

WHEN SