

Introduction:

Ladies and gentlemen, our next speaker has witnessed the transformation from tangible photo albums to social media. Having navigated the evolving landscape from his days at Columbia Engineering to today, he's here to share a personal story of connection, and personal brand renewal. As we reflect on our own digital footprints, please join me in welcoming Tom Tan, also affectionately known to some as 'Flying Tom' with his speech "A Birthday Reflection: Renewing My Digital Narrative". "A Birthday Reflection: Renewing My Digital Narrative", Tom Tan.

A Birthday Reflection: Renewing My Digital Narrative

1. Reflection (1-2 minutes):

When I was in my childhood and adolescence, birthdays were about gatherings, phone calls, and physical cards. My family took photos. Instead of instantly "sharing" or "posting" them, they went into photo albums, which we often take out to revisit ourselves or show them to visitors.

When I was turning twenty, Facebook was founded. It was not a brand-new idea because my school, Columbia Engineering, had just rolled out a similar website for our own students. Probably, the engineering students were too nerdy, so the website did not gain much traction. However, Facebook broke down the wall between the engineering school and other schools at Columbia, which immediately expanded the network. I joined Facebook without hesitation, except that I used my nickname, Flying Tom, as my account name. It caused some confusion as people who knew me from Facebook would call me Flying. Back then, as an international student, I struggled with remembering people's names. Therefore, I used Facebook primarily to remember new acquaintances' names. I had no idea what "interested in men/women" meant. I was interested in EVERYONE! (pause) In short, I initially considered social media, represented by Facebook, to be a tool to connect with friends.

2. Realization (1-2 minutes):

However, as years went by, the landscape changed. The borderline between social connections and professional promotion became blurred. Social media are not just about connecting, but about projecting. Professionals post their achievements to promote themselves. Influencers use the social media platform to recruit fans and market their service or products. Each post, like a brushstroke, paints an image of who we are—or at least who we want the world to think we are. I was not initially too comfortable about seeing others use social media to promote themselves because I felt such behavior was like blowing one's own trumpet. However, I later realized that communicating what makes us valuable and making it easy and accessible for people to see what we have to offer is critical to realizing our full potential.

Therefore, as I celebrated my 39th birthday yesterday, I took a step back, examined my social media, and wondered: "Does this truly represent me? How can I use it to communicate my personal brand story more effectively, while maintaining authenticity?"

3. Rebuilding (2-3 minutes):

I realized that I had a mixed group of “friends” on my Facebook, including personal friends and professional connections. However, posting personal stories to keep friends updated is inappropriate for a professional audience. Therefore, I need to compartmentalize my personal and professional profiles. In particular, I will make my FB page even more private for personal friends only and strengthen my professional presence on LinkedIn.

[Left of the screen]: On the FB front, I remind myself the “friends” on Facebook are about quality over quantity. I should not be obsessed over likes and “friends”. I am not an influencer. I am not selling cosmetics! Instead, I desire to build and maintain meaningful emotional connections with my personal friends on Facebook. For example, I can share stories and have live conversations with friends. I can post my recorded Toastmasters speeches, which I think can resonate with my friends. It's the meaningful conversations, the stories shared, and the relationships nurtured that truly define the worth of my personal social media footprint.

[Right of the screen]: On the professional side, I hope to revamp my LinkedIn profile to renew my personal brand. That means I must 1) redefine my purpose and value proposition, 2) use narratives to communicate my positivity, productivity, and desire to learn and grow, and 3) socialize my brand. For example, as a teacher/scholar, my tagline is to inform, entertain, and inspire the minds. Among all my talented colleagues, I have a very strong track record in both teaching and research. I passionately pursue excellence and keep learning and growing to stay on the front curve of research and teaching. I can enlist gatekeepers and promoters like editors, journalists, and mentors to enhance my credibility and reach new audiences.

Conclusion:

To conclude, this new year of life for me isn't just about age. It's about renewal—a chance to repaint, redefine, and resonate with passion and purpose. As I embark on this journey of renewal, I invite each one of you to take a moment. Look at your social media presence. What story does it tell? And more importantly, what story do you want it to tell?