



The Inside Social Media Podcast
Episode 2:
Rick Wion, Director of Social Media for McDonald's US

Rick Mulready: Rick, welcome to the show.

Rick Wion: Great, thanks for having me.

Rick Mulready: Absolutely. So, I want to start out with your background. I want to jump right into it. You have a really diverse background having worked in PR, IT systems, graphic design and journalism and of course now you've been heading up social media for one of the biggest brands in the world for the last three years. Small business owners tend to have diverse backgrounds as well, so how do you think your diversity has helped – the background diversity has helped you in your job today?

Rick Wion: Well really at the core of it, you know, I started out as a journalist. My degree is in journalism and that's where I learned really how to write and not only how to write, but how to write different ways, you know, for different audiences and so being able to communicate to customers, to internal audiences, to vendors. You know, there's different styles that you need to bring to bear to that and I think just developing a recognition of that and then, you know, using that in your business is really one of the most important things that I draw off my background.

I think, you know, that any business person at any level should be able to do and then the other thing that I would point to my background is that, you know, even though I have had different kinds of roles, each one of those, the IT systems so understanding kind of the bits and bytes behind the social media world and also how to read analytics and what those mean for the business.

On the graphic design side, understanding what makes a good design and what doesn't make good design. There's been snippets and little pieces from each job that I feel I'm taking away and so – and again, you know, what I could turn that into advice for other people is just kind of taking self-assessment and understanding all right, well what have I learned and what are just the macro lessons but then also the micro skills that I've got from my past. I mean, how can I continue to use those skills and keep them sharp as I apply them to new roles.

Rick Mulready: Sure. I love that because as I mentioned small business owners do have those. They tend to do have diverse backgrounds and social media frankly can be quite intimidating for people, so you know knowing that you can use those skills that they

have from that diverse background and turn it into, you know, a successful social media strategy for whatever their brand or business is, that is really really good to know and to look at someone as successful as you and look at what the type background that you have and what you're doing now.

So, that kind of leads me into my next question here. So you're with one of the top brands in the entire world, the McDonald's, what can small businesses and online entrepreneurs learn from what big brands like McDonald's are doing on Twitter?

Rick Wion: Well, you know, I think there's probably a lot of lessons that are applicable from McDonald's partially because we are a system of entrepreneurs and small businesses as well. McDonald's in the U.S. we're about – 85 to 90% of our restaurants are owned by franchises and so these are you know men and women across the country who are not only building businesses but they're building their communities as well.

And so that's one thing that you'll see – you know, you'll see this both international handle but out of our local outreach as well where we're constantly trying to – yes, we have the, you know, an advertising budget that we're on TV a lot and there's a lot of material that we're producing, but we're always trying to localize it as well. In fact, we have more than 90 different local Twitter handles.

And these Twitter handles are run by our local franchise cooperatives and with those local handles, we're able to reach out to people in the community whether it's, you know, local news anchors or bloggers or just customers in that area and so we can go from a big national campaign down into local outreach very quickly on Twitter and so – and in that local outreach it might be that we do many contests on Twitter where a local organization will be giving out free samples for people who send in a picture of you know, send in a picture of yourself via Twitter in a costume going to McDonald's, we'll send you a coupon for free big Mac.

Those are kind of programs that we're doing all the time where we're taking the extensive reach on Twitter, but then applying a very small filter to it to find folks within a particular area.

Rick Mulready: Sure, sure. And then with the – since you have so many of the individual franchises and that those are essentially small businesses, do you guys do any kind of training for them or how – you know, how is that rolled out to from a national level? How is it rolled out to the local level in those individual franchises?

Rick Wion: Well, the way that it works is we're organized into a cooperative, so the franchisees in particular area get together and kind of share what is a lot of their marketing activations end up looking like, but at the same time individual restaurant owners are doing all kinds of different things as well.

In fact, there's one restaurant owner in South Jersey, she hosts a monthly meet up for moms and she did this. She found some mom bloggers that were in her area. She

became friends with them on Facebook and Twitter and then started inviting them out saying hey, I've got – I'll give you free coffee, you can put your kids in the play place and just hang out and network for an hour and she does this one for moms, you know.

So that's another example of how they were using social media at local level to just make connections with people, so as much as it's a very digital thing, what it's – the digital just means to an end of connecting to the people in your area. And you know to be honest with you, there's not necessarily a training guide that's going to tell somebody how to be involved in their community.

And we do give tips and things in terms of how to build relationships and what could an outreach look like, you know, but that's got to be a personality trait that either you have or you've got to develop if you're a small business person.

