

Ferris State Torch

Recommendation Report

Version 2.0

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1.0 PROJECT INFORMATION

TITLE

FSU Torch Recommendation Report

SUMMARY

Our recommendatin report for the FSU Torch defines the primary issues the Torch faces and outlines the steps that the Torch should take in order to attempt to fix these problems.

TIMEFRAME

November 3 - December 8, 2016

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

The FSU Torch is a student driven, community-wide newspaper that is not affiliated with Ferris State University. With one print issue per week, the Torch also has an online edition, both at no charge to students. The Torch gives its advertising profits to the Pioneer, the Big Rapids newspaper, in exchange for free printing and free web publishing, as well as free distribution off campus. The paid student staff are responsible for all other functions of the Torch including on-campus distribution.

2.2 The Problem

The FSU Torch is an award-winning college newspaper, but page views on the website have decreased and the Torch is finding a numerous amount of untouched print copies by the end of each week. Many students at Ferris have not heard of the Torch or do not know that the Torch is available in both print and online. With the student body constantly changing, the FSU Torch wants to increase awareness of its existence among the student body.

2.3 Strategies

We conducted our research primarily through interviews, with the exception of one survey. Our strategy was to use our sources to broaden our knowledge of the problem and we found that the most productive method was through conversations with experts. We found that our interviews also provided a majority of our data due to the expertise and resources that our interviewees had.

2.4 Proposed Solutions

Our team has found a variety of solutions that address the popularity of the Torch and ways it can better serve the students of Ferris. These solutions also address how the Torch can keep advertising within a constantly changing student body and how the Torch can stay popular throughout the year.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Client Interview

On November 15th, our interviewer sat down with Steven Fox, the adviser of the Torch newspaper of nine years, to inquire details about the problem from an expert. We decided that this interview would be crucial to our research because Fox deals with the Torch first hand and is the best witness to the issues the Torch faces because of his long-term involvement. We also knew that, not only would he help define this problem, he could also direct us to other sources.

3.2 Survey

Our team created a survey that asked a variety of questions that addressed the popularity of the Torch and other news sources and asked for recommendations of how the Torch can improve. We thought a general student opinion was necessary in finding the root of the problem as well as the severity of it. The survey also began the brainstorming process for our recommendations by asking students, the major consumer of the newspaper, what they would like to see from the Torch. We conducted our survey 2 - 2:50 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 17 and received 30 responses to base our data off of.

3.3 Interview with Editor in Chief of the Torch

Monday, November 29, our interviewer met with Keith Salowich, the Torch Editor in Chief of two years to gather more information about the traffic on the Torch website. As Editor in Chief, Salowich has all the data and statistics for the Torch website and it's readers. We believe that this information is necessary for providing data on the website's popularity, which is essential to our recommendations.

4.0 Results

4.1 Client Interview

4.1.A.

Fox noted the importance of recognizing what the Torch is doing well and should keep doing:

- A campus-wide email advertising the Torch was sent out the Wednesday before the interview, however it has not been repeated since.
- The website services and the off campus distribution are handled by the Pioneer.
- At times, stories are uploaded to the Torch website immediately after they happen, which means the Torch can produce news in real time.
- The Torch staff has a desire to evolve and improve as a whole.
- The Torch is community based and covers what is important rather than what is popular. Therefore, it is not driven by ratings and popularity.
- The Torch exposes things that need to be fixed and attempts to be diverse in its coverage.

4.1.B.

Throughout the interview, we were able to expose several key issues the Torch faces including:

- 2000 copies of the print newspaper are distributed on campus, but 1000 copies each week are typically unaccounted for.
- The number of weekly views on the Torch website has decreased from about 5000 to 3000 views four weeks in a row.
- Due to the numbers stated above, the Torch probably won't break the record of pageviews from last year.
- The Torch is constantly struggling to prove its existence because the school population is always changing.

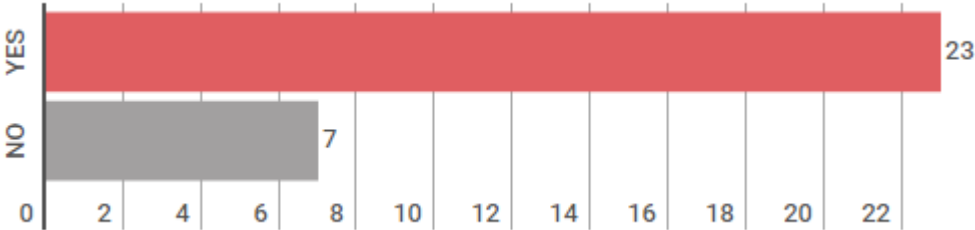
4.1.C.

