



Vertical First: Reinventing Audience Engagement at the Loyolan

Recognizing the Problem

**The world of media is evolving,
and student journalism must evolve with it.**

In recent years, the Loyolan has recognized a crucial shift in audience behavior. Students were no longer consistently engaging with traditional forms of campus media, whether that meant reading full-length articles or even watching long-form video content. At the same time, audiences were increasingly consuming information through short-form, mobile-first video platforms that delivered content quickly and directly.



@laloyolan

This realization came during a period of significant change for our publication. As the Loyolan transitioned from a hybrid print-and-digital publication to a fully digital newsroom, we were challenged to rethink how we connected with readers in the absence of a consistent physical presence on campus.



@thelaloyolan

While the Loyolan continued producing strong journalism, we recognized that many students were not actively seeking it out — and even traditional social media strategies were falling short. We needed a new way to bring journalism directly to our audience rather than waiting for our audience to come to us.

Our solution: a vertical video strategy.

Through the work of our Audience Engagement team, the Loyolan developed a strategic approach to vertical video that went beyond simply posting content. By creating recognizable series, integrating reporters into video production, and tailoring stories for social platforms, we transformed the way students engaged with campus journalism.

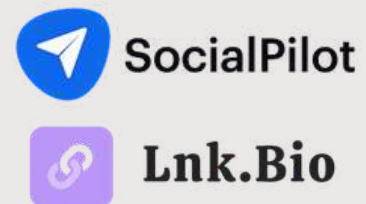
The Role of Audience Engagement (AE)

Before

Before the launch of our vertical video initiative, the Loyolan’s social media strategy focused primarily on promoting written stories through static posts and driving readers back to our website. Using SocialPilot, we organized a strategic posting schedule and tracked analytics, while also utilizing Lnk.Bio to connect Instagram posts directly to stories published on the Loyolan website. Our workflow was designed to ensure stories were rolled out in a timely and strategic way to maximize engagement among our followers.

Our workflow centered around:

- scheduling and distributing social posts
- adapting written stories into Instagram graphics
- tracking social media analytics and traffic to the website
- maintaining a consistent posting schedule across platforms



While this system helped increase visibility, social media mainly served as a tool to redirect audiences to our website rather than as a storytelling platform — and it was growing less effective at reliably directing traffic. Our audience was increasingly just reading our social media posts and not actually taking the next step to click through and consume the full pieces.

Now

Today, AE serves as both a content distribution team and a multimedia production hub within the Loyolan newsroom. While we continue to manage social media strategy, analytics, posting schedules, and website promotion, our role has expanded significantly to include creating original video content and developing new storytelling formats.

Our workflow now includes:

- developing and pitching original video concepts
- filming, editing, and publishing vertical video content
- training reporters to appear on camera and tell stories through video
- assisting reporters with filming, interviewing, and video production
- collaborating with every section of the newsroom to expand story coverage



By combining traditional reporting with multimedia storytelling, AE has transformed our social media from a promotional tool into an extension of the Loyolan's newsroom.

Building a Vertical Video Strategy

We knew we wanted to integrate vertical video into our social media platforms, but the question was how?

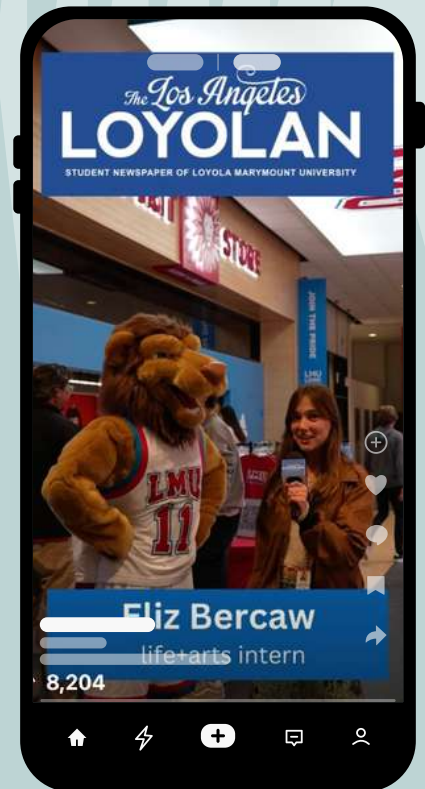
Our solution was to develop a collection of recognizable vertical video series that readers could easily engage with and return to regularly. Each series was designed to reflect what was happening around campus in real time, allowing us to create content that could either elevate stories published on our website or serve as standalone pieces of journalism.