Rick Mulready: Sure, sure. I mean, do you ever have any kind of instances where, you know, you don't think an individual franchise is maybe utilizing Twitter or Facebook to the level that they should – not that there's a right or wrong way to do it, but you think that they could be making some improvements, do you ever have cases like that where you kind of step in and you know try to kind of help and guide them?

Rick Wion: You know we're always putting out different things. We've got guidelines for social media and tool kits for activating different things. Another thing that we do is as we're moving through various campaigns, we'll put together content for the local markets to use, so that way they've got some you know like ready-made or just like add in some local flavor type of tweets and Facebook postings that they can use and that helps kind of raise not only the consistency level across all these local handles, the local sort of handles that we're using, but also it brings greater alignments to where am I sitting looks like as well.

Rick Mulready: Got you. Got you. Cool. You know keeping on that discussion about Twitter, what do you see Twitter doing over the next couple of years to make itself more attractive to small businesses? You know they've really recently rolled out their advertising and offering free credits and so forth, where do you see them going to make it more attractive to small businesses over the next of couple of years?

Rick Wion: Well, from what I've seen I think a lot of the advertising and especially the targeting that is going to be part of that advertising and then, you know, there's a self-serve motto where you can buy keywords, I think each one of those things are going to be – are going to help strengthen the advertising platform and make it something that's going to be a better and more useful tool for small business people, you know, but at the same time, I'm a big believer in that advertising is only half of the equation in terms of how you need to look at that tool.

You know having a good content and using Twitter as – developing a Twitter voice and using it as a networking tool are all other elements of the equation and I think, you know, if you just look at one of their newest things was Vine, that short video–

Rick Mulready: Yeah, I love Vine.

Rick Wion: – service that’s in there. Yeah. We've actually just started playing with them last couple of weeks and we just produced our first couple of videos. I think that’s a really interesting – and it's a great tool because like it's something I'll put in the frame of reference of my dad.

So my dad runs a small tax practice in suburban Chicago and so he’s not on Twitter, but if he was I’d say hey dad, you got to get on Vine because how great would it be for you to do a six-second weekly tax tip. You know, you could do one a week for the entire year, that would be some really interesting content and then you could use the app to target people in your area who look for tax tips, so then when they walk into your door, they’ve already seen you. They’ve seen your face.

They’ve heard your voice and you're kind of shortening that connection to familiarity* as a string of people have to go down when they're starting up a new relationship with the business.

Rick Mulready: Very cool. I mean that’s a perfect opportunity that something super simple that any small business can do to take advantage of the types of tools that are out there. And Vine is at the time of that we're talking today Vine is a fairly new product as you just mentioned that you just recently started playing around with. I believe it's been out about a month or two maybe or it might have been out longer than that, but it's kind of gaining popularity right now.

So, you mentioned – I want to kind of touch on real quick, I think this is a good time because before we started talking “officially” here for the show, you’ve mentioned to me that talking about Twitter and Facebook and that with over 27 million fans on Facebook that you guys, McDonald’s U.S. post on the Facebook page, you know, a few times per week, maybe three – between three and five times per week and I get that question from people all the time.

You know, what's the best number of times or how many times a day should I post to my Facebook page? What type of content should I be posting? And then McDonald’s is super active on Twitter, multiple times throughout the day, so that kind of – that’s a great example of finding that – I mean, being active on both, but finding that sweet spot of what resonates best with your audience.

So, can you kind of shed some light on how you guys went about figuring that out, figuring out the optimal times or the number of times to be posting both to Facebook and to Twitter?

Rick Wion: Sure, yeah. And it was actually a fairly simple process. We tried different types of content and then with different frequencies and you know, through some experimentation we found out – we just discovered that that was kind of our sweet spot.

You know the three to five posts per week, we realized that if we post more than that then, you know, we're getting feedback that hey, McDonald's, you know, I gave you a like, but you show up too often in my feed and so, you know.

And that's one thing and whether it's Facebook or it's Twitter or it's you know, whatever channel, we were always listening to our customers and that feedback is something that we're – you know, that's very important to us because it makes us smarter as both marketers and its company.

Rick Mulready: And that is gold right there. I mean that's what social media gives us the opportunity to listen to our customers and I think that what a lot of small businesses don't do is they don't take advantage of that and they don't necessarily listen to their customers. They think they have to be on one of these platforms and doing something because everybody else is doing it, but they really need to – it really comes down to figuring out what best works for them and their customers and then listening to those customers and like McDonald's did just really refining the process if you will and finding what best works for them and then keep going with it. So, I love that. I love that.

And that you may have just kind of answered my next question, but you know, what are the top three tips that you would give to a small business or online entrepreneur who is just starting out on Twitter?

