Create brand engagement with multiple social media channels

To engage users across all networks, brands must consider dynamics specific to each social network and the reasons users spend time on those sites.

Twitter

Twitter is unique from other platforms due to its 140-character restriction on messages.

Users are drawn to the network as a place to create and access breaking news and information quickly.

Twitter's use of hashtags (#), user names e.g. @ajkb and short links makes it easy for users to search what other people and brands are posting.

Users expect fresh, real-time content, which makes Twitter an ideal venue for brands to communicate special events and time-sensitive promotions.

Linked In

LinkedIn provides a much different type of experience and is used by consumers for entirely different purposes.

It's where people look to build their professional networks, look for job opportunities, and other information related to their careers.

For marketers, LinkedIn offers a great place for brands to advertise products, services, events, white papers, and recruitment opportunities.

Pinterest

One of the fastest-growing networks, social bookmarking site Pinterest is where people collect and share photos and images of their favourite interests, hobbies and events, often by location.

For marketers, Pinterest can serve as a destination for users to peruse and discover a brand.

Pinterest is the perfect platform to develop aspects of a brand that may have been left offline, such as its look and feel, USP, inspiration and style.

Facebook

Facebook allows for branded messages to integrate seamlessly into users' social conversation stream.

It also features social endorsements from users' friends (the average is now over 300 per user).

As such, Facebook is a destination where marketers can generate high-impact engagement with their brand's message to large user groups.

Wordpress

Wordpress is the world's best known blogging platform and now powers one in six of the world's new websites, due to its free content management system and easy to use website templates.

Wordpress helps you create a position of 'thought leadership' for brands using blogs on single topics of interest for a chosen audience or group.

Google +

Google+ offers brands several unique tools to get their messages to target users. Brands can share expertise, get customer feedback, launch new products and share exclusive information through Hangouts: face-to-face multi-person video chats.

Google+ Circles also enables brands to publish personalised updates to certain customer groups, based on geography, gender and age.

YouTube

YouTube, in addition to being a platform for entertainment content, is an excellent resource for consumers who are searching for video-based product and instructional information.

Millions of consumers visit YouTube daily to find information all about products and services.

The average YouTube user watches 5 hours of videos each month, so is ideal for brand messages.

Preparing yourself for social media

Social's integration into your overall marketing strategy may require you to think differently about how to structure your marketing operations and resources, and about how social media fits in to company-wide policies and procedures.

Social marketing expertise and resources within enterprises are typically limited, so how do you best utilise scarce resources across the organisation?

How do you maintain proper control and standards for social media marketing without creating bottlenecks and impeding the speed and agility required for effective social marketing?

A 'hub and spoke' organisational model works best to scale social marketing and empower company-wide coordination and accountability.

The 'hub' is a team of expert resources that includes social marketing strategists and content specialists. They support an array of 'spokes', teams that represent different products, regions, and other units in the organisation active in social media.

Spokes include the leads within the organisational unit they represent – the 'subject matter experts' responsible for their group's social media activities.

Key social media policy questions

1. What are the goals of your social media policy?
2. How do you update your policy and reinforce it?
3. Will you encourage employees to participate in social media as a representative of your brand?
4. Which networks do you maintain presence on?
5. How will you maintain a consistent social tone and style across these networks?
6. What information do you permit staff to share?
7. How will you monitor conversations about your brand on social channels? Who will monitor these conversations?
8. How to respond to users who communicate with your brand via social channels? Who will respond on your brand's behalf?
9. Who is authorised to proactively post on your brand's behalf? Does this authorisation account for different regions and teams?
10. What constitutes a social media 'crisis' for your business? What is your process for handling a post that could be categorised as a crisis?

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Integrate social media into your own marketing mix

Social Media needs to be an integrated part of your overall marketing mix, rather than a separate activity. Treat social media as a core marketing element together with advertising, events, web, email and other marketing.

To help integration, marketers have begun increasing social media budgets: social marketing percentage spend of marketing budgets is projected to increase from 8% to 19% over the next five years.

Despite this trend, however, many marketing leaders don't believe that their social media activities are still strong enough or well enough integrated with their overall marketing strategies.

Establishing a social media policy

As the popularity of social media grows, you must account for the fact that the people with the closest connection to your brand, your staff, are likely to be active on almost all main social media channels.

While your employees are an excellent source of brand advocacy and evangelism, they can also threaten your brand's reputation if they comment or behave inappropriately on social sites.

To mitigate that risk, develop a company-wide policy that clearly defines acceptable (and unacceptable) behaviour in social media, and dictates how staff can effectively communicate your brand message.

Be sure to also include guidelines about confidential and proprietary information: how each should be treated and balanced against the transparency that consumers increasingly expect from social media.

Providing your staff with these resources takes the guesswork out of determining what's appropriate to post, tweet or share. It also increases the consistency of communications about your brand.

Consider delivering these resources to your staff as part of a company-wide social media training programme, ideally also delivered via your intranet.

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