In our early days, we started out with a variety of video concepts...



Event Coverage

Members of the Audience Engagement team, as well as reporters from across the newsroom, attended campus events to capture them in short-form videos. This approach not only encouraged reporters to step in front of the camera and develop multimedia storytelling skills, but also allowed us to showcase events in a way that written coverage alone could not.



Person on the Street

With person-on-the-street videos already thriving across social media platforms, the Loyolan adapted the format to create its own recurring series, What's Up Wednesday. Each week, a reporter attended LMU's on-campus farmers market, one of the university's busiest gathering spaces, to ask students a question centered around current campus conversations, trending topics, or issues relevant to college students and the greater Los Angeles area.



Click on **the phones** to take you to the reel!

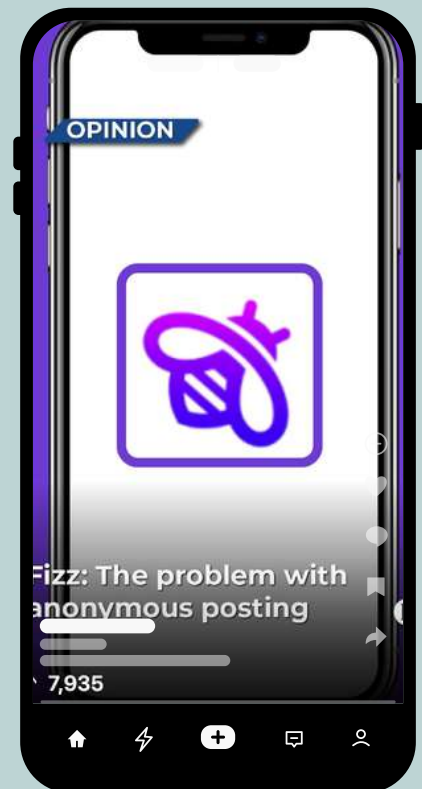
Profiles

Vertical video proved to be an especially effective format for profiles because it allowed audiences to connect with the subjects on a more personal level. Rather than simply reading about someone's achievements, viewers could see and hear directly from the subjects themselves, gaining a better understanding of their personality and passions. By combining interviews with footage of people in their element, video-formatted profiles brought their stories to life.



Social Cuts

Designed specifically for social media, social cuts serve as teasers that highlight the most engaging moments of a video and encourage viewers to watch the full piece. As the Loyolan's video team expanded its production efforts, social cuts emerged as a natural extension of our existing workflow.



Click [**HERE**](#) to watch the video that was a social cut for this reel!

Click on [the phone](#) to take you to the reel!

Story + Video

While many of our vertical videos existed as standalone pieces of content, we also developed a story + video approach that paired written reporting with complementary video coverage. story + video pieces were designed to expand upon the original story by adding visual elements, interviews, behind-the-scenes footage, and experiences that could not be fully captured through text alone.



Click [HERE](#) to read the story this reel was based on!

As the Loyolan expanded its vertical video offerings, we saw significant growth in both social media engagement and website traffic. Students and Loyolan followers alike were interacting with our content in new ways, and our audience continued to grow across platforms.

That said, not every video format performed equally. Some series consistently generated higher views with stronger engagement...

With Trial Comes Error

As opposed to viewing these differences as setbacks, we saw them as opportunities to learn.

Here are the trends we noticed:

Person on the Street



What's Up Wednesday consistently outperformed our other video formats, quickly becoming one of the Loyolan's most successful and recognizable series. We realized that What's Up Wednesday gave students an opportunity to share their opinions and become active participants in ongoing campus conversations.

Beyond those featured on camera, the series also encouraged engagement from the broader student body. Students frequently continued discussions in the comment section, shared their own perspectives on the topic, or interacted with videos because they recognized friends and classmates who appeared in them.

As the series evolved, it also became a valuable opportunity to involve more members of our newsroom in multimedia storytelling. Reporters who were already covering stories for the website could step in front of the camera, gain on-camera experience, and connect their reporting directly to student perspectives.