We also discovered factors that could be contributing to these problems:

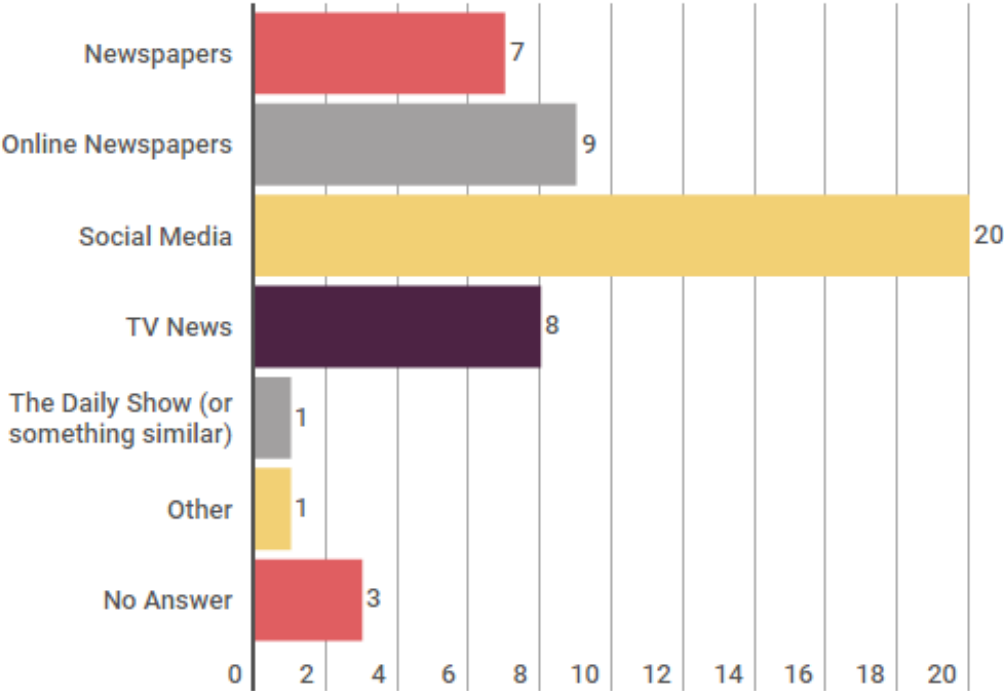
- Distribution books are available but are not being updated, therefore the Torch doesn't know which locations are better for distribution.
- Papers are free, therefore, there isn't a way to monitor the number of readers for print newspapers.
- The website measures the number of page views, not the number of visitors. For example, one person can read four articles and it will count as four pageviews, giving the Torch higher numbers.
- Website advertising does not create as much of a profit as paper advertisements, therefore the Torch must keep their print edition.
- Event coverage typically isn't shared until a week after the event has happened despite the ability for the Torch to publish online at any time.

4.2 Survey

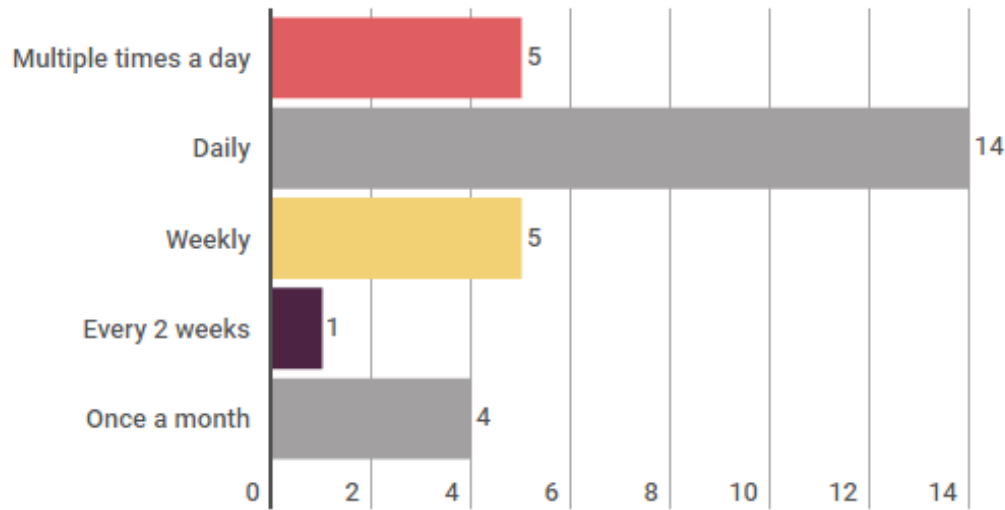
4.2.A.: Have you heard of the Torch?



