

SOCIAL MEDIA MATTERS



HOW TO DRIVE INTERACTION TO YOUR BRAND

A Pocket Guide to Social Media

from

Covenant

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INTRODUCTION

In the movie “Field of Dreams,” Kevin Costner regularly hears a voice encouraging him to build a baseball field in his backyard, claiming that if he does, great baseball players from the past will join him to play a game. You remember the words ... “If you build it, they will come.” Sadly, many times we think the same thing will happen in our businesses. We think that if we have a good product or service, create a vibrant identity, and build experience, our job is done, and customers will just show up on our doorstep, like the baseball ghosts of the past.

While sometimes this may be the case, most of the time it isn't. You must drive your customers back to your brand again and again and again if you want to be successful.

LAW *of* DIMINISHING RETURNS

In economics, there is a concept called the “Law of Diminishing Returns.” The law basically says that there comes a point when the amount you put into something becomes more than you actually get out of something. So if you’re running a factory, there will come a time when the number of man hours you put into development of a product will be greater than the product returns to you in sales.

We can apply this law in principle to what we’re talking about in this e-book, especially as it relates to driving brand interaction. From a consumer perspective, there comes a point when the more products there are in the marketplace vying for our attention, the less impact those products have on us. For instance, if there were only two automobile brands in the global marketplace, the marketing messages of those two companies would have a pretty sizable impact on us as consumers, because there are only two.

Alternatively, if there are 20 automobile brands in the global marketplace, we as consumers have exponentially more to process. The return of an individual automobile’s marketing message is much less with 19 competitors than it would be with one.

With more than 6,000 marketing messages bombarding us every day, the Law of Diminishing Returns is definitely in effect. So it’s important as business owners, brand managers and marketing directors to continually drive our customers to interact with our brands. We can build it, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they will come.

Granted, a successful brand will usually attract consumers on its own accord—that’s the whole point of doing brand development. But we can’t rely solely on the attractiveness of our brands. We have to be intentional to invite and encourage interaction—because that is what builds lasting relationships with users.

So how do we drive brand interaction? Well, first, we must understand how consumers are interacting. And this is changing rapidly with the advance of social media platforms. We also must understand how we should position our brands in light of these changes.

INTRODUCTION

A Two-Way Street

_____ Gary Vaynerchuk—a successful entrepreneur and self-proclaimed “social media sommelier”—doesn’t like the term “social media.” According to Vaynerchuk, social media isn’t a form of media, it’s the new form of media. And certainly, while social media hasn’t replaced other foundational forms of media such as television or print, no one can argue that we are seeing a monumental change in how consumers interact and connect with brands.

_____ Think of this change as a street. Previously, the way in which we interacted with brands could be likened to a one-way street. Companies put out information, we consumed that information, and made decisions accordingly. Even before the Internet hit the scene, this was the status quo. Whether it was through print advertising, television commercials, or websites, it was always a one-way conversation between brands and consumers.

_____ That’s now changed. What once was a one-way conversation between brands and consumers has now become a two-way dialogue in the same way that a one-way street is widened and made into a thoroughfare. It’s not enough to simply “put” information out there, like most businesses have done for years. Now brands must continue to offer relevant content that will leave consumers wanting more.



“ Social Media is the interactive, ongoing conversation you have with your customers. ”

DON'T GENERALIZE.

Let's talk for a second about generalizations. What's good for someone else may not be good for you, and what's bad for someone else may not be bad for you. Unfortunately, in trying to keep up with the latest trends and best practices, businesses and brands can often fall into the “everybody's doing it, so I should do it” trap. I see this happening quite a bit when discussing social media strategies with clients. When this topic comes up, typically Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube come to mind—and in the span of a few seconds, the client makes up his or her mind whether or not to employ social media initiatives as part of their marketing strategy. What is the basis of this decision?