Event Coverage



Despite showcasing important moments on campus, our event coverage videos consistently generated lower engagement and fewer interactions than series like What's Up Wednesday.

As we analyzed audience behavior, we realized that timing played a significant role. Because these videos were typically published after an event had already taken place, many viewers felt they had missed the opportunity to participate. Rather than creating anticipation or inviting discussion, the videos often served only as recaps of events students could no longer attend.

We also found that many campus events lacked the built-in conversation starters that fueled engagement in our other content. Unlike person-on-the-street videos, which encouraged students to share opinions and react to current topics, event coverage often focused on simply documenting what happened. As a result, many videos felt informative but lacked the elements that motivated viewers to comment, share, or continue the conversation.

Time for Innovation

**We knew we needed to rethink our event coverage.
But how?**

The success of What's Up Wednesday demonstrated that students were most engaged when they felt like active participants in the story rather than passive viewers. At the same time, our traditional event coverage videos were underperforming, signaling a need for a new approach. We set out to create a format that maintained our ability to cover campus events while incorporating the audience participation, personality, and interaction that made What's Up Wednesday so successful.

From this, *Beyond the Newsroom* was born.

Designed as a fresh approach to event coverage, Beyond the Newsroom allowed AE team members to attend events both on and off campus, giving viewers a first-hand experience of what it was like. Rather than simply documenting what happened, the series placed the reporter at the center of the story. AE team members participated in activities, interacted with attendees, and immersed themselves in the event, creating a more personal and engaging viewing experience.

The format also introduced audiences to the people behind our coverage. As AE team members became recurring faces across multiple series, many developed recognizable on-campus identities and became closely associated with The Loyolan's digital presence. By combining event coverage with personality-driven storytelling, Beyond the Newsroom transformed passive event recaps into experiences that students could connect with, follow, and look forward to watching.

Click the phones to see the before-and-after.

What engages you more?

Click on **the phones** to take you to the reel!



Before



After

“Our event coverage wasn’t performing the way we wanted to, but working in the newsroom and with AE, I saw how much personality and energy we had, and that’s exactly what was missing. Beyond the Newsroom was a way of bringing our personalities to our audience and making them feel like they were experiencing the event with us.”

— **Ellie McGough, Audience Engagement Producer**



Continuing to Innovate

Even with the success of Beyond the Newsroom, we wanted to continue to reach our audience in new, engaging ways.

As our recurring series continued to gain traction, we began exploring new ways to connect with students beyond event coverage and campus discussions. While What's Up Wednesday excelled at capturing student opinions and Beyond the Newsroom provided immersive event experiences, we saw an opportunity to highlight another important aspect of campus life: the everyday experiences of LMU students.

Inspired by successful student media organizations across the country, we recognized that not every engaging story needed to be tied to a specific event or news topic. Some of the most compelling content simply reflected the culture, habits, and personalities of the student body itself.

From this idea, [Lions in the Wild](#) was born.

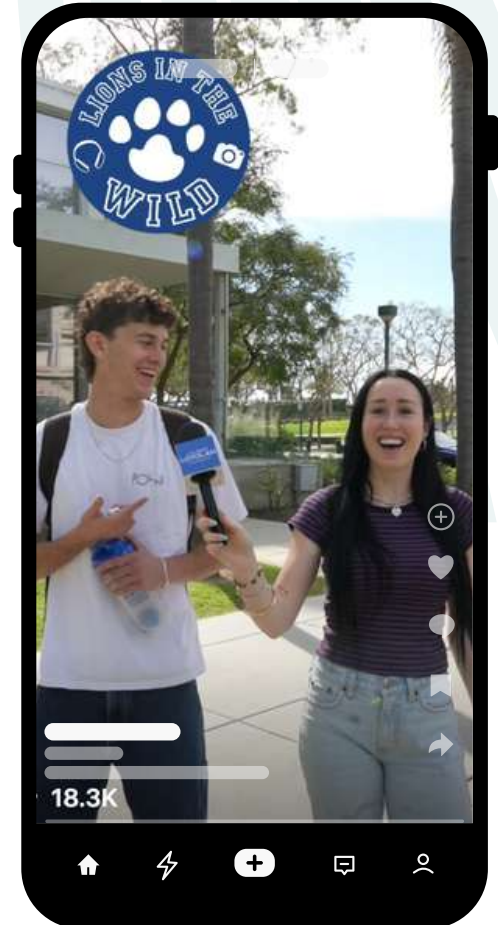
The series focused on relatable, student-centered topics ranging from fashion and dating to music and everyday campus life. By stopping students around campus and inviting them to share their experiences, Lions in the Wild created content that felt authentic, approachable, and highly shareable. While the videos were lighthearted in nature, they also offered insight into the trends, interests, and culture that shape the LMU community.