4.2.B.: Where do you get the majority of your news from?



4.2.C.: How often do you read/watch that news source?



4.2.D.: How can the school newspaper best meet your needs?

Responses:

- More visibility on social media
- Upcoming events/issues on campus
- Great work! Love the Tire Fire
- Stop putting stuff on your logo
- More social media
- Make them available in areas where they can be easily reached, also... spread the word about the Torch...
- Online version located on social media
- I don't have the need. But I do think the covers of the newspaper have been interesting and I've seen people pick them up.
- They already do, I love the Torch
- Send through email
- Have a download for my phone to read on my phone
- Keep doing what you're doing! Love the Torch!
- Increase spots to obtain it.
- News is more personal and focused on the area you are in.
- Yes
- Online
- Make sure the Torch is available in more locations on campus
- Tell news well

4.3 Interview with Editor in Chief of the Torch

4.3.A.

The information provided by Salowich gave us the following positive insight about the Torch:

- The website does not only count the number of pageviews as we had previously thought, it also provides the number of sessions, which serves as the number of visitors to the website.
- Despite a lack of pageviews and sessions this year, the Torch is still doing well compared to the years before last.
- There are plans in store for Facebook Live podcasts and 51% of the traffic is coming from social media already.
- The website is getting traffic from readers around the world.

4.3.B.

The interview with Salowich also unveiled the following issues:

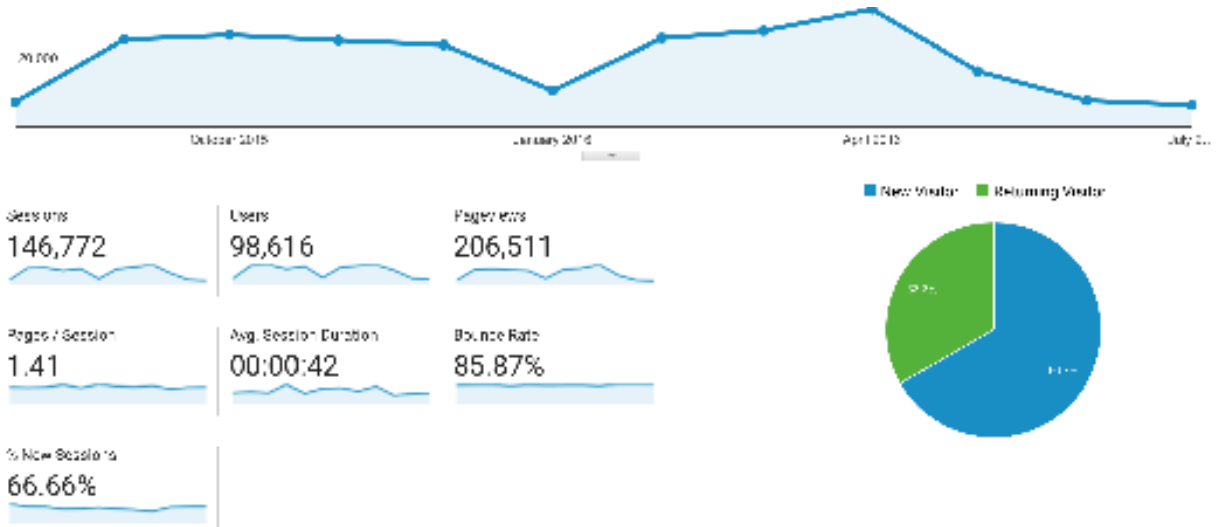
- The average session lasts about 45 seconds.
- Last year they had 20,000 more views at this point in the year, which Salowich contributes to popular stories that were published at the beginning of the year.
- There hasn't been any significant change in the functions of the Torch, resulting in an unclear source of the lack of readers.

4.3.C.