INTRODUCTION

_____ More often than not it's based on two factors—a generalization of what social media is, and a comparison of what everybody else is doing. But there are two very important things to consider when determining how to drive brand interaction:

① **Social Media Is More Than Social Media**

_____ Social media is more than just the platforms Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Social media is the interactive, ongoing conversation you are having with your customers. The core of social media is interaction. As I mentioned before, instead of just a one-way conversation between brands and consumers, social media platforms encourage dialogue. This creates powerful new channels through which a business can extend their brand experience, and reach target audiences. And it doesn't just happen on the most popular or well-known sites (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube).

_____ You can integrate social media into your brand in a variety of ways—it could be a blog, social community, local Tweet-up, interactive poll, weekly podcast, e-newsletter, or conference call. The bottom line is social media is about building, and maintaining a conversation with your customers—in essence, driving brand interaction.

② Don't Be A Follower

_____ *“If you're not the lead dog the view never changes.”* We've all heard this expression, and believe it or not, it can actually be applied to social media, but perhaps not in the way you think. Certainly, it's important to be a leader not a follower—you want your brand or business to be at the head of the pack. So there is a point to be made that you shouldn't follow everyone else for the sake of following everyone else. But the key element here is not about being a leader or a follower—the key element is what you are trying to accomplish.

_____ Let's put it this way, if you're on Twitter just because everyone else is on Twitter, that's not a good reason to do it. But if you're on Twitter because no one is on Twitter, that in itself is not a good reason to do it either. The question is, what is your purpose? What are you trying to accomplish with that particular initiative? Is it increased sales? More brand recognition? A unique product offering?

_____ Everything you do should have a goal behind it, and a strategy for how to get there. It's not so much about being the lead dog, and it's not so much about being a follower. It's much more about your specific vision for your brand, the purposes behind the initiatives, and the strategy for accomplishing your goals.

_____ So how do you drive brand interaction? By recognizing that you must build and maintain an open conversation between your brand and your users.

THE THREE “C’s” OF SOCIAL MEDIA

There are three primary elements to an effective social media strategy. I call these elements the “Three C’s of Social Media.”

① Conversation

Your brand is, after all, a business. In addition to providing care and building community, it’s also important to manage a consistent conversation about your brand to potential users and to the general public. This is a practical application of the “two-way street” principle we talked about earlier. Users want to dialogue and interact, and are searching for trust, openness and honesty.



Furthermore, users will talk about you with or without your help. This is perhaps one of the most fascinating aspects of the social media movement. After a recent re-design of their orange juice packaging in 2009, Tropicana Foods experienced a large amount of negative feedback on Twitter and other platforms. As a result, Tropicana went back to their old packaging designs because of popular opinion.

There are also many stories about the same thing happening to other brands, who were unfortunately not listening—and as a result, their brand image was significantly hurt in the eyes of their customers. It’s important to not only build a conversation around your organization, but to also monitor and manage the conversation coming from others. Even if the conversation is negative, an organization that is actively interacting with its users will produce a stronger brand image than if it alternatively doesn’t respond at all.

THE THREE “C’s” OF SOCIAL MEDIA

② Community



As human beings, we were designed to live in community. Additionally, we typically trust and are willing to invest in “people like us.” This is one of the reasons why Amazon puts so much emphasis on its customer reviews, and why product review websites are so popular—because consumers feel comfortable making decisions when “people like them” have made similar decisions.

With technologies like Facebook “Like” and Google Search just now starting to gain traction (and both of which are major game changers), expect these and other passive filters to help weed out unnecessary information via our friends and social networks. Pete Cashmore, founder of Mashable.com says that *“Increasingly, your friends are becoming the curators of your consumption, from web links to movies, books to TV shows.”*

Without you really having to do anything, how you interact with your friends, and what social networks you are a part of can filter content so that what hits your “inbox” is stuff that’s generally relevant to you. That is part of community, and it’s how we are beginning to make decisions as consumers. Brands who pay attention to this, and develop accordingly, will succeed in interacting with their user base.

