

WWE Case Study

World Wrestling Entertainment, otherwise known as WWE, is an American media and entertainment organisation recognised worldwide, through its television programming, pay-per-views, social media, and publishing platforms. It was officially founded 41 years ago in 1979 under the company's incorporation of 'World Wrestling Federation'. Though in 2002, due to a failed lawsuit with the 'World Wildlife Fund' over the WWF trademark, the 'World Wrestling Federation' changed its company name and wrestling promotion to WWE to focus on entertainment. This is demonstrated through their global shows which are storyline orientated as well as matches being scripted and choreographed, despite the risk of superstars possibly sustaining life threatening injuries depending on if move sets are not executed and performed properly.

June 6, 1982, is believed to be the date which marked the beginning of a new transformation (WWE, 2012). Now the Chairman and CEO, Vincent Kennedy McMahon bought 'Capitol Wrestling' of his father to seize complete control of the company and would go on to turn WWE into a household name with the help of pioneering superstars, such as Hulk Hogan, Andre the Giant, and "Rowdy" Roddy Piper. To this day, it remains the biggest wrestling promotion in the world with its headquarters based in Stamford, Connecticut.

WWE's social media presence is unlike any other. In late 2019, the company announced it had gained more than one billion social followers making the organisation one of the most iconic and popular brands around the world (WWE, 2019). Below is a current bullet pointed list of each of their platforms and number of followers/subscribers on each account.

As of May 18, 2020:

- YouTube (60.2M with 43.1 billion views)
- Facebook (43M)
- Twitter (10.9M)
- Instagram (21.2M)
- TikTok (5.2M with over 56M likes)

With YouTube in particular and reaching that specific accomplishment, it "ranks as the No. 1 Sports channel", ahead of other top brands, such as the NBA, NFL, MLB, NHL, ESPN, and NASCAR (WWE, 2020). To put it in further context, at present, WWE's YouTube channel is currently the fifth most viewed across the globe.

Alexander analyses the social media popularity of YouTube:

'YouTube has over a billion users - almost one third of all people on the Internet - and every day people watch hundreds of millions of hours on YouTube and generate billions of views. YouTube overall, and even YouTube on mobile alone, reaches more 18-34 and 18-49-year-olds than any cable network in the U.S' (Alexander, 2017, p.90).

WWE superstars past and present frequently use social media. From Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson (14.5M followers on Twitter and 183M on Instagram), to '16-time World Champion' John Cena (12.3M followers on Twitter and 13.7M on Instagram), to WWE's first ever 'British born World Heavyweight Champion' Drew McIntyre (715.5K followers on Twitter and 769K on Instagram). All of whom have or continue to use their platforms to help promote the industry, events, live shows, merchandise, etc.

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, WWE were forced to cancel WrestleMania 36, their flagship event, scheduled at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Florida in April. So,

instead, 'The Grandest Stage Of Them All' was held across two nights behind-closed-doors at the 'WWE Performance Center' training facility in Orlando, Florida and it surpassed extraordinary viewership milestones.

As reported on their website, WrestleMania became the "most social event in WWE history" (WWE, 2020). On Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, there was a combined total of '13.8 million social media interactions' – a staggering '57 per cent' increase over WrestleMania 35. Also, across all of the company's digital and social media platforms, they gathered '967 million video views', another impressive increase of '20 per cent year-over-year'. WWE's social media following is by far their strongest asset.

Sheth notes:

'The world is changing; technology is ubiquitous, and it is impacting society with each rapid change it undergoes itself. A few decades ago, television was the most exciting technological development, and it transformed society in an unprecedented manner. Today, we're seeing a similar transformation via the Internet and the rise of social media. In fact, social media is poised to transform society in an even more fundamental manner' (Sheth, 2018, p.3).

WWE's main publication platform is their website and it provides access to a range of content, including their five main shows from RAW, Smackdown, NXT, NXT UK and 205 Live, to individual superstar bio's, tickets to each event and also a link to the 'WWE Shop'.

WWE Monday Night Raw still remains 'the longest-running professional wrestling program on U.S. national television', having been on the air for more than '25 years with over 1300 episodes' (WWE, 2018). The three-hour show currently airs on USA Network.

While another flagship show, Friday Night Smackdown now broadcasts on Fox Network, debuting with the company on October 4, 2019 which officially celebrated the '20th Anniversary' of the blue brand, after Smackdown made its first appearance in 1999.

The company's third major brand NXT was introduced on February 23, 2010. When it first started, it was originally a development system for the main roster but overtime it became what it is today – a global establishment known for its own high-quality storylines and wrestling matches. Like Monday Night Raw, it also airs on USA Network, broadcasting on Wednesday evenings.

The latter two, NXT UK (began airing in October 2018) and 205 Live, (November 2016), otherwise known as the cruiserweight division, broadcast on the award winning 'WWE Network'.