Rick Wion: Well, I think the first tip is that you got to find your voice and there's no right voice for any particular, you know, any particular person or brand or business. Like back to the example of my father, just because he's a tax accountant, it doesn't mean that he should sound like a tax accountant nor does it mean that he should be some wild, crazy guy in a cowboy hat talking about big tax savings, so that's not his personality either.

So, you know, and finding your voice is something that it just it takes time and effort to do. Roger Ebert had a great quote which I'm probably going to butcher but it was essentially that, you know, as a writer there's probably 100,000 words that you have to write before you actually get good at it and I think on Twitter there's a certain amount of tweets that you have to write before you get comfortable with it and before you even kind of really, you know, find your voice.

So, I think that's kind of the first thing, is finding your voices, you know, the equivalent of getting your legs underneath you.

I think another that you need to do on Twitter is be thoughtful in terms of how you're building your following. There's lots of different ways to go about building a following. In fact, there are some services out there that I definitely would not recommend to use where you can, you know, if you – you can buy followers literally, but you're – no one is going to be impressed by follower counts if the followers you have are spam and bots. So, I think that's kind of the second tip for someone who's starting out.

And then I think the third this is just to really stay at it. You know Twitter is as much a network as it is a publishing tool and I think folks who get that and work in that manner will quickly realize that yeah, you know what, it's about the quality of the followers and the quality of the relationships that you're able to build on Twitter more than anything else that you can get out of the platform.

Rick Mulready: Sure. So, you kind of touch on – I love what you just said there and one of the questions I get a lot is obviously is how to – how do I get, you know, how do I build my Twitter following? How do I get more Facebook fans so and you kind of touched on it there, so when it comes to Twitter, you know what, what would you recommend people do to get that right “type of audience” on their Twitter page?

Rick Wion: Well, I think it's a matter of doing your research and – I want to say research, some of the researches, one we used to like, clicking around and seeing, you know, a lot of times what people do when they go on Twitter first is they'll follow a couple of new sites or they'll think of a couple of magazines or reporters or just influential people that they know and like and that's a great place to start, but then you go beyond that and say okay, well who else are these people following.

You know, put kind of random keywords that are things that are tied to your business or just areas that are important to you and then see who comes up as the top or influential people, you know, influential people there. And also just remember it's not a race either. You know I see all the time where people will be following 2,001 which is the maximum that Twitter will let you follow until you get 2,000 followers yourself and you know I got to wonder too.

To me that says that someone's just blindly following up to 2,000 people. You know it doesn't necessarily speak that somebody has put a lot of careful thought and consideration into who is – they're putting in their network.

Rick Mulready: Yeah. That's really – I mean that's interesting because it does give you that social proof if you will because that is a large number, but I agree with you what you said that, you know, are they having meaningful conversations with those people, probably not. You know I like to use the example of – if I'm – if it's lunchtime and I'm walking on the block and there's three or four restaurants right in the row, you know, and there's a – one of the restaurants has a huge line out the door and the other restaurants don't have anybody in line, you know, that – you know, my interest is peaked there with the restaurant with the long line so, but yeah it comes down to okay, they might have a lot of Twitter followers there, but what type of engagement are they seeing there.

Is that a real, you know, true representation of what they have there on Twitter? So that's a really interesting point. Let's talk about Twitter marketing campaigns. So, you know, I realize there are different measures of success when it comes to a Twitter marketing campaign, but in your mind what's one example of a really successful campaign that you've seen and then why do you think it was successful?

Rick Wion: You know, here's a – and you're right, success can be measured in so many different ways and you know before I answer the question, one of the things that I do and I tell my team to do this all the time too, is when we're putting together a campaign, you know, the goal is not to get tweets or followers or any of those things because those are all nice numbers but the numbers alone don't move the business and so you know, I want to say all right, well what are the strategic things that actually help build the business?

And so campaign by campaign we're going to have different objectives that we're trying to move, so in one it might be we want to build awareness because it's something new on the menu and people might not know about it so we want to build that awareness. For another one, it might be that we want to drive trial or we want people to taste it or we want people to know that it's a new recipe so it's got less salt or sodium or fat or something like that in it.

So there's actually two quick examples I'll point to against both of those. We did a really fun thing and actually our New York team was the spearhead of – it's our local team for McRib late last year where when McRib is back, big news. It kind of drive its own excitement, but what we saw is that we've got loyal McRib customers, but there are some opportunity to get even more people trying McRib who hadn't tried it before.

