

Hopping onto a Social Media Strategy!

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'We are a lifestyle brand': How IHOP's social media strategy stacks up

On June 9, **IHOP** ran its first series of **Facebook** Live videos to promote its new range of "Paradise Pancakes." The three videos were nothing more than a shot of pancakes sitting on a table at a beach. Yet together, they amassed over 385,000 video views with people watching over 171,000 minutes, quickly becoming **IHOP**'s highest-performing **social** video effort to date.

"It was deliberate use of a great new content forum that was clever, immersive and sticky," said Kirk Thompson, svp of **marketing** at **IHOP**. "It drove attention to the pancakes but also allowed us to showcase our **brand** voice, enabling us to engage and interact with our audience."

It didn't stop there. One of the moments during the live stream that piqued fans' interest the most was when a man with a beard popped into the frame to quickly take a bite of one of the pancakes before swiftly disappearing. **IHOP** brought back the "Beard Guy" in a 360 photo it posted on **Facebook** on June 16, which itself has garnered over 3,000 reactions.

<https://www.facebook.com/IHOP/photos/a.168208503151.118014.10036618151/10153878782928152/?type=3&theater>

IHOP's most recent efforts tie in with the **brand**'s overarching **social** media strategy, said Thompson, which is to constantly try to be "in the right place and the right conversations in the right manner." This wasn't always the case, said Thompson, with **social** being merely an afterthought to traditional channels like print, radio and television. But within the last year and a half, **IHOP** has been quick to embrace emerging **social** tools such as **Facebook** Live and 360, while others have taken more of a wait-and-see approach.

On National Pancake Day in March, for instance, the **brand** set up a **social** war room in its agency MRM//McCann's New York headquarters, monitoring trends throughout the day on **social** media and creating real-time content, like this doge-inspired pancake meme, in response. And earlier this year, when Snapchat introduced sponsored geofilters, **IHOP** was one of the first **brands** on board, targeting customers within **IHOP** restaurants with **IHOP**-themed overlays on the platform. In January, it used the hashtags #Panuary and #Entry on Instagram to encourage pancake lovers to compete in a pancake-eating competition. It also commissioned

pancake artist Nathan Shields to turn fan photos into real-time pancake portraits on Twitter.

While **IHOP** is happy to engage with audiences and increase the number of its followers on **social**, ultimately it's looking to sell pancakes. It might be working: **IHOP**'s total sales were up 8.1 percent over the past year while competitor Denny's was up just 4.1 percent, according to Technomic. To sustain that growth, it will keep looking to **social** media as a way to insert itself into people's lives on a daily basis, said Thompson.

"I would say that we are a lifestyle **brand** considering we're a 58-year-old **brand** that's been a part of people's breakfast rituals and special moments for decades," he said. "It is both healthy and important for us to remain a dynamic part of their lifestyles, even though the term may be overused today."

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