LEVERAGING WORDPRESS

AS A DIGITAL PUBLISHER

Time. ... Welcome to today’s presentation on...
Time.              …. . About me!

- Web Developer for 18 years
- WordPress development for 7 years
- Love technically efficient business strategy & operations
- Love meeting goals & objectives even more
- Work for NESN
RSN in the NEW ENGLAND region.

It has the linear television broadcast rights to Red Sox & Bruins games.

Considered “Independent” owned by the teams through Fenway Sports Group.

NESN Digital’s goal. Content perspective: cover not just RS & B, but all NE sports. As well as sports with national/global focus, like soccer, UFC, NASCAR
How do we achieve a national footprint?

One key component is designed a strategy of engaging the New England sports fans with trending sports content on a number of different digital platforms like social media.

Another component used to reach our goal is being able to evaluate the strategy through measuring Key Performance Indicators that assess success levels of the different aspects of our strategy.

Lastly, this wouldn’t be possible without the actual implementation both of these pieces through technology.

As you can see, all 3 of these scopes help achieve to our goal.

At the very heart of our goal making it all possible is.. (SLIDE)
Time. …. 

Talking about what our digital products are, how we use WordPress to implement these products efficiently, how we use WordPress as a strategic tool, and how we use metrics to evaluate our success.
Time. ....

NESN has a group of digital products on WordPress. The biggest one is NESN.com. Then there are other digital products for original network entertainment shows. NESN Clubhouse & Dining Playbook currently are still running and are supported in the digital space and there were other shows like NESN Fuel and NESN Next Producer that have since been canceled and decommissioned. NESN also has a group of smaller sub-sites for business functions like a sales lead generation website, a careers website, and a website for our viewers on how to learn how to get NESN into their homes. The digital department at NESN also supports the FSG website for our owners on WordPress.
Before we take a deeper dive into the NESN.com product, I’m going to talk a little bit about the product roadmap and how the creation of a product or feature comes to be.
The process around a product (or feature) development looks something like this. Business stakeholder comes to us with their goal and makes a request. We do an assessment around Why they want this and How it will be measured as success and that breaks down into what the KPIs are going to be and the threshold for a definition of success. We’ll determine When which is ultimately the timeline for work and launch. These 3 questions really drive the last two questions of What and Where. Is it a feature request to an existing digital product or a stand-alone product? Do we need custom code for this request or can we utilize a plugin?

After these questions are answered the project assessment, planning, and kick-off with the stakeholder. The design and technology architecting portions of the process begin. We then have a check-in meeting with the stakeholders again to confirm we’re on the right path.

Begin development & QA.

Have a final check-in and plan the launch of this feature/product. Finish QA and
coordinate launch before actually launching the product.
Now we’ll talk about NESN.com specifically as a digital product on a closer level technically. Ultimately, as a lean and efficient technical team, we look to make our product as technically efficient and responsive as possible. We do that by really architecting a solution that has a product split close to this type of proportion. The majority of our code base will be utilizing core features of WordPress and plugins so that our product meets certain standards and specifications and then we’ll focus on building out custom features to meet those intricate and unique business goals and objectives.
To go into the custom features more specifically -- Ultimately on NESN.com there are a variety of custom features --- some of which do overlap onto other digital products.

The main custom feature that has become integral to NESN.com is the primary category feature. This feature is utilized for Sales initiatives and content targeting. There is also a custom feature for category menus to provide readily available content to our users.

A custom video player embed button for the native video player inside posts. This button eases workflow for our video & editorial teams to embed video content while also making sure the sales initiatives are met by rendering ad server integration code automatically.

Custom shortcodes for both our tv schedule and content & advertising partners and then ultimately custom widgets for our video player and ad units.
We also focus on developing each of our digital products by using plugins to make code efficient and limiting custom features and required maintenance. Some common plugins used across a number of NESN’s digital products include:

- WP Content Options
- AMP
- Apple News
- Popular Posts
- Featured Images
- Publicize
- Add SEO Meta Tag

wp content options specifically for featured posts & tv schedules;
AMP & Apple News to make our content even more accessible;
Popular posts plugin to assist in internal traffic recirculation;
featured images plugin for accessible and responsive images and other plugins like publicize, seo meta tag that allow us to have our content both shared and found across the internet.
Now let’s take a deeper dive into NESN.com as a digital product. What we implement in terms of content to strive to meet our goal and then how these objectives match up with different tools. Ultimately NESN.com hosts a variety of content including original written and video sports content. This matches up with the core features of WordPress as a CMS to allow for our editorial team to create timely content easily. Core features like posts, pages, categories and tags are utilized as well as social media embeds, including YouTube videos. For broadcast network initiatives, the simplest example is the digital presence of our tv schedules.
We can move on to covering the strategic element of NESN’s digital goal to be the national footprint of an RSN. Our strategy is engagement with our audience or the New England sports fanbase. NESN uses three techniques to engage with it’s audience.

First, NESN tries to reach it’s audience across the internet. This tactic revolved around a number of ways in the digital space related to capturing an audience. This could mean through search, social media, or other partners that post our content in other places.