THE THREE “C’S” OF SOCIAL MEDIA

③ Care

The backbone of any brand interaction strategy has to be care—care for your customers, users, employees, and listeners. Social media platforms allow organizations to extend, and at times literally brand, care. Never before have organizations had the ability to interact with their user-base in real time with virtually no boundaries. Instead of a phone call or e-mail, now a conversation can start with a Tweet, a chat on Facebook or a Skype.



This is revolutionary. Customer service has literally been redefined—it doesn't have to take place within the four walls of an office, or a website, or even a telephone call. Customer care can be distributed 365 days, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Now social media can be used to create a better customer service experience: following up on known issues, or proactively taking care of minor issues before they become major ones. It can also involve a better purchasing experience, better interaction during point of sale, or follow-up after a purchase is made to ensure complete satisfaction.

There is a huge opportunity to leverage the power of social media to provide a new level of care to your customers.

GO *to* YOUR MARKET

I’ve talked with a lot of businesses and brands who are indifferent to social media and brand interaction strategies because they’ve had negative prior experiences, or more commonly, haven’t found a lot of success with their Twitter profiles or Facebook fan pages. To be sure, there is a strategy involved in building successful brand interaction strategies, but there is a common theme that I’ve found in a lot of situations. One of the primary reasons brands don’t experience success in driving brand interaction is because they neglect to go where their market is.

If your target audience interacts primarily on Facebook, don’t spend a ton of time on Twitter, or YouTube, or on some specific Ning social network. Go on Facebook. That’s where your market is. Or if your target market responds better to relevant content that you put out through e-mail newsletters and your blog, stick to doing that.

GO *to* YOUR MARKET

_____ Spend the time and effort where your audience is. It seems simple, and it is. But for some reason, we have this tendency to want to be on every hip, cool, latest platform. By doing so, you’ll wind up spinning your wheels, wasting a lot of time and energy, and—in the end—you’ll come out jaded and frustrated because you’re not seeing results.

_____ Most of the time the issue is not that social media is a bad decision for your brand. It’s usually that you didn’t take the time to research, and position your brand to be successful. So before you write off social media initiatives, spend some time studying your market, find out where they’re interacting, and build a profile there.

_____ Certain social media platforms don’t work for everyone. Though I am a believer that every business should embrace social media initiatives, I don’t believe that every business should embrace the same ones. The bottom line is that every business and every brand should desire and make an effort to interact and engage their customers on a regular basis.

SERVICES

For service providers, there are three things you need to consider and implement in order to have a successful social media strategy:

① Present Yourself As An Expert

Though there are many factors consumers consider when choosing a service provider (cost, location, relevance, etc), one of the most important factors— and probably the one that makes consumers most comfortable with their decision—is the knowledge level of the service provider.

Social Media Applications: Make sure your website is geared towards your customer—include relevant information that he/she will be looking for and present it in a way that supports you or your brand as an expert on the subject. Start a blog where you can provide consistent, meaningful content in your area of expertise. This is a great way to offer free information to potential customers, and will make your brand more valuable to customers.

SERVICES

② Invite Interaction

It's not enough to simply "put" information online and then expect potential customers to view it and respond. You have to initiate, and continue to invite interaction on the part of your customers. Once you've positioned yourself as an expert in your field you must make an effort to enter your customer's world and make your expertise relevant to them.

Social Media Applications: Determine where your customers spend the bulk of their time online. If your customers are on Facebook or Twitter, you need to be on there, and interacting with them. If they are on niche communities such as Cork'd (wine community), you need to have a presence there. So find out where your users spend most of their time, and build a profile on those platforms.

SERVICES

③ Respond

Finally it's not enough to simply invite interaction on the part of your customers. You must respond to them as well. This means making an effort to draw out your user base, network with potential clients, and build relationships. If a new customer chooses your service brand over another, it will likely be because you have done a better job building a relationship with them.

