

Marketing Minute ~ Harnessing the Growing Power of Facebook

According to the latest (June, 2010) reported statistics by Google, Facebook is the #1 most visited website on the Internet. The fact is that facebook.com gets 35% of traffic, followed by google.com and yahoo.com. The most interesting stat about Facebook is that the average Facebook visitor spends a whopping 44.6 minutes a day on the site! That's crazy! Facebook alone gets 570 BILLION page views a month, which is 8 times the number of page views that Google gets.

Of all the tools in the 24/7 social media universe, Facebook has become a strategic imperative as a brand builder. Consider that Facebook has the above stat, from 350 million people as active users, with more than 50% of those logging into the site daily.

In response to those huge numbers, a study by interactive marketing agency Rosetta finds that 59% of the top 100 retailers are now using Facebook as a communications tool. What's more, Gartner reports that more than 60% of Fortune 1000 companies with a website will connect to or host an online community such as Facebook to interact with potential customers.

It's a trend that hasn't gone unnoticed by Dana Hughens, CEO of PR/marketing agency Clairemont Communications. In fact, she predicted the oncoming Facebook power play. "Last year was about trying Facebook personally and some experimentation with your brand," says Hughens. "2010 is all about using Facebook to its fullest and proving ROI."

While it's safe to say that social media efforts focused on connecting with customers, increasing sales and boosting brand recognition is becoming the norm in business. Gartner goes on to state in its report that half of those companies will fail in their social media efforts.

Consequently, as more organizations jump into the Facebook fray, key strategies and tactics that truly tap Facebook's potential should be explored fully. PR News spoke with top Facebook practitioners about those areas of concentration that will enable meaningful conversations, successful outcomes and maximum power. The following is from those discussions.

Think Centralization

When planning your Facebook presence, having multiple pages is not a good idea, says Wendy Harman, social media manager of the American Red Cross. "It's much easier to have one destination," says Harman. Not only is it easier to manage, but a centralized destination allows for more diverse conversations. So whether it's the earthquake disaster in Haiti or floods in Southern California, it can all be found through the same Red Cross page.

Stephanie Agresta, EVP and global director of digital strategy, social media, at Porter Novelli, is another proponent of centralization, particularly after a campaign ends and fan activity winds down. "Then, it's best to aggregate the community into one location," says Agresta.

She cites a recent Mountain Dew campaign on Facebook, "DewMocracy," as one that has thrived on the central Mountain Dew page; more than 600,000 people have opted in on the Mountain Dew fan page.

Find Your Influencers

The mistake of creating a Facebook page and waiting for an audience to find you is more common than one might think. In getting started, extensive research isn't necessary, according to Agresta. "You can start by using the Facebook search box, typing in key words and phrases that pertain to your organization's products and/or messages." Chances are you'll find individual interests and often entire groups that are talking about subjects related to your offerings.

When initially reaching out to those influencers, says Agresta, keep in mind the informal, conversational nature of Facebook, and the difference between personal and professional messaging. "Some people are turned off by outreach from a brand or organization," says Agresta. "But, we're finding more and more that line is blurring." Bottom line: Quickly back away if someone is unhappy with your outreach, or it could result in a flurry of negative posts.

Content is King

Consider that more than 3.5 billion pieces of content (Web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc.) are shared each week on Facebook. So, repurposing your own organization's content is crucial to keeping your audience engaged with your brand and each other. Such content can include job listings, news announcements, ad spots and videos from YouTube.

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Facebook content was critical in Aflac's integrated campaign that raised more than \$1 million for charity. According to Jon Sullivan, the company's external communication manager, "Each time a piece of content went up, fans got a reminder. So they would go on again, and share that content with their friends."

Know Privacy Policies and Protocol

Because of a recent ruckus on user privacy, Facebook was forced to take an open stance with its policies. A look on its privacy information pages proves that Facebook is serious about users having control of what they see. "With your brand, of course, you want to expose it as much as possible," says Agresta. "But you need to get familiar with privacy policies of your fans."

Continual Monitoring and Updating

Most marketers know that listening is the mantra for success with Facebook. For Harman, learning and adapting are a close second and third. "The Facebook Insights page will tell you who is engaging, who isn't and when," she says. While understanding fan activity and page performance helps, "translating is a real trial-and-error process," according to Harman. The American Red Cross abides by three simple rules when it comes to utilizing Facebook. They are:

- Show insight and promote discussion;
- Provide mission-critical information, and,
- Offer action items.

Powerful Tool

Those rules have allowed Facebook to become a powerful tool for the American Red Cross. Since the earthquake struck Haiti, Harman has seen the number of fans increase from 97,000 to 144,000.

"There's been so much activity, it's been very hard to respond," she says. Facebook has proven to be effective on two fronts: fundraising, and helping people in Haiti who need services.

Harman sums up the power of Facebook this way: "I count success as whenever we serve as a medium of conversation for people who want to give or people that need help. Facebook is revolutionary because people who care about you can talk to one another."

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