Sports Insight

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PREDATORY PR

CONNECTING IN CYBERSPACE

Dave Howell talks to Joanna Morley of online marketing specialist SiteVisibility about how retailers can use social media to grow their businesses

WHAT ARE THE KEY COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING CAMPAIGN?

Retailers need a simple, clear way to deploy a social media strategy that does not necessarily start with technology. It is simply about understanding; understanding who your customers are and why they shop with you. Without a genuine appreciation of your customers and their behaviour, your efforts and messaging could quite easily be inadvertently targeted to the wrong audience, therefore having a negative impact on the performance of your social media campaign.

And crucially, retailers must understand the clear differences between social media and social networking. Social media is a way to transmit or share information with a broad audience. Everyone has the opportunity to create and distribute. On the other hand, social networking is an act of engagement. Groups of people with common interests, or like minds, associate together on social networking sites and build relationships through a community.

ARE MARKETING MESSAGES MORE ACCEPTED ON SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS THAN THEY ONCE WERE?

There are two ways to look at this. Yes, they are accepted more often, mainly due to the fact that there are more social media platforms now, and more and more businesses, organisations and individuals are becoming savvy users of such online tools.

However, you just can't push out sales messages and expect potential customers to contact you. Today customers are savvy social media users and are often suspicious of businesses that try to sell their services online. It is all about engagement; the goal of social media engagement is to influence participants to have a positive impression of the company through factual, verifiable contributions from employees and subject matter experts.

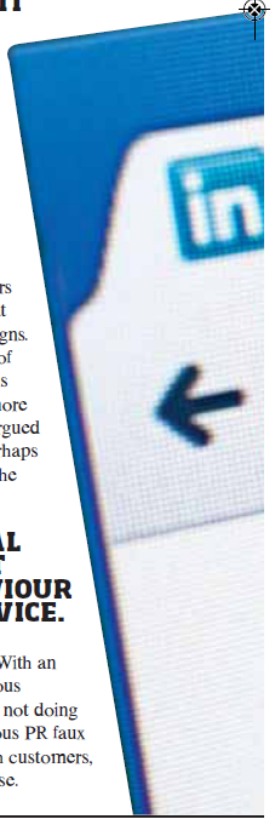
WHAT ARE THE SOCIAL MEDIA PITFALLS TO AVOID?

Don't just sell. You have to be smarter than this. Don't just talk about yourself, otherwise people will be deterred from visiting your site. Instead talk about wider industry issues and position yourself as a thought leader within your sector or industry. Engage with your customers and contacts. The first thing to do is to develop an online personality. This will ensure you become a trusted source of information and advice, and you will also develop a reputation for having a 'personal touch'. Keep it important, relevant and interesting to your audience with no self-promotion content. No one likes a show off.

HOW CAN A MARKETING MESSAGE BE TAILORED TO THE PARTICULAR NETWORK IT WILL BE USED ON?

Businesses that are undertaking social media outreach need to think about tailoring the content for the specific site in order to maximise reach and user experience. It is about adopting a voice for each medium. For example, LinkedIn is often perceived as more formal, whereas Facebook is the opposite, but offers the greatest breadth of community oriented functionality.

The rise to prominence of services such as Quora, Groupon and Foursquare is there for all to see, with the latter able to actually entice customers into stores. However, it's Twitter and Facebook that remain the more popular choices for most campaigns. Despite the similarities between the two, the tone of voice used by the wider community on both sites is entirely different. Facebook editorial tends to be more generalist by nature, whereas Twitter it could be argued can be more pointed, opinionated and acerbic, perhaps because of the reliance on text-only content and the limited amount of characters.



IT IS OFTEN SAID THAT SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IS ABOUT SELLING A CHANGE IN BEHAVIOUR AND NOT A PRODUCT OR SERVICE. WOULD YOU AGREE?

It has certainly changed the behaviour of brands. With an online profile, they are open to the world and various communities and they have to listen to people. By not doing the basics right online, they are committing a serious PR faux pas. Brands must behave properly and engage with customers, whether it's handling a complaint or receiving praise.

CAN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING BE MEASURED? IF SO, WHAT ARE THE BEST TOOLS TO USE?

Absolutely. First of all, it can be measured by the number of followers and fans you have accumulated over time on Facebook, Twitter, etc. Then, of course, it can be measured by your own level of engagement and the number of people who are 'liking' your comments and posts. And don't forget about people and businesses that Retweet your messages. Also, check your trends and statistics - who is visiting your website directly from social media websites?

ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES RETAILERS CAN USE IN THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS?

Build communities and keep it interesting and topical. Blogging is a favoured method. Many companies overlook blogs, as they think they are used purely for self expression. However, the smarter brands see blogging as an additional platform to get their overall marketing message across. Our client, Bishop's Move, the UK's largest privately owned removals company, won't just Tweet and post messages about the removals industry. It branches into other sectors and territories and uses social media to comment on the wider industry issues that could affect its customers.

> "IF RETAILERS DON'T DEVELOP A SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN, THEY RISK FALLING BEHIND THEIR COMPETITORS"

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE FOR RETAILER USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR MARKETING ACTIVITIES?

If retailers don't develop a social media campaign, they risk falling behind their competitors. I can't stress enough the importance of organising your social media efforts at a global level, but using this as the backbone to carry out campaigns locally. For example, you want all of your Facebook creative to be optimised to get the best reaction. And that takes local input and interaction.

Crowd purchasing is also becoming more popular and certainly a method retailers should think about. This allows groups of internet users to purchase products and services from local retailers. For online stores, selling items in bulk and at discount prices makes perfect sense.