- Although the source of the problem is unclear, Salowich did provide data that proved that Wednesday's, the day the print copy comes out, are the most popular days for web traffic and the most popular days for posting articles on the web. This shows that the news is being saturated around Wednesdays.

4.3.D.

2015-2016 Google Analytics Data - The big Year



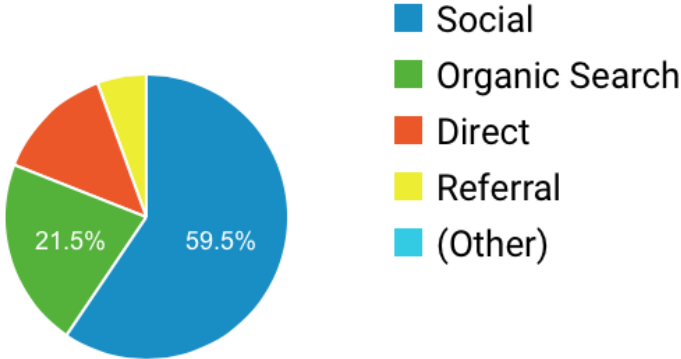
Lists of the top articles from 2015-2016

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. /	19,923 (9.65%)	1. /	6,978 (13.16%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. /2015/12/11/ferris-student-faces-two-sexual-assault-charges/	7,383 (3.58%)	2. /2016/09/07/rapist-named-brock-turner/	1,473 (2.78%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. /2015/11/03/no-liquor-ferris-greek-life-cracks-down-on-parties/	6,448 (3.12%)	3. /2016/09/22/breaking-news-firetrucks-business-building/	1,292 (2.44%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. /2015/09/14/ferris-communications-professor-lon-green-dies/	6,122 (2.96%)	4. /2016/10/04/clowning-around-campus/	1,279 (2.41%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. /2015/10/17/vander-laan-best-in-the-land/	4,880 (2.36%)	5. /2016/10/18/rock-wars/	935 (1.76%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. /2016/05/01/vander-laan-goes-pro/	4,573 (2.21%)	6. /2016/08/28/homecoming-comedians-announced/	874 (1.65%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. /2015/12/12/chapman-found-guilty-soliciting-prostitution/	3,750 (1.82%)	7. /2016/08/23/ch-ch-changes/	826 (1.56%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	8. /2015/08/30/bo-burnham-announced-as-ferris-homecoming-comedian/	3,447 (1.67%)	8. /2016/11/02/never-said-yes/	746 (1.41%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	9. /2016/03/14/lupe-fiasco-headed-ferris/	3,034 (1.47%)	9. /2016/09/21/twenty-keeps-cool/	684 (1.29%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	10. /2016/06/25/ferris-water-tests-report-lead-contamination/	2,969 (1.44%)	10. /category/news/	630 (1.19%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	11. /2016/02/24/breaking-news-assault-campus/	2,791 (1.35%)	11. /2016/09/10/mrsa-at-ferris/	612 (1.15%)
			12. /2016/11/21/shots-fired-oakwood/	569 (1.07%)

4.3.D. (Continued)

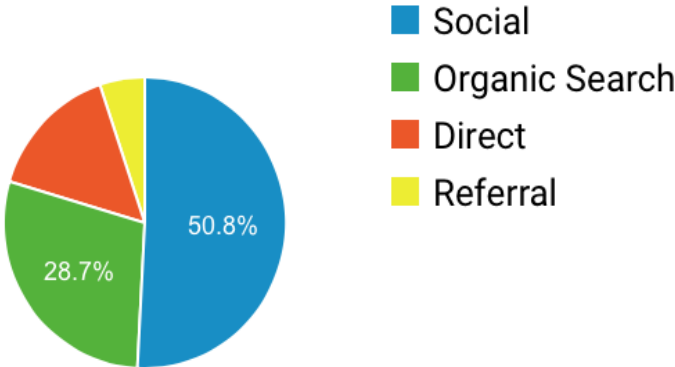
Methods viewers are reading articles during 2015-2016

Top Channels



Methods viewers are reading articles thus far 2016-2017

Top Channels



5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Distribution

From our research, we can conclude that if the Torch kept track of distribution records, they would be able to increase the number of readers by putting more print copies in locations that are more popular and less print copies in unpopular locations. The Torch also has 1000 copies each week that are unaccounted for and could be used in new and different distribution locations. The Torch also receives free printing from the Pioneer in exchange for advertising profits, therefore they should take advantage of all the free copies they are receiving each week because they're giving up the money from advertising.

