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What is complementary content?

Complementary content refers to promotional assets that are produced in addition to programming (feature-length film, web series) that help grow audiences and deepen the viewer's connection with a project.

Trailers, behind-the-scenes clips, and images for social media are common examples. Complementary content could also help educate the audience, inform their choices, and stimulate positive change. For example, basic teaching and learning tools, basic games, screening and discussion guides, webisodes, podcasts, blogs, eBooks, and newsletters.

Complementary content should be supported by the underlying research in the subject area and be easily accessible for viewers of the programming.

Why create complementary content for your screen media project?

Complementary content often requires careful planning and investment. You might be thinking, why bother? These assets can be a powerful way to drive awareness for a project and deepen audience engagement. Here are a few benefits of complementary content.

Benefits of complementary content

1. Expand Reach

Distributing high-value complementary content across multiple platforms gives audiences more opportunities to discover and access content.

Human+ created a suite of 'lunch and learn' digital cards so organizations and groups could run their own discussions around the project's themes.

Champions created a web series with webisodes published to social media once a week for 30 weeks. The content was shared by associations that advocate for autistic individuals and people with intellectual disabilities. These influencers caused the web series to travel farther than initially expected.

2. Expand Audiences

Complementary content can be designed to target broad or niche audiences beyond the segments identified for the primary content. This allows for penetration into untapped demographics.

Cypher expanded its audience into the youth market with their series of 'Letters From Caregivers' music videos.



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Les Aventures du Pharmacien's complementary content resonated with online audiences interested in health sciences.

3. Expand Storytelling

Audiences are often hungry for content that extends the primary storyworld. Complementary content enables producers to tell multi-dimensional stories that audiences can enjoy when and how they want.

Jenny built a digital presence for their main character over the course of three seasons. This brings the character to life and gives the viewer the impression that they have special access to her.

4. Deepen Engagement

High value complementary such as educational kits and screening guides can stimulate deep, real-life connections and conversation with audiences – both online and off.

A Better Man drove awareness of the film's central issues through educational events and discussions.

Stories For Caregivers found significant engagement with their Caregiver Appreciation Giveaway, where they asked their caregiving community to share experiences and stories related to weekly posts.

5. Deliver Insights

Complementary content distributed across multiple platforms can inspire feedback from audiences and deliver invaluable real-time data that may be used to optimize audience development tactics.

Stories For Caregivers doubled-down on the content that performed best throughout COVID-19. By watching the data, they were able to expand on the success of a series of original songs.

Ghost BFF received a significant number of user comments thanking them for producing a series of mental health PSAs.

6. Drive Impact

Complementary content has the potential to amplify impact. Meaningful, shareable assets that are adjacent to core content can inspire important conversation amongst audiences and across communities.

Stories for Caregivers saw that many members of their Facebook group were inspired to share their own stories about caregiving and engage in health discussions about topics such as death and dying, and available treatments and options.

Jenny used complementary content in a novel way to raise money for deserving organizations. They partnered with a different foundation for each season and used complementary content to engage audiences. Each audience "share" earned the foundation \$1 in donation.



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Complementary Content Best Practices:

Plan Early

Planning is everything, especially when it comes to complementary content. Creating additional assets impacts production timelines, staffing, and budgets. If possible, start thinking about complementary content in development.

Be Consistent

Create a timeline for publishing a steady stream of content, particularly during pre-launch and launch. If you have limited assets consider how, when, and where to release the complementary content to optimize reach and audience interaction.

Tailor Content for Platforms

Complementary content should be tailored to suit the channel, e.g., Facebook, website, YouTube, where it will be posted. The channels must be carefully selected based on data that shows where target audiences spend time.

Create a Community Management Plan

Complementary content is designed to inspire engagement. When audiences talk, it's important to listen, especially when it comes to health and wellness subject matter. Develop a thoughtful and actionable plan for managing audiences. For more information, see [the community management tipsheet](#).

Collaborate!

Partners can play a key role in developing and distributing complementary content. Broadcasters and streaming platforms can drive significant reach and impact if they are willing to share the content across their audience touchpoints. Marquee talent and key production personnel with large online followings can also drive visibility. Expert organizations can often help with distribution and also community management.