There is really no way to describe the feeling of knowing that people took the time to read your message. This project gave me a sense of accomplishment and importance. I accomplished my main goal. I had done something for the first time in years that I was willing to share with the public and something I was very proud of. I learned much more from this project than just creating a website, and I am very thankful for that.

Visit my site: <http://armaansanghera.weebly.com>



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