Behind creating Lions in the Wild

“What largely inspired me to create this series was realizing that there is something so unique and important in the journalistic value of the everyday student experience. While running up to students in passing and asking what they’re wearing or what they think about dating in college may seem merely entertaining and even a bit mindless at first, these interactions provide just as much insight — arguably even more authentically — into the campus culture, community, and genuine student experience. That perspective really grounded me as a student journalist and reminded me that our duty is to document all aspects of student life — not just the biggest stories, but the ones that capture what it truly feels like to be a college student.”

— **Maria Cranston, Spring 2026 Audience Engagement Producer**

Click on **the phone**
to take you to the reel!



The Results

According to the Loyolan's end-of-year analytics reports for the 2024-25 and 2025-26 academic years, our vertical video initiative produced measurable results across multiple platforms.

Here's what we noticed:

1. Vertical video reached audiences far beyond our website.

One of the most significant findings from our analytics was the scale of engagement generated through vertical video. Each week, the Loyolan website as a whole averaged 10,000 to 20,000 page views, while individual Instagram Reels regularly generated 5,000 to 11,000 views on their own.

2. Vertical videos vastly outperformed traditional videos.

Before the vertical video initiative, the Loyolan's primary video platform was our YouTube. While YouTube remained an important archive for long-form video content, Instagram Reels consistently generated significantly larger audiences. Most YouTube videos during 2025-26 averaged between 100 and 500 views per video, which is an astonishing comparison to the average of 5,000 to 11,000 views per vertical video.

3. Recurring series consistently outperformed.

The most important lesson from the initiative was that audiences responded strongest to recurring series. When viewers recognized a format, they understood what to expect and were more likely to engage. This was especially evident with What's Up Wednesday drawing between 5,000 to 11,000 views, Beyond the Newsroom attaining between 4,000 to 10,000 views, and our new series, Lions in the Wild, attracting between 7,000 to 18,000 views!

Beyond the Numbers

While it was rewarding to watch our analytics grow and see thousands of students engaging with our content online, the most meaningful impact of the vertical video initiative could not be measured by views alone.

As reporters and AE team members became more visible on campus, the Loyolan evolved from an online publication students occasionally encountered to a recognizable presence in the LMU community. Through recurring series, on-camera reporting, student participation and so much more, our journalists were no longer just names attached to articles — they became familiar faces that students saw in classrooms, at events, and around campus.

“I began working on the AE team last semester, and it has been the greatest experience in helping me become more involved and active on campus. Part of our AE video strategy is to attend on-campus events, something I didn’t do much of before stepping into this role. Now, I have had many people attend events they didn’t know were happening because of our content, and many have come up to me on campus to tell me they love our videos. Knowing that our series has helped foster such a cool community on campus has been such a fulfilling experience!”



— **Denny Morgan, Assistant Audience Engagement Producer**

What started as an effort to increase digital engagement ultimately helped make student journalism feel more accessible and, more importantly, approachable. By regularly interviewing students and inviting them to participate in videos, we created new opportunities for connection between the newsroom and the community we serve. Students began recognizing our reporters, volunteering to be interviewed, and engaging with our coverage in ways that had not previously existed.

The success of the initiative was not simply that more students watched our content — it was that more students recognized the Loyolan as a trusted and active part of campus life. Vertical video helped transform our relationship with the LMU community, giving us both a stronger digital presence and a more visible physical presence on campus.



“The story of our vertical video strategy is one that I envision being passed down in our newsroom for years to come because it’s illustrative of how the Loyolan can adapt to best serve a readership with evolving consumption patterns. Through their distinguished representation of our publication to the campus community, Audience Engagement has grown into the load-bearing pillar of our forward-facing identity. This team has also become an internal model for our newsroom as we seek to balance foundational journalistic principles with the exploration of new formats through which we can reach our audience.”