And so our team out in New York they put together a campaign for that local area where if people tweeted a picture of themselves eating the McRib for the first time and they tagged it first McRib, that they would be entered into a drawing and that the winner would get a McRib price pack which was some slack, a T-shirt, a couple of tchotchkes and some coupons and you know, there – and I don't know the exact numbers, but it was successful in terms of getting people who never tried the McRib before to try it for the first time.

And so – and to me the success of that is that we were able to talk about a real business challenge in terms of okay, how do we get new people to try this. We came up with idea to incent people to do that and then paid it off by actually having that.

And then kind of a different, you know, a quick example of that is one that we've got going on now, so we've got a new item on our menu called fish McBites which is it's basically like little pieces of fish that are chopped up and fried, so things like popcorn style kind of fish and it's new on the menu and so we're trying out many different things to kind of drive excitement of it out there.

And one of the things that we're doing is that we are – and there's also some new news around our fish overall. So, fish McBites and Filet-O-Fish, they're both 100% sustainable, certified by the Marine Stewardship Council and so what we're putting out there is hey, there's a new product oh, and by the way, did you know that this product is sustainable. So, we've got kind of a two-tiered news and so if you look at our Twitter stream, we're talking about fish McBites but we're also talking of the sustainability of fish and so both of which are strategic objectives because we want to raise awareness of a

new product, but we also want to raise awareness that oh and by the way, it's got a really good quality and sustainability story behind it.

Rick Mulready: Sure. And today in your Twitter feed it has essentially been taken over by you've called Frankie the fish. Is that correct?

Rick Wion: Yes. Frankie is kind of the unofficial mascot of the fish McBites item on the menu and it comes from in some old Filet-O-Fish spot. We had the fish that's on the wall that sings. We've used that in our creative and he's been given a name Frankie and so we thought it might be fun to kind of get away from our normal Twitter handle and let Frankie have the reigns and you know, he's not really snarky but he's definitely a funny fish and really good at fun so you know, today our team is just really just having a blast getting out there and kind of pretending to be a different voice for a day and the customers are responding really really well.

We've gotten tons and tons of tweets back to us, people telling us what they think that what we're doing is funny and that sort of they're having a laugh, people actually shooting pictures that they've drawn of Frankie to us as well. So yeah, it's pretty fun. It's a great thing for a Friday.

Rick Mulready: Well, that's a great example too of you know this – social media should be fun, you know, I mean it's whatever channel that you are using, have fun with it and that's a perfect example of you guys having some fun today with Frankie, the fish and yes, you do have your normal “voice” but you know it's like you just said, it's fun to have sort of a different voice if you will from Frankie the fish today and that's great that people are responding so well to it.

So, the last question I have for you Rick is, you know, small businesses obviously don't have the kind of marketing and social media budgets that big brands do, so if you could give only one piece of advice to small businesses wanting to market themselves on Twitter, what would that be?

Rick Wion: Well, I think it's really – the one piece to this would be to figure out how it fits together with your company and when I say that, you know, tweeting doesn't really take time. It doesn't take a whole lot of time to do it well, you know, but like everyone every small business person has got a million things on their plate and the oh my God, I got to sit down and tweet, too, you know probably is something that's fairly common. I mean it's probably why I haven't got my dad on Twitter yet, but at the same time there are some things that you can do to figure out how to do it.

So, whether it's you doing it or having someone within your company doing it, you know, find someone who can dedicate the time and dedicating the time doesn't have to mean that you have to spend hours and hours doing it. You know often times when I'm busy, my tweeting is – I'll open up Twitter. I'll look at my stream. I'll just send off a couple quick tweets to a few people I know and then I'm done within five minutes.

So, it's a 140 characters, you know, don't over think it, but also find the time, squeeze it in somewhere because you know if – once you get your legs in there, when you find voice and you're building a network, you'll figure out where your pay off is in terms of using it as a business tool.

Rick Mulready: Yeah, I love that because so many people think that it has to be, you know, a big investment of their time and oh God, I have to sit down and do this or you know I have to – this is going to take up, you know, much of my morning or whatever and it really doesn't have to, like you just said it can take a few minutes and go to your Twitter stream and see, you know, what's being discussed and like you said, once you have your voice there, tweet out a couple of relevant things and you know, be on with your day, so it does not have to take a lot of your time.

So, Rick thank you so much for being on today. I really really appreciate it. You know, if – you kind of mentioned it before, is there something that you'd like to promote? You guys are talking about the fish McBites today.

Rick Wion: Well, just fish McBites are new on the menu, so go try them and don't – and I'll be completely honest with you, you know, I have heard on Twitter people are like oh, that's kind of weird sounding name, just trust me on it, they're good.

Rick Mulready: Okay. Awesome. Rick thanks very much. I really appreciate it.

Rick Wion: All right. Thank you.