



Successful Marketing in the Social Networking Era

Twitter. Facebook. While these may be two brand names heard on a typical college campus, they can also be powerful tools for the savvy corporate marketer. Electronic marketing is quickly becoming the best option for organizations that seek a low-cost yet effective way of targeting influential younger consumers. In light of the special economic conditions many organizations face, there has never been a more opportune time to take advantage of marketing through social networking websites. Successful marketing through social networking sites will provide your organization's brand with a considerable amount of exposure to some of the most influential consumers out there today. With a little bit of time and creativity, your organization's brand identity will flourish and propagate through social networking sites, resulting in increased brand awareness and a growing base of desirable consumers.

In the rush to adopt social networking as a useful marketing tool, many organizations make the unfortunate mistake of developing a blanket marketing strategy for use on all Internet websites. The problem with these "one-size-fits-all" methods is that they do not allow an organization to utilize the unique characteristics of each major social networking site to their full marketing potential. Each social networking website should be treated as unique entities unto themselves in order to best maximize a brand's potential marketing outreach. The most successful marketing strategies identify the unique characteristics of each medium and fit those aspects into an organization's overall marketing plan. Let's take a closer look at two of the biggest social networking websites around today and how their unique characteristics can assist in maximizing your organization's marketing needs.

Twitter

Twitter is the darling of social networking right now and its meteoric rise has not gone unnoticed by savvy marketers. The popularity surrounding Twitter shows that its social reach goes far beyond just teenagers and celebrities. Usage rates are up 900% since last year and the member base is still rapidly growing. Twitter is based on a continuous set of "tweets" or, in laymen's terms, short and concise sentences that announce any ideas, plans, or news to keep the other members aware of one's current thoughts and activities. These tweets are limited to 140 characters or less, but that should not deter one from using this powerful tool in accessing the public. As more potential consumers find your organization's Twitter account, they will ask to follow you or, in other words, be linked to your account. This way each person who follows you will be able to view all your tweets on their home page, and will be notified if/when you make any updates. Of course, the easiest way of letting the public know of your Twitter account is advertising the Twitter information on your organization's business cards, websites, newsletters, newspaper ads, etc. Make sure to include your organization's account name so the public can search for your account with ease.



Twitter should be used in a marketing plan as a way of keeping the public aware of any new bits of information about the organization such as an upcoming sale, any new goods or services you offer, or as a way of gauging potential interest for an upcoming product. However, news is not the only way an organization should be using its Twitter account. The more creative and entertaining tweets often garnish more attention than straightforward news items. A successful balance between maintaining your organization's image in a professional manner and showing the humanistic side of the organization in a casual manner can go a long way in the eyes of fellow twitters.

An organization's Twitter account should be one that is constantly updating, ideally about three times a day to begin with, for the main strength of Twitter is in its ability to keep the public's cognitive awareness of a brand at a consistently high level. Plus, a seemingly inactive account can become a major turnoff for fellow "twitters" and your organization runs the risk of giving the public a reason to stop following your account. On the other hand, spamming or sending out too many notices in a short amount of time can be viewed as annoying to your followers, so make sure to keep the "tweets" as relevant and interesting as possible.

Lastly, the most important rule of Twitter is to make sure your organization takes the time out to respond back to your followers. Twitter should not be viewed as a one-way medium; instead it should be seen as a way of directly conversing with your audience. One beneficial aspect of this ability is that Twitter can become an informal way of finding out what your current and potential customers think and feel about your organization. By searching for your company's name, you will be able to see what the public is saying about your brand, image, products, services, etc. As you can see, Twitter is a casual and fun way to interact with your contacts (and potential contacts!) by harnessing the power of today's most talked about website.

Facebook

Facebook is another highly popular social networking site that has seen a tremendous rise in membership and activity over the last year. The main purpose of Facebook centers on creating a profile page filled with various sorts of information, and any organization can take advantage of this to boost awareness for their brand. Facebook allows organizations to create their own "pages" as opposed to a regular profile page that an individual would create. These pages serve as the informational window to your organization. As other Facebook members search or come across your organization's page, they can select to become a "fan" of your brand. When individuals become a fan, they will be able to view any updates that you do to your organization's page. Any new posts and/or photos added to your page will show up on the individual's personal profile. This is a great way to keep your "fans" up-to-date with the latest happenings of your organization, and provides you a simple, effective, and cost-free way to keep your brand name fresh.

Postings on your organization's page can consist of anything from new product announcements and sale alerts to web links to any publicity your brand has received. For instance, a link to a positive review or a magazine article about your organization can help boost the positive awareness level of



your brand, and your Facebook account may help direct those who would otherwise not have been aware of this information to your article or review. Hyperlinks that lead back to your organization's own web address should be included throughout the page, as this will help drive traffic to your own website.

As on Twitter, communication with the public should be a two-way flow, since fans of your page have the ability to post their own comments about your brand on your "wall", which is Facebook-speak for your home page. Unfortunately, the canon of Facebook states that the colors and fonts cannot be changed on your organization's page so it is very important to make sure that your page includes many relevant photos, videos, and attractive corporate information (verbiage), in addition to constant new posts.

The default image for your organization's Facebook account should be a simple and easy-to-see photo of your brand's logo or wordmark. Photos should be uploaded and grouped into albums and the pictures selected should be of your product on display and/or the services you provide in action. Photos and videos can be uploaded that show behind-the-scenes footage from your organization's daily operations to give the public a glimpse into the humanistic side of the company. Even photos and videos from a charity event sponsored by your organization would be relevant to post onto Facebook.

Information placed on your organization's Facebook page should include all the basics of your company such as your address, telephone numbers, corporate website, and hours of operation. In addition, don't forget to advertise the fact that your organization has a Facebook account so that the public knows how to find you on the website!

As with Twitter, make sure to cultivate your organization's Facebook page, ideally around once a day, and never let the page sit idle for more than a week at most. Remember the goal of using Facebook and Twitter is to keep your brand in people's minds as they think about their consumer choices. By fostering this connection between your organization and the public, a relationship will occur that can not only boost your bottom line, but also help to create positive feelings about your brand in the present and future. It's important to remember that using Twitter and Facebook should be a fun and creative experience for you, the savvy marketer. By utilizing these two powerful social networking websites, your organization will have two powerful marketing tools at your disposal and you will be on the road to "virtual" success in no time!

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