— **Sabatino Stacchi, Editor-in-Chief**

Community Recognition

The success of the vertical video initiative extended beyond audience engagement. Over the years, the Loyolan's innovative approach to multimedia storytelling has been recognized by several student media organizations, earning awards including:

2025 California College Media Award for General Innovation

2025 College Media Association Pinnacle Award, Best Vertical Short Video, "The Unicyclist"

2026 Associated Collegiate Press Best of Show for Broadcast News Program, What's Up Wednesday (3rd Place)

.....

The success of the Loyolan's vertical video initiative extended beyond our own newsroom. At MediaFest 2025 in Washington, D.C., and the 2026 Associated Collegiate Press Spring College Media Conference, the Loyolan presented "Making Vertical Video Work for Your Newsroom," a session designed to help other student media organizations navigate the rapidly evolving digital landscape. The presentation drew large crowds of student journalists and advisors interested in learning how the Loyolan built a sustainable vertical video strategy, increased audience engagement, and integrated multimedia storytelling into its reporting process. A key focus of the session was demonstrating that impactful audience engagement does not require a large budget or specialized equipment. Instead, we shared how a small team of student journalists used existing resources, strategic planning, and a willingness to experiment to create meaningful results. By sharing both our successes and challenges, we hoped to inspire other student publications to rethink how they connect with their audiences.



Access the presentation [here!](#)

What's Next?

While our vertical video initiative has been successful, we are far from finished. Innovation is an ongoing process, and we are constantly exploring new ways to engage our audience and adapt to their needs.

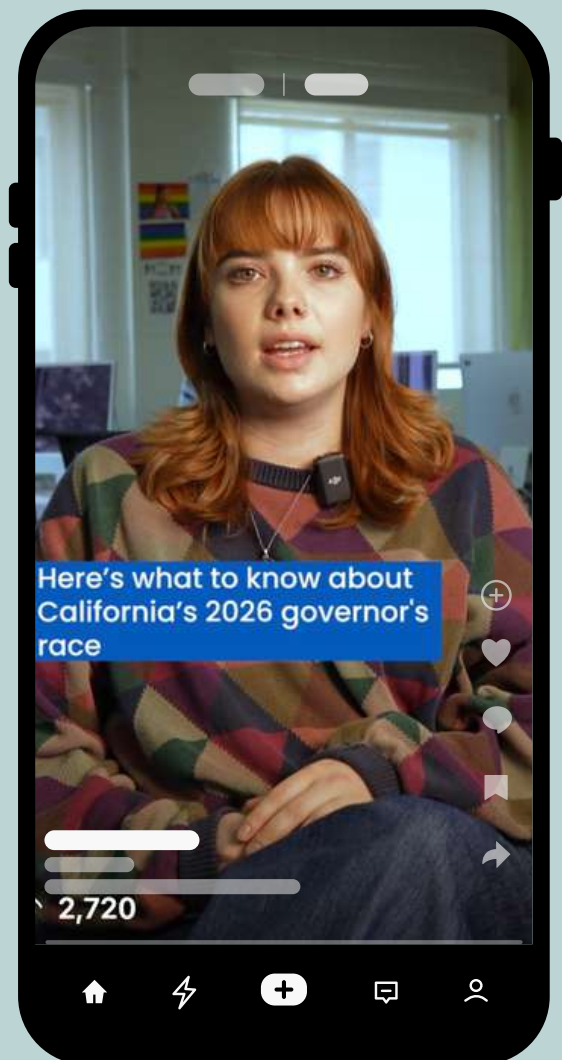
One of our newest areas of focus is developing explainer videos, a format inspired by the growing shift toward short-form news content among major media organizations. As news outlets such as the New York Times and the Daily Mail increasingly incorporate vertical video into their reporting and social media strategies, we recognized an opportunity to bring a similar approach to student journalism.

Our first attempts at creating explainer videos showed promise, but we quickly learned that translating a written story into a compelling short-form video required more than simply summarizing an article. Through experimentation and refinement, we developed a format that allows reporters to take the stories they have already written and explain the key points directly to viewers on camera, with visuals to support them.