Social Media Applications: Invite interaction and give interaction, and ideally, give more than you get. Remember people aren't online waiting for you to find them. They're online for themselves—so it's up to you to enter their world and bring them into yours in a way that is both unpretentious as well as strategic. Respond to their comments, posts and ideas, and try to find ways to incorporate them into your own marketing. One of our clients, a travel company, had one of their customers post a funny travel picture on their company Facebook page, which inspired the company to start a photo contest on their page. People began to share, not only their photos, but also their stories and experiences with the company. Responding to your customers' feedback validates their opinions and allows them to feel like they have a voice too.

PRO DUCTS

For product brands there are three things you need to consider and implement in order to have a successful social media strategy:

① **It's All About Position**

In a world where thousands of companies and products are vying for the attention of consumers, it is vital to make sure you are positioning your brand to drive consumers to choose you. In order to do so, you can't just offer your customers another choice—you have to offer them a better choice. What makes you different and relevant. Why should consumers look at your product, and why should they care about it? The answers to those two questions are vital to the success of any social media efforts you embrace.

Social Media Applications: Make sure you have a brand positioning platform outlined and in place. Every initiative you start must affect the bottom line—ask yourself, *“will this help position my brand so that consumers will pay attention, and care about my product?”* Your brand positioning platform must carry through all of your brand touchpoints, including social media. If I access your Facebook page, Twitter profile, or website, all three should give me a clear, synergistic picture of what your product is, and why I should care enough to invest in it.

PRO DUCTS

② Listen & Engage

As a business, you don't want to be ruled by your customers. But you also don't want to ignore them. Certainly, you want to be careful not to base every decision on the popular opinion of your target market. But, at the same time, failure to listen to and engage with your user base will prove to be harmful to your business in the long run. Social media offers a profound platform on which to listen to and engage with your user base. It is more important than ever to have a constant pulse on the popular opinion of your product brand. Listen to what your customers are saying, make improvements where necessarily, but most of all, engage with your users.

Social Media Applications: The first task is to find out what your customers are saying about your product. In order to monitor conversations about your brand, set up customized Google Alerts, build ego searches using Google Blogsearch, and utilize Twitter search to monitor conversations on Twitter. Once you're monitoring what your users are saying, then you need to interact with them. Comment on blogs, @ reply on Twitter, interact on Facebook, or even invite conversation onto your own website.

PRO DUCTS

③ Convert, Convert, Convert

At the end of the day, you must convert initiatives into sales. Unless you're in the business of working for free, your success as a business is dependent on selling products. So your efforts on social media should reflect your overall desire to sell your products. This doesn't mean you take the used car salesman approach and bog your customers down with gimmicks and sales pitches. Social media is more about engaging and interacting than anything else, but that doesn't mean it can't lead to sales. Social media and sales are not mutually exclusive—they can and should work together hand-in-hand.

Social Media Applications: Utilize soft-sell techniques in your social interaction. You can do this by offering specials and discounts for user groups on individual platforms, such as a special discount for your fans on Facebook, or a special offer for your RSS feed subscribers. Create a consistent e-newsletter and e-marketing campaign that allows you to get content to your users on a regular basis and drive sales. Follow up with your customers after they've purchased your product to ensure complete satisfaction and, when possible, repeat business.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

That's a good question, and it's really up to you and your business' specific goals. What do you want to achieve? An effective social media strategy has to come from your goals and your vision, and it's the best place to start any initiative.

Every business is different, and though there are core principles that apply to everyone, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. But every business and brand can and should embrace social media.

If you have questions, or want to learn more about how to incorporate social media into your business strategy, we'd love to chat with you in person. Covenant Communications provides a range of social media design and management solutions and we'd love the opportunity to learn more about your needs and determine how we can serve you. To learn more, visit www.covweb.com or call 800.994.3844.

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ABOUT COVENANT COMMUNICATIONS

Fueled by creativity, Covenant Communications is a full-service marketing agency based in Orlando, FL, that strives to deliver ideas, initiatives and results that are unique to our clients' specific needs. We believe that strong marketing is built on strong relationships—and we have a genuine interest in our clients and their success. For more information visit www.covweb.com or call 800.994.3844.



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