5.2 Print vs. Web

It's clear that the Torch is reliant on the print edition for advertising profits but needs the online edition for more readers. Keeping the two well-balanced will help keep a steady amount of readers.

5.3 Advertising

We've concluded that, due to the constantly changing student population, the Torch should be advertising to freshmen and transfer students. The main problem with the popularity of the Torch stems from a lack of awareness and even the students who are aware of the Torch may not be regularly thinking about the newspaper due to a lack of reminders or relativity.

From our survey we could also conclude that the majority of students get their news from social media, however there is still a desire to consume the news as many students reported consuming the news on a daily basis. In addition, those who had heard of the Torch were consistent in their feedback of ways the Torch can improve, meaning they pay attention and analyze the paper.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 Create an App

It's clear that students are getting most of their news from social media, which is popularly viewed from a phone. Creating an app would allow students to read the news from anywhere at any time. The app could also give notifications about big stories and could easily share articles on social media.

6.2 Advertise to incoming freshmen and transfer students

All freshmen and most transfer students have to participate in orientation before attending Ferris, which would be an ideal time to advertise to the continuously changing student population. By investing in advertisements such as flyers, pens or other accessories, incoming students will be more aware of the Torch and, if there's an app, students could download the app at orientation. Also including a copy of the Torch inside this orientation bags highly recommended for immediate interaction.

6.3 Convert to heavier online publishing

A lot of event coverage for the newspaper isn't published until almost a week after it has happened because the print edition is only released on Wednesdays. Therefore, the news may seem somewhat old. The Torch should take advantage of the ability to publish online at any time. The same news could still be included in the newspaper, but having it readily available online will help the credibility of the Torch.

6.4 Look for better areas of distribution

The Torch should start keeping track of the amount of papers left each week at the different distribution locations. Once enough data has been collected, the Torch should either provide more papers in more popular locations or should change the location of unpopular distribution sites. This way, the paper can reach more readers. The Torch could also add locations to their distribution route for the 1000 extra papers they have each week.

6.5 Advertise on campus

Creating posters and displaying them around campus would also contribute to an increase in readers. The Torch has a staff that could easily design a visually appealing poster that could be posted in buildings on campus and at distribution locations.

6.6 Create an incentive

Generally, students love prizes. By creating a promotional challenge with a positive outcome, students will bring awareness of the Torch to others. For example, the challenge could be to share three articles on Facebook to be entered in a drawing for a free starbucks gift card. Or, download the app to be entered in a drawing for two free hockey tickets.

6.7 Social media

Social media is a powerful tool and the Torch should use it to their advantage. By being regularly active on social media accounts, the Torch can gain more followers and, therefore, more readers. The Torch should also try new forms of social media such as Facebook Live. Doing live podcasts or even live news reports could add to the credibility of the Torch as a source that provides news quickly.

7.0 Sources

- The Ferris State Torch - Truth, Fairness & Accuracy since 1931. (2016).
Retrieved from <http://fsutorch.com/>

8.0 Supplemental Materials

8.1 Client Interview Questions

- How many papers does the Torch print each week?
- How many unread papers do you have leftover?
- How many viewers access the Torch website per week?
- Do you recommend anyone in particular for us to get in contact with at the Pioneer newspaper? We need to further our research, and would appreciate additional contacts with other Newspaper companies.
- How have you seen the Torch change in the 9 years you've been here?
- What's the present trend of the newspaper?
- How's the circulation of the Torch looking, in your opinion?
- Are there any big cons we should be aware of going into this?

8.2 Survey

1. **Have you heard of The Torch?**

YES NO

2. **Where do you get most of your news from?**

- Newspapers Online Newspapers Social Media TV News The Daily Show
 (or something similar)
- Other _____

3. **How often to you read/watch that news source?**

- Multiple times a day Daily Weekly Every 2 weeks Once a month

4. **How can the school newspaper best meet your needs? (Answer on back)**

8.1 Editor in Chief Interview Questions

- How does the Torch keep track of their data from year to year?
- What's the difference between a page view and a session?
- What days do you generally put out a majority of your articles?
- How often do you check this data?
- Why were there more views than normal last year?
- Have there been any major changes in infrastructure within the last year? Or changes in how you advertise the Torch?
- Have you looked into Facebook Live at all for any type of news?

