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Feb 24, 2023 by [Kerry Velez](#)

Diplomats, It's Time to BeReal ^[1]

It is no surprise that diplomats and global businesses are slow at adopting new platforms and technology. By 2023, 15 years after the U.S. Department of State launched its Facebook account, one would imagine that social media had proven itself worthy of being a critical message carrier. However, many communicators and digital specialists face a cumbersome process when they suggest creating a new profile on a new platform. BeReal, a relatively new platform based on the ideals of authenticity, can be the exception to that rule.

The app BeReal is in its growth stage: the company is focused on recruiting more users, and with their downloads, the public is deciding for themselves how they'd like to use the app and what they would like to see, making it the perfect time to test how BeReal can help public diplomacy strategies reach new or existing audiences. Launched in December of 2019 by two French Entrepreneurs, Alexis Barreyat and Kévin Perreau, BeReal has gained significant traction with French teens, U.S. college students, generation Z in Latin America and most recently, millennials, and its audience is growing daily. As of February 2023, BeReal has been downloaded an estimated 70-85 million times (BeReal does not confirm numbers in an

effort, they say, to align their brand with users instead of monetization). With large audiences in the U.S., the UK, Germany and more, and an estimated monthly active user base of 47.8 million, 13 of which access the app daily, BeReal has traction that is worth testing.

Think of BeReal more like email lists or Facebook groups, a tool used in public diplomacy and marketing to keep audiences engaged who already have a connection to the organization, person or brand.

Jumping into a new social media tool as a country, organization or brand requires a number of steps. It starts with learning about the new platform and how to use it, determining how to add this daily task to an ever-growing list of responsibilities, designing a strategy and then convincing supervisors and stakeholders to approve it and provide a greenlight. Although all of these processes will still need to be completed, if you adopt BeReal into your social media portfolio, the simplicity of the app allows for easier conversion.

Every day, at a non-disclosed and different time than the previous, BeReal will send a mobile notification to the account logged in. From the moment one receives the notification, the person in charge of the app has two minutes to take a photo. The photo captures an image from the front and back cameras simultaneously, but one will only see an image from one camera when taking the picture. Don't like that photo? Retake it in that two-minute window and publish that image instead but note that the app will inform people that this image was a retake. Once happy with the photo, add a caption and press publish to discovery or friends only. Miss the notification or not in a place appropriate to take a photo? The app is forgiving. Capture an image at a more convenient time; once ready, BeReal will still only allow two minutes for a picture but then it can be published—again, with the caveat that the post was submitted late. If posting is not an option that day, the app won't allow browsing but no other penalties occur.

Unlike apps like TikTok, Instagram or even venturing into the Metaverse, BeReal was built in a way so that one is not spending a lot of time on the app. There is no need or space for professional photos, no comprehensive copy that needs to be written and no algorithm pushing one to post multiple times a day. With more limitations on how the app can be used, it makes it easier for public diplomats or teams to manage without taking much time away from their schedules. The contrast to this is that BeReal was not intended for influencing or virality. At the moment, there seems to be a cap of "friends" of around 2,000. Whilst an impediment, it can also be an asset strategically.

Think of BeReal more like email lists or Facebook groups, a tool used in public diplomacy and marketing to keep audiences engaged who already have a connection to the organization, person or brand. Maybe the program team has an account to share progress on a specific climate goal they are working towards, the human resources department promotes one to harness buzz around internship openings or an ambassador starts an account to share initiatives specifically with journalists. Once a game plan is made, an editorial calendar and messages should be pre-determined. This way authenticity shines through but does not come as surprise to the institution. Plus, no one wants to be caught sharing classified documents.

Like any social media account, developing a strategy, an editorial calendar and ways to measure the platform are imperative.

BeReal offers the opportunity for diplomats to be more authentic with audiences. In an era of deep fakes, conspiracy theories and heightened skepticism, and as younger generations trust social media more than traditional news, BeReal could be a solution that brings truth and the day-to-day work of public diplomacy professionals closer to audiences. Is it a sure thing? No, the platform could slip away, especially since Meta has already launched Instagram Candids in South Africa, but learning new and “hot” ways to communicate messages is critical in public diplomacy.
