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für Käufer und Anwender der Hebeindustrie

2013



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Building a social network

In this technology driven age a computer, a decent network connection and a bright spark of initiative can be the difference between success and failure. Ed Darwin takes a look at how social media, the latest online development which has taken the world by storm, has changed the way people communicate and highlights the benefits and the potential pitfalls of introducing social media within a business.

With the birth of the internet few could have ever predicted the impact it would subsequently have on society. Since the introduction of the World Wide Web 21 years ago the number of people connecting to the internet every day has increased exponentially to over 2.5 billion and is rising daily. Not only has it changed how society functions but it has also revolutionised how businesses are run. Before the internet, a company might open up a store and rely on passing demand alone to become successful. Its best marketing tool, other than perhaps an advert in the local paper, would have been by word of mouth. In today's climate this has not changed a great deal, word of mouth is still regarded as one of the best marketing tools available, however the big difference between then and now is that the internet has given businesses the power to carry that 'word of mouth' all the way around the world.



Over the last 20 years traditional online methods like website content and email campaigns have been used formally to inform or interact with customers. This is changing though as a new method of communication is gaining momentum in the form of social media.

So what is social media?

Categorically defining social media is not exactly straight forward, not only does each social network site vary from the next but they are also still evolving and adapting at a rapid pace to suit the needs of their users. What makes social networking unique is that an individual, who has access to the internet, is able to share content, opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives with the world. A platform is provided to engage, interact, inform and entertain other users, using a wide range of mediums which include images, videos and text. The same process is available for businesses to utilise.

Whether you own a worldwide company or you are a sole trader, you can create an online presence and by using this digital 'word of mouth' communicate to either to an individual or the masses alike. Creating an account on these user-friendly sites is very simple, all you need is an email address and basic information about yourself or company. After logging in, and depending on the networking site, you are then free to upload pictures, post status', watch videos and find other people you know who are using the site. Once you 'add as friend' (Facebook) or 'follow' (Twitter) people you know they will receive any information you post on their profile. This interaction can happen between two people, a handful of acquaintances or potentially on a global scale.

While many of our readers are already fully tuned in to all the various forms of social media, a significant majority of the population haven't a clue what all these things are or how they work. We thought it was worth a brief introduction to some of the most popular social networking sites currently being used. (see panel right)

So what's all the fuss about?

The prospect of connecting with the mind numbingly high user numbers

is almost enough for a company to incorporate social media immediately. But as you can see from just some of the mentioned networking sites available there are a multitude of sites to choose from with each one slightly more varied from the last. Before opening an account it's important to consider what each site has to offer and how customers will best benefit from the sites you choose. Figure out which sites are best for your demographic because without a fully developed plan you could end up squandering time and effort on irrelevant sites – remember of the millions of users not all of them will be your customers.

It is worth mentioning that social media is not just another avenue for advertising and therefore should not be used as an opportunity to contrive loosely veiled sales pitches. The emphasis is on establishing trust and building relationships with people who might express an interest in your products further down the line. Although it doesn't hurt, the objective is not to try get as many 'likes' or 'follows' as possible, concentrate instead on providing fun and interesting content and remember it is not a place to post stuffy financial reports! Use your imagination and be creative: run competitions, release sneak previews of new products, tell customers of any charity events the company takes part in. You can also use it to learn what your customers want, to improve what you already offer them, or to respond to any feedback. Social networking sites are ideal for companies who have a story or something interesting to say, take some pride in your company and its accomplishments and use the opportunity to break down the corporate wall by injecting it with human interest. People don't always trust companies so one of the best things to do is to humanise your business, which is after all made up of people and what better way to do that than put a live person in front of them?

Sites such as Twitter and Facebook are often used by customers to highlight problems or issues they have encountered with companies or products. Although no one enjoys receiving criticism, at least you are in a position to address problems and deliver direct feedback. This is



Facebook

The most recognised site Facebook connects millions of individual profiles together on a personal level. It is also a place where businesses can create company profiles providing information, pictures, videos and regular updates. Similar to a good company website, it is easier to update and can also be used to actively communicate with interested parties in a two way exchange as well as being a great way to amass a fan base.