The second element of an engagement strategy relates to directing users. Direct here is not specific to a Google Analytics definition of “direct traffic” but more about providing NESN’s content directly onto what I refer to sometimes other platforms. The content that is produced and lives on NESN.com also gets distributed and lives on other mobile app aggregator or web frameworks. This would be different than a social media platform since the user can actually read or watch the full content in these places other than NESN.com.
Lastly, the focus can be on trying to engage with a user more than once or for longer periods of time. Once they reach our content how do we keep them reading our content, like a similar post or sharing that current post. Ultimately as the publisher trying to distribute and connect your content in a way to keep your audience continually coming back to you.

With those 3 elements of engagement strategy highlighted, let’s take a look at how a closer look at how WordPress helps fulfill these needs.
On the Reach track, social media and SEO are important practices and WordPress has both plugins and core functionality to help put these practices in place.

There are plugins like Publicize, which is a part of Jetpack, and SEO Meta Tag that NESN currently uses to allow for sharing of content on social media both from the NESN side and the user side. NESN can easily push to social media platforms using the publicize tool from within the WordPress admin area and this plugin will also allow for social media share buttons to appear on post pages so that users can share content they find intriguing to their own social media accounts. The SEO Meta Tag plugin allows for NESN’s content writers to add SEO friendly key words that add color to content within the source code that can get crawled by search engines like Google, Bing and Yahoo. There is also the core feature of WordPress, taxonomies, that can make articles SEO friendly. The content writers can use this core feature, specifically categories and tags, easily when writing posts and they will help add additional insight and color to the source code to allow for better SEO.
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For the Direct strategy practice, WordPress has plugins or core features for a number of additional platforms. Currently, NESN employs the use of Apple News and AMP pages because these tools provide the biggest amount of ROI to help the goal be met. The plugin for Apple News will allow for posts upon being published to be distributed into the Apple News channel. There they have the Apple News format and this allows users of that platform to get direct access to NESN content. In a similar way, WordPress core will automatically create AMP pages for all posts published. These types of articles are then easily accessible and favored by Google to allow for a better mobile experience to users on the go and that promotes NESN content across the web especially to a mobile audience. There are other plugins as well. One such plugin that NESN current does not employ is the Facebook Instant Articles platform, but allows for similar functionality of publishing straight to the platform to allow for Facebook specific content articles.

I also wanted to point out that Google News is a platform that can be used in a similar manner. The integration that Google allows to this platform however is specific to RSS feeds at the moment. But, the SEO Meta Tag plugin that was
mentioned above has a specific section for Google News Keywords that help with indexing on this platform.
From a Reengagement perspective, there have been a number ways NESN has tried to reengage it’s present audience over the years. In the past, emphasis has been placed upon a custom NESN recent posts widget to show the most recent posts in a specific category context on each page. In the past year, we have leveraged the Popular Posts plugin which when installed will generate an RSS feed of the most popular posts trending across the site. This RSS feed can then be used with the RSS widget that is a part of JetPack and allow for users to see trending content in posts they’re currently reading. We have most recently seen great success in reengaging our audience with this type of method on our AMP pages.
In order to assess and make decisions on how to adjust both the product or the strategy, there has to be an evaluation in place. This process involves measuring a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) from an agreed upon dataset.

There are a number of datasets available to do an evaluation like the one being discussed, but one of the most common and one that is used for this product is Google Analytics.

I also want to point out that there are other useful analytic tools that also are leveraged like WordPress Stats and all of the analytics metrics from each social media platform, but Google Analytics KPIs will be discussed further as the KPIs in question come from this data source.
The main key performance indicators used for evaluation are pageviews, users and sessions.

A pageview is the number of times a specific page is viewed by a user who is an individual who goes to the site. A session speaks to the series of interactions a user has with the site during their visit which includes pageviews as well as events.

There isn’t really a good or bad specific number that has to be met with any of these KPIs but analysis of these KPIs will take place to give a view at how the site is performing and how well the goal is being achieved. At a basic level, obviously, the better the trend increases on each of these metrics the close to the goal the product gets.
Here’s a quick data visualization of how the SEO tools used for engagement fit into a KPI measurement. This shows the top 3 keywords that were trending toward the end of July this year. You can see how these unique types of keywords perform and how many pageviews or sessions they generate.
This is another data visualization showing the top trending articles for the 2nd or 3rd week of July based on “platform”. The top table shows the top 5 posts or articles that are specifically NESN.com and how many sessions they have generated. This layout gives insight into how specific content or categories trend.

The bottom table shows the top 5 posts or articles that were on NESN.com AMP pages specifically. It’s interesting to note the difference in content and context and ultimately see how these two platforms compared to each other and how to maximize the product’s reach.
In closing, I wanted to touch on what is currently slated for NESN.com. We’re looking to migrate platforms toward the end of this year. We’re currently on VIP and we’re looking to move to VIPgo to ultimately allow for a multi-site instance that will give us greater flexibility in site and user management. Ultimately, we’d love to be able to migrate code out of each of the custom themes for our sites that we support and put them into network level plugins. This was also a topic of discussion for a few panels at WordCamp Boston last month. We’d primarily focus on the primary category functionality in our themes.

We’re also looking to move toward Gutenberg.
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