With these different brands and other features, the website itself gains plenty of traffic as this statement from the website shows: "For the first quarter of 2020, our primary website, WWE.com averaged 6.8 million unique monthly visitors worldwide, 82 million-page views and 6.2 million video streams per month" (WWE, Digital Media, 2020).

On the website, there is a variety of coverage, from 'what's trending, latest results on each brand, interactive polls, and video playlists', highlighting the beneficial, creative and professional use of multimedia content in a number of unique ways.

An example of what's trending on their website is a match preview to the upcoming WWE pay-per-view Backlash on June 14 between two powerhouses of the sports entertainment industry in 'The Rated-R Superstar' Edge and 'The Viper' Randy Orton who know each other very well, having recently faced one another at WrestleMania 36 in which the former was victorious on that occasion. The pair have 24 'World Championships' combined and are set to square off in a one-on-one match in what is being built up as quite possibly 'The Greatest

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Wrestling Match Ever', given their illustrious history within the business (WWE, Edge vs. Randy Orton, 2020).

However, despite its key strengths, the website also has some flaws. The layout of the website design could be significantly improved as it doesn't run and present itself as smoothly and effectively as other leading sports websites, such as BBC Sport, Sky Sports and BT Sport.

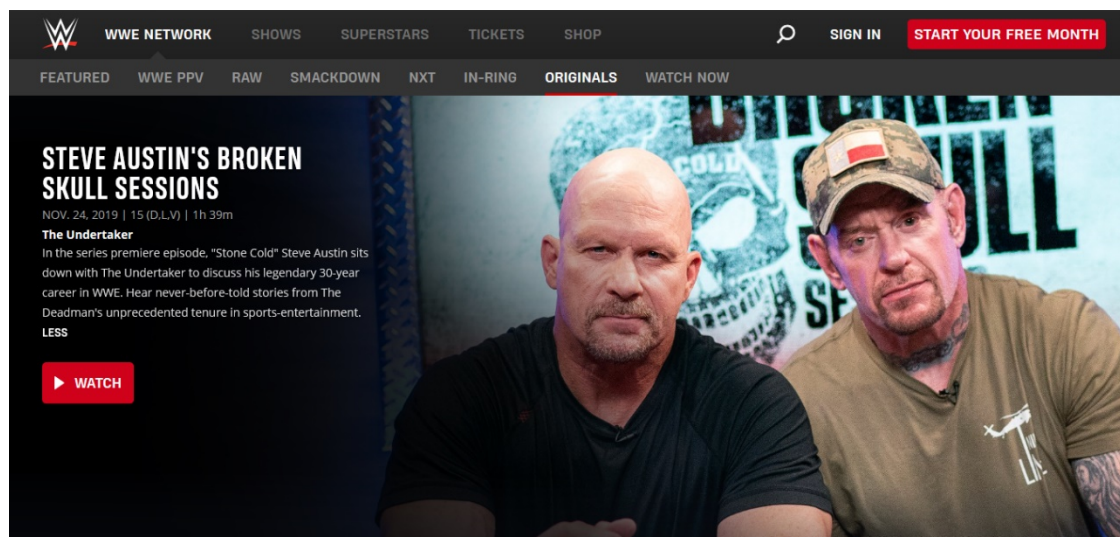
One other alarming issue with the website is there's no tabs to the social media channels which is obviously a basic rookie error as no matter the size of the organisation, links to those platforms are vital in order to attract and maintain current fans.

In a separate part within the website is the 'WWE Network' a 24-hour streaming service, similar to Netflix, which gives fans the chance to watch all pay-per-view events, reality shows, documentaries, podcasts, current shows, classic matches and over 10,000 hours of video-on-demand content all in unlimited and instant access at the push of a button.

One of the main attractions of the service is it only costs \$9.99 a month, while getting the first month for free and is available in over 180 countries.

WWE Network formed in 2014 and just 11 months after launching, they 'surpassed one million subscribers which made it the fastest-growing digital subscription service ever' (WWE, 2015).

A popular podcast on the WWE Network is 'Stone Cold Steve Austin's Broken Skull Sessions', pictured below. Nicknamed 'The Texas Rattlesnake', Steve chats to a number of WWE legends, including Ric Flair, Bret Hart and Goldberg. Throughout the podcast, he provides fans with interesting insights and compelling stories which have never been talked about before. In this edition, he talks to Mark Calaway, also known in the WWE universe as the Undertaker, and discusses his awe-inspiring 30-year career as one of the biggest stars in the entire industry.



Iain Hepburn, Digital Editor of Scottish Daily Record, discusses why podcasts need to connect with the audience or listener:

'Audio is an incredibly raw, visceral medium. It's intimate, yet capable of achieving untold scale, because it relies on a connection with the listener's brain. Be it a show

about music, movies, parenting, or politics, for a podcast to work it has to connect the listener on some level. This isn't the same as radio, where you can have it on as aural wallpaper in the background and forget about it if needs be. People actively choose to seek out and listen to podcasts. So, there must be some kind of engagement, of connection, with the audience member that they want to listen' (Hepburn, 2013, p.94).

Word Count: 1505

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