Much like our story + video model, explainer videos are designed to complement written reporting rather than replace it. By breaking down complex topics into a concise and digestible format, these videos make journalism more accessible to audiences who may not immediately click on a written article. At the same time, they serve as a gateway to deeper reporting by encouraging viewers to visit the original story for additional context and information.

As we continue refining the series, we believe explainer videos represent the next evolution of the Loyolan's vertical video strategy — one that further bridges the gap between traditional reporting and the way modern audiences consume news.

Click on **the phone** to take you to the reel!



If our vertical video initiative taught us anything, it is that innovation is never finished. The next great idea is always just around the corner.

Why the Loyolan?

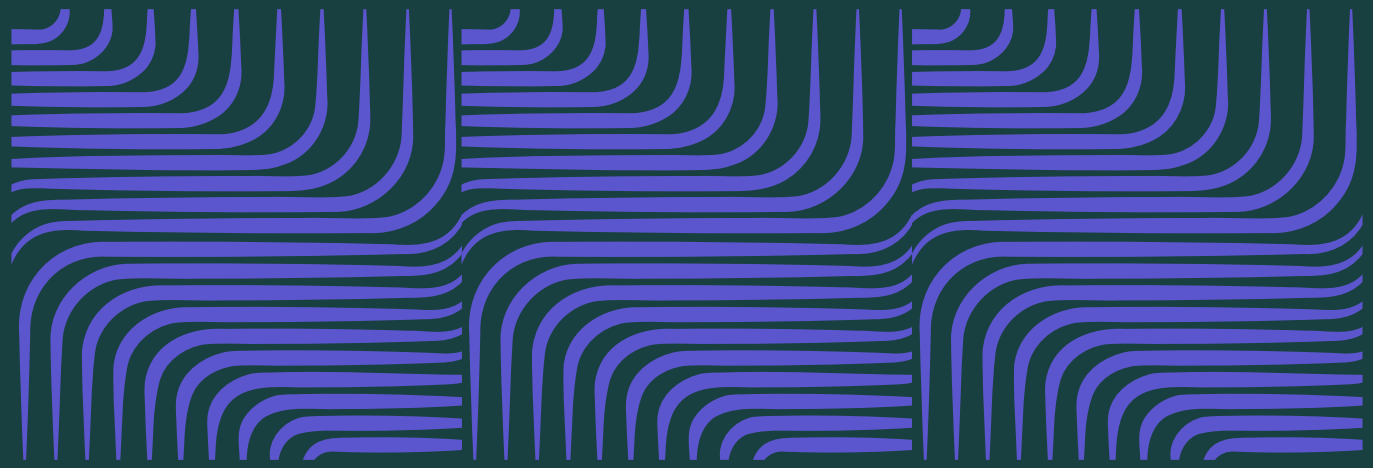
**At the Loyolan, innovation is not a one-time project
— it's the way we approach journalism every day.**

Our vertical video initiative represents far more than the adoption of a new storytelling format. It fundamentally changed how our newsroom operates, creating new opportunities for cross-departmental collaboration and bringing more students into the journalistic process. Reporters who once worked exclusively in print now appear on camera, conduct interviews for social media, and engage directly with the audiences they serve. Stories no longer exist solely on our website; they live across platforms, allowing written reporting, multimedia storytelling, and audience engagement to work together in ways that strengthen one another.

The initiative also transformed the relationship between our newsroom and the LMU community. Through recurring video series, on-campus reporting, and student participation, the Loyolan became more visible, approachable, and connected to campus life. Students began recognizing our reporters, contributing to conversations, and interacting with our journalism in ways we could never have imagined.

Most importantly, this initiative reflects a newsroom that is constantly seeking new ways to evolve. The Loyolan has a record of embracing innovation, earning national recognition through an Innovation Pacemaker for our [First Amendment Week](#) as well as placing as a finalist for [E2024](#) and [ROAR Studios](#). At the Loyolan, we don't view innovation as something that “finishes” — we see it as an ongoing responsibility to adapt, experiment, and better serve our ever-changing audience.

The Innovation Pacemaker honors organizations that are willing to challenge traditional models and redefine what journalism can be. Through our vertical video initiative, we did not simply create a new content strategy — we fostered collaboration across our newsroom, expanded opportunities for student journalists, strengthened our connection to the LMU community and reimaged how student journalism can reach the next generation.



Thank you for your consideration!