Numbers: One billion monthly active users.



Twitter

Twitter can be used by businesses to reach customers in real time and vice versa with the use of short (140 characters) 'tweets', easily sent from a smart phone or computer. It is used to quickly share information with people interested in your products and services, gather real-time market intelligence and feedback, and to build relationships with customers, partners and influencers. Essentially Twitter offers businesses an easy way to reach those interested in your company.

Numbers: 100 million active monthly tweeters and 400 million monthly visitors.



YouTube

YouTube allows hundreds of millions of people to discover, watch and share all manner of videos. As the name suggests it provides a site for the individual to upload his or her videos online. It provides a forum for people to connect with, inform and inspire others across the globe and acts as a distribution platform for original-content video creators and advertisers both large and small.

Numbers: Over 800 million unique users visit YouTube each month and more than four billion hours of video are watched each month.



Tumblr

Tumblr is quickly becoming a force in the world of social media combining the social sharing of Twitter and Facebook with an easy-to-use blogging platform. Predominately used by the younger generation and students the Tumblr community is big on sharing and re-blogging. The key to its success seems to be in short, visual blogs so try not to get bogged down in longwinded text-intensive posts.

Numbers: More than 10 billion posts and 30 million blogs.



Pinterest

Relatively new on the scene Pinterest is a virtual bulletin board that allows users to 'pin' images and links which they find interesting. Although a large majority of users are women, this statistic is slowly beginning to change. Adding a 'pin it' button to any of your images on your site allows users to promote your products for you!

Numbers: Over 17 million users but growing fast!



LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network which connects your work profile with other users in order to exchange knowledge, ideas, work opportunities as well as find suitable leads and contacts. Company profiles can be made where customers are able to review your products and services and follow your company to receive updates.

Numbers: Over 175 million users.



Google +

Google + is Google's latest attempt at a social networking site and one which might just have the legs to go the whole way. Similar to Facebook it can be used to create a company profile but also has the added bonus of working in conjunction with the world's most popular search engine. As well as gaining any programs associated with Google it also assists with optimised searches.

Numbers: Relatively new on the scene but has over 400 million users and growing.

important as too easily companies choose to ignore it. A report published last year showed that more than 70 percent of all complaints go unanswered on Twitter. You wouldn't ignore any other form of complaint so why ignore one on social media? Here are a few fairly light hearted examples of o2 responding to complaints after its network went down earlier this year.



Examples of o2 responding to complaints on Twitter

Fox at Planeta Terra

One way of attracting attention to your company is to think outside the box completely. Although exceptionally difficult, try creating an intelligent marketing campaign with the hope that it might go 'viral' - giving customers and people who wouldn't normally be interested in your company a reason to talk about you. A great example of this happened last year when German car manufacturer Volkswagen launched a social media competition in Sao Paulo, Brazil to promote the Volkswagen Fox being at one of the largest music concerts in the world - the Planeta Terra Festival. The company asked itself: "How can we let the rest of Sao Paulo know the Fox will be at the Planeta Terra?"



Volkswagen successfully targeted a specific area with a specific outcome by thinking outside of the box.

It offered free tickets to the concert but to make it more interesting hid them in 10 different locations around the city. An aerial shot of the city was up on its Twitter website and every time someone tweeted #foxatplanetterra it slowly zoomed in. After nearly 2,000 tweets the aerial view had zoomed in sufficiently to show the exact location of a set of the tickets. Whoever arrived at the destination first won the tickets and a few minutes later the next competition began. After four days of flooding Twitter with #foxatplanetterra it had become the top trending topic in Sao Paulo, successfully reaching Volkswagen's target audience right in Sao Paulo! To watch the video visit: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xa7FvS-uq_8.

