

EXPERTS CORNER

Social Networks



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— Lisa Morgan

Context Is Important to Social Media Marketing

In the rush to adopt social media a number of retailers have failed to ask themselves important questions that can affect the success of their campaigns. If you haven't taken the time to understand how social media types differ, now is a good time. Even if you have, you need to consider what's going on in the minds of your customers.

Take social networks and communities for example. The obvious difference between them is that social networks are third-party sites and communities may reside on your site or they may be established by a group, such as an association or collection of strategic partners. Standing in the shoes of a consumer, it becomes more obvious how these social destinations differ

as they relate to customer behavior.

When consumers are using social networks like Facebook they're typically doing something that relates to their personal lifestyles like sharing photos, personal experiences, videos, and the like. Visitors are more interested in interacting with each other than with your brand, unless you give them a good reason.

Over time it has become more commonplace for brands to establish Facebook pages so customers and evangelists can become "Fans". Target has more than 147,000 fans, for example. In January, its Facebook page featured an interactive football widget that offered eight clever football facts. It also featured a video of Christina Aguilera shooting a

Target video. The page carries brand image and anticipates the mindset of page visitors and fans looking to be entertained. Coca Cola has more than two million Facebook fans by comparison. History and international adoption are the main page themes and there aren't any gimmicks like football facts. Of course, since Target and Coca Cola are different types of businesses with different histories what works for one won't work for the other, which is a very important point.

If you have added a community section to your website the good news is people are on your website and not on Facebook. People of like minds have gathered together which companies like Petco have used to their advantage. It's an

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entirely different context than a Facebook or MySpace page.

There's an art to running a community, which some companies have figured out and others haven't. It's important to have an objective for the community and it's important to realize that a community is an ecosystem that can't be entirely controlled. It also needs care and feeding.

The strength of a community is driven by numbers but more importantly passion. People are very passionate about their pets so they love to share stories and photos. It's a little harder to get excited about paper clips, so if you haven't set up a community yet or you have established one and it isn't quite developing as you had hoped, you might ask yourself whether having a community is the right thing for your business or whether the purpose and theme of the community is something that will in fact support growth and involvement.

In the case of associations or collections of partners who have set up communities, individual brand is less important than the collective value the members provide.

Then there's Twitter. Twitter is a micro blogging site that is increasingly considered a "must have". What value can possibly result from entries that are limited to a 140-character

limitation? Ask Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos.com. Tony is a Twitter addict. He constantly micro blogs about where he is and what he's doing, providing an entirely new view into the life of a CEO. Tony also uses Twitter as a community-building tool. Sometimes he'll tell his followers he's in or headed for a certain city and that he and a group of Zappos.com employees will be at a certain bar at a certain time. The result: an instant party. Tony has also used Twitter as a medium for contests or drawings which is another reason why people should and do follow him. He has more than 38,000 followers and follows more than 32,000 people himself. Through the use of Twitter, Tony gives people all new reasons to love Zappos.com as if great products, free shipping, free returns, and awesome customer service aren't enough.

Because this article is short, it's impossible to cover every possible type of social medium, but the message is, have an objective, understand what your customer is looking for, and be prepared to have the necessary resources in place to make your social media campaigns a success. If all that sounds like a recipe for successful marketing generally, it is. The problem is, when innovation happens, some of us become so blinded by the

hype and cool factors that we sometimes forget important fundamentals. ☑

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