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# 6 Reactions by Marketers to the End of 'Free Social' as the Algorithm Era Unfolds

## Instagram and Twitter's tweaks alter strategies By Christopher Heine

March 24, 2016, 7:00 AM EDT

Technology



Social algorithms have organic marketers rethinking content. Getty Images

Instagram **last week** unveiled its updated algorithm, which will reorder the images and videos users see in their news feeds based on their interests instead of how the posts were published chronologically. The development followed a similar move by Twitter **six weeks ago** to reorder users' time lines—if they opt in—based on the relevance of tweets.

And considering Facebook's algorithm changes **in recent years** have made it significantly more challenging for posts to gain traction, it seems more obvious than ever that organic social is being threatened like never before. Wall Street wants bigger ad dollars from these publicly held tech brands, so Instagram, Twitter and Facebook are essentially making marketers pay if they want to increase the likelihood of achieving big social results.

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We asked digital players what it means for their businesses, and here are the six most interesting things they had to say.

## 1. Social, as a "free ride," is officially over

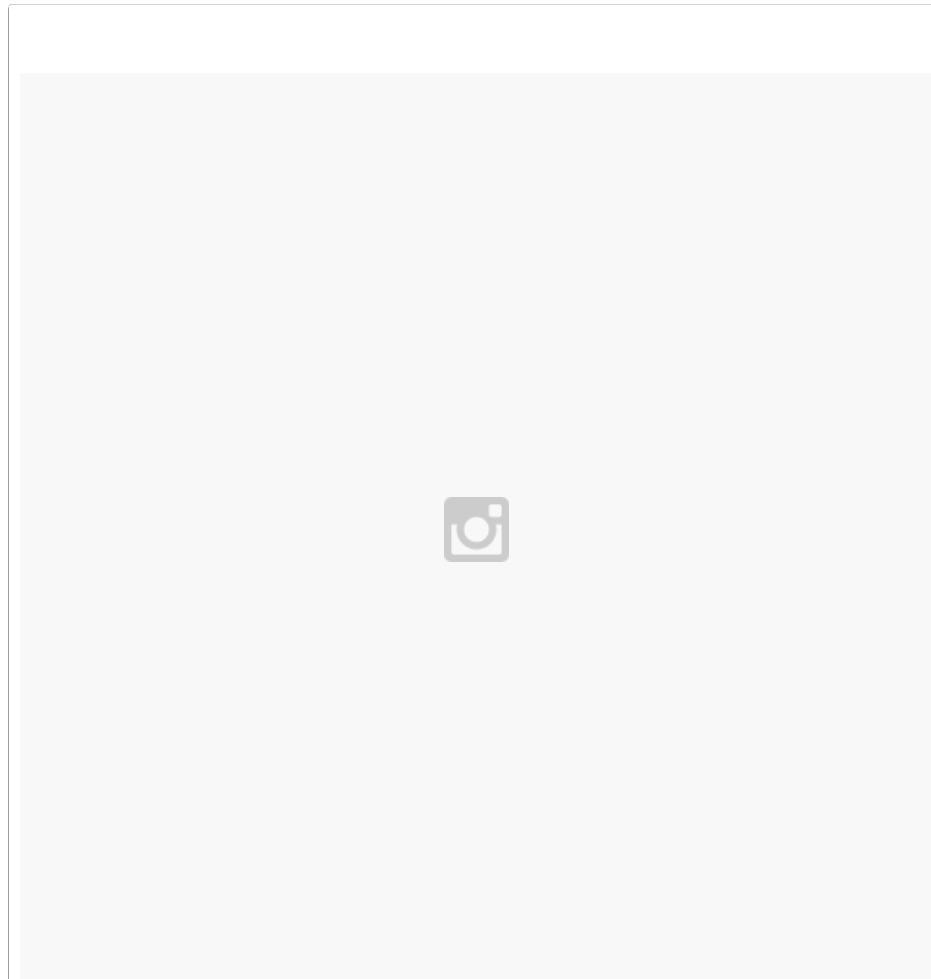
Marketers predicted that more of their budgets will be spent on organic and paid social advertising as long as brand execs feel like the efforts are producing strong results. Even if the success rate lessens, said David Moritz, CEO of Viceroy Creative, most major companies will want to have a healthy presence on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook in order to stay relevant to consumers.

"It will cost [marketers] more to do it," Moritz said. "The free ride is over, but everyone who participated in it seems to have benefited in some way."

Ben Hordell, partner at DXAgency, added that "social media has become a lot less free as there has been a need to generate revenue on the platforms. The companies will say that these algorithms are a volume issue, which is also true, but money is certainly playing its part as it always does."

## 2. The best content wins

Industry players agreed that less organic reach will force marketers to think more innovatively as social stalwarts **Red Bull** and **Gatorade** have done. In fact, on Instagram in particular, underwear startup Tommy John's social staffers seem to be ahead of the game. On Tuesday, they posted a photo that combined fashion influencer "**Cuffington**" with #MarchMadness—on a day when there weren't any NCAA tourney games—and quickly garnered more than 100 organic Instagram likes at little cost. (To be clear, Cuffington wasn't compensated.)



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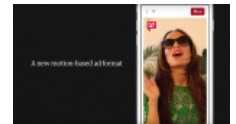
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Even though there wasn't a paid push behind the effort, Monica Fineis, social director for Tommy John, said that combining influencers with Twitter and Instagram ads could be important to her marketing strategy in the algorithm era.

Tania Yuki, CEO of social media marketing player Shareablee, is of a similar mind.

"If an advertiser is still struggling to create a social strategy that resonates with users, these algorithmic changes challenge them to think more about their creative," she said. "The bar just got raised."

Brandfire CEO Adam Padilla added that the best content creates "reactions and disruption because they are coming from a place of authenticity and know how to clearly communicate their point of view. That is what real branding is. It's communicating through all the noise and clutter. It's platform and algorithm agnostic."

### 3. Ad performance could improve thanks to algorithms

If there is less marketing content in news feeds, it could help advertisers zero in on consumers while impacting their purchase decisions, Padilla suggested.

"The upside to these algorithms for marketers, at least in the short term, is that they will have an even more specific target consumer to aim for, making each ad dollar a more fruitful spend," he said.

Yuki added, "If you are an advertiser that has seen success with your social strategy, more users will now be able to discover your content."

### 4. There will be plenty of losers

Content marketing is tough, so marketers should expect to hear more stories than ever before from colleagues and industry peers about being left in the dust.

"Don't kid yourself," said Hordell, the DXagency exec. "Even if you have unbelievable content, you could still find yourself in a if-a-tree-falls-in-the-woods-and-nobody-is-around moment."

### 5. Though email could become more lucrative

Hordell also said, "In my opinion, the decline of free social has made email marketing even more attractive over the past few years. In email marketing, marketers have greater control of message delivery when compared to the modern social mode."

And hey, he might be right. Consider Epsilon's [report on Wednesday](#) that found millennials increasingly using email, more so in fact than any other age demographic.

### 6. If you were caught off guard, shame on you

Several marketers we spoke with said they saw the algorithms coming from the proverbial mile away.

"We've been preparing for this and are not surprised," said Fineis of Tommy John. "It just means that you have to work hard for engagement, which is how we approach every piece of content."



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