Some home truths

It is worth addressing a few 'home truths' about social media and debunk some of the myths. A commonly held misconception is that social media is free. While it is true creating a Facebook or Twitter account will not cost you anything, the hidden cost often over looked is time. If you are serious about incorporating social media be aware

that it will operate at a loss in terms of effort put in to rewards reaped - at least initially. However once integrated into your business it will eventually help you meet your business goals and objectives, while boosting brand recognition and enhancing company reputation. Your social media communications plan must be as carefully crafted as any of your other marketing efforts.

Another popular belief is that you only need to spend a couple of minutes a day working on your social network sites. A recent study

examining how marketers are using social media to grow their businesses revealed that 59 percent spend six hours a week on social media while 33 percent spend 11 or more hours. The same amount of time and effort needs to be set aside as you would with any other marketing campaign, which means that dedicating five minutes during a lunch break isn't likely to be enough. Posting the odd Facebook status here and the odd tweet there does not qualify as having a social media presence either and it is also not sufficient to delegate the responsibilities to the 14 year old kid currently on work experience, just because he already spends every waking moment on Facebook! Knowledge of how to use the sites does not mean they have the maturity, the insight or the strategic thinking for the business use of social media.

It's also worth mentioning that 83 percent of online adults use some form of social media, so the old myth that it's a young person's game or that your customers are not using social media is probably not true.

One of the most frequent questions asked is: how do you measure the effect of social media marketing and how do you track the generated revenues and return on investment? The problem with trying to determine return of investment is that you are trying to put numeric quantities around human interactions and conversations, which are not quantifiable. As with all marketing campaigns measuring success is often quite difficult however there are applications





Results displayed in an easy to read, user friendly format.

available to help. Free software programmes such as Google Analytics and Hootsuite can be useful tools in tracking conversations about companies and measuring campaign results. They are able to measure sales and conversions, track how visitors arrived at your site and can highlight which parts of your website are performing well and - maybe more importantly - which parts are not performing so well.

In our industry it is very unlikely that social media leads will perform the same way that other marketing leads might. What it can do however is reach potential buyers earlier in the sales process as well as reduce the number of touch-points needed to close a sale. Having a marketing strategy in place is essential when it comes to creating a sale. Remove any possible stumbling blocks by providing content designed to answer questions which are

commonly asked or pre-empt queries that are often heard throughout the sales process. Traditional sales-related email campaigns will not work with the social media



A tool that allows other users from multiple sites to repost any articles.

buyer so bombarding them with too much information will effectively work against you. Instead provide

valuable content that is both helpful and interesting as this will help drive the decision-making process.

Social media should not be used to replace traditional marketing expenditures but instead used in conjunction with it in order to achieve maximum results. Many companies, for example, which take out advertisements in magazines or on websites which target a specific audience will often provide the links and websites of its social media sites. This enables the company to keep the advertisement succinct, clear and to the point. If a customer

trust and building up a relationship as well as strengthen your customer service – far out-way the pitfalls which, with careful planning and insight, can be mostly avoided. Social media has made it more important than ever for businesses to operate in an ethical, fair and open manner - individuals around the world share their experiences of companies so negative experiences travel fast and far.

Here are two quotes worth keeping in mind, the first of which will be important to remember and the second of which captures the essence of social media.

Firstly chief executive of Amazon.com Jeff Bezos warns: "If you make a customer unhappy in the physical world, they might only tell six friends. But if you make a customer unhappy on the internet, they might tell all 6,000 friends!" And secondly Scott Cook, owner and founder of financial software company Intuit, comments: "Remember a brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is - it is what consumers tell each other it is."

is interested then they know more information can be found by following the links provided.

You would be wrong to think that social media is just a passing trend. Granted, while no one can predict the future, the chance of the social media bubble popping anytime soon is highly unlikely, with statistics showing user numbers are still increasing month on month. Even if Facebook or Twitter were to lose popularity and go up in flames, the idea behind giving the power to the individual will remain with newer networking sites emerging as the old ones go down.

The benefits of social media – raising brand awareness, humanising your company, drawing attention to products and marketing campaigns, increasing

