A GUIDE TO DEVELOPING A SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN
Part II - Online Presence is Beneficial & Cultural
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Online Presence is Beneficial

Part I of this guide noted how a wise brand will construct its communication strategy around the value propositions that social media affords its customers, recognizing that it too will reap benefits. Part II of this guide provides relevant research statistics with a customer focus, as well as research that supports how social media is beneficial from an institutional perspective.

Increasing Operational Efficiencies

In the article *Digital Government*, a city manager in Elgin, Illinois is touted for using social media to greatly improve operations during a debilitating snowstorm in 2011. The manager used Facebook and Twitter to communicate with the citizens of the city. 100 posts were made sharing National Weather Service updates, as well as logistical information about snow removal operations. The city manager was able to post the messages from a mobile device while he was actually onsite performing inspections. The social media strategy worked well for an offsite, traveling operation. The citizen response was overwhelmingly positive.

Rory Webber in the paper *Beyond Likes, Fans, and Followers* highlights how Starbucks has directly integrated social media into its operations. The specialized coffee brand established the website www.mystarbucksidea.com. Customers propose and rate ideas, and interact with the brand and other customers. Many of the ideas proposed within the online community have been implemented and are successful product line expansions. Webber draws attention to the fact that this format provides the most reliable source of market intelligence possible.

The success of the Starbucks strategy shows that brands can easily become better and enhance customer satisfaction by using forums. Forums encourage customers to engage with the brand about its products with both adoration and admonishment. Successful brands view forums as a repository of valuable feedback that can be analyzed to improve new versions of a product or customer service method.

Cost Savings

Using electronically based communications and marketing is becoming standard. It is a low-cost alternative to printing and mailing marketing materials.

Brand Image

Negative publicity can be extremely damaging. Consider the example of United Airlines that Rory Webber writes about. According to Webber, in 2009 United Airlines' stock dropped 10% in just four days because of a negative message that went viral. Dave Carroll is a musician whose guitar was broken during a United Airlines flight. Carroll took to YouTube to show his disagreement with the airline after it refused to compensate him for the damaged property.

Webber points out that the memory of social media is long, and potentially unforgiving. A demonstration of this, it is 2014 and links for the 2009 fiasco still pull-up if you search United Airlines + Dave Carroll. A brand must properly manage social media crises or else experience significant loss of brand equity and revenue. Having an official online presence helps a brand better manage negative messages.

Online Presence Is Cultural

The United States' culture is socially powered. Customers, brands, and governmental agencies use the Internet for personal and business purposes. Social commerce is when customers, companies, and governmental agencies use social networks to communicate, market, and transact. Customers post and reference peer-reviews; use online company information to make buying decisions; and purchase and sell on retailer sites and online auctions. Companies distribute and receive and information about products and target markets; use collected data to make production decisions; and buy and sell on e-commerce sites. In short, social commerce is the monetization of social networking, and frankly, there is a lot of it happening in America.

Social Customer Usage

Richard Miller's *Consumer Behavior 2012* is an excellent source of marketing research. The results of the *2011 Digital Future Project* published in Miller's book indicated that 82% of the U.S. population uses the Internet. This portion of the population is online an average of 18.3 hours a week. Also found in Miller's book is a statistic from eMarketer that in the year 2014, 165 million or 66% of Internet users will use social media. The 66% includes all Internet users. A closer look at just the ages of teenagers and young adults shows an even higher expectation of social media usage. 86% of Internet users ages twelve to seventeen, and 91% of users ages eighteen to twenty-four, are expected to use social media in 2014. Statistic Brain published that

98% of Americans in the eighteen to twenty-four years age range that were polled in 2012 already use social media (Statistic Brain, Social Networking, 2012).

When learning just how many people use each of the major platforms it is plausible to believe that nearly every young adult in America will in fact interact on social media. Craig Smith, a subject matter expert on social media, complied and maintains a comprehensive list of *How Many People Use the Top Social Media, Apps & Service*s (Smith, List, 2013). A select list as of August 5, 2013 is as follows:

- Facebook   1.15 billion users

- YouTube   1 billion users (4 billion views daily)

- Twitter   500 million users (200 active)

- Google+   343 million users

- Linkedin   238 million users

- Instagram   130 million users

- MySpace   32.6 million users

Moreover, Statistic Brain publicized on May 7, 2013 that Twitter has 555 million active users that tweet 58 million times daily. According to the site, Twitter is also growing by 135,000 new users each day (Statistic Brain, Twitter, 2013).

Statistic Brain also has updated information on Facebook. As of June 23, 2013 the mammoth social media site had 1.11 billion active users, and 680 million mobile users that use the site an average of twenty minutes each visit. One million links are shared every twenty minutes on Facebook. Moreover, there are currently seven million Facebook integrated applications on the market (Statistic Brain, Facebook, 2013). Furthermore, Facebook usage represents 8% of the total time that the Internet is in use (Statistic Brain, Marketing, 2013).

Social Customer Expectations & Patterns

OnUpWeb did a 2010 study that was published in *Consumer Behavior 2012*. The study reveals customer expectations for an e-commerce site. Select results show that 41% of respondents expect onsite reviews, 32% expect live customer service, and 23% expect links to social networks.

In addition to Craig Smith compiling his own list of social media usage, he also keeps up with industry publications. He posted LinchpinSEO's info-graphic of the best days for a brand to post on Facebook (Smith, Blog, 2013). According to the info-graphic, Saturdays and Sundays are the best days for an entertainment brand to post on the site. Postings published on the weekend experience 20% more interaction than on other days. Ironically, only 14% of brand posts are made on the weekend. Perhaps this is because traditional business hours exclude the weekend.

The info-graphic published three other strong facts. Social media users interact 14% more with evening posts than day posts. There is also a clear parameter for the optimal number of postings. A brand can see 19% more interaction with users when it posts once or twice daily. However, posting more than seven times a week will actually decrease interaction by 25%.

Keller Fay Group performed a survey in 2010 and Miller references select findings in *Consumer Behavior 2012*. American's talk about brands often, 56 times per week in fact. American's mainly discuss brands offline, 92% of discussions occur during conversations in settings outside of social media. However, when a customer is displeased, he or she usually takes to social media.

Social Customer Fandom

In his book, Miller referenced a study conducted by Chadwick Martin Bailey and iModerate in 2010 that evaluates why users connect with brands and how that connection impacts the likelihood of commerce. Obtaining discounts is the most widespread reason why users connect with brands on social media. Other reasons are to: stay current, obtain exclusive content, and simply be supportive. The majority of Facebook and Twitter users acknowledged that they would likely purchase from the brands that they follow. An even higher majority credited the connection itself for their increased likeliness to make a purchase.

Also published in *Consumer Behavior 2012,* are the results from the *2011 Social Commerce Study* which was a tri-organizational collaboration between Com.Score, Social Shopping Lab, and Shop.Org. According to the study, 42% of online customers actively follow retailers using Facebook, Twitter, or retailer blogs. It is common for this segment to follow around six retailers. The reasons given coincide with the CMB and iModerate findings. Users want to get current information on deals, products, events, and contests. Additionally, social media posts inspire the majority of users to visit the retailer's website. A smaller number of those visitors will actually make purchases.

Brand followers are not just a show of popularity for brands. Miller features a 2010 survey by Syncapse and Hotspex that shows that social media can be a value-add. Each Facebook fan averages $136.38 in added-value.

Social Customer Activism

According to various surveys in *Consumer Behavior 2012*, a great number of consumers are socially aware and using their buying power as extensions of their voices to express their positions on issues that they support. 81% of consumers will buy a cause-related product. 64% of women will even pay more for a brand that is associated with a cause that they deem worthwhile.

Moreover, customers ages twelve to thirty-two are predicted to be the most civic-minded generation so far. 11% feel a personal responsibility to make a difference in the world, and 75% say that companies should make a difference in the world along with them. In one particular instance, 64% paid more for a cola that gave 5% of its proceeds to an environmental cause over a less expensive cola with no associated cause.

Lastly, many customers want to talk about social issues. 15% would like to hear companies talk about safety and human rights issues on blogs and on social networks.

Market Research Summary

These statistics clearly show that social users are powering the proliferation of online social media usage. Social media empowers users. It allows them to find information on deals, products, exclusive content, contests, and events; as well as socialize with others, and support their favorite brands and heartfelt causes.

Powering of and empowerment from social media is not a one way street. Brands also are powering the proliferation of online social media usage because it meets needs and affords real business benefits. Social media platforms are essentially free channels to disseminate product, promotion, and brand information.

Make sure to read our next newsletter for Part III of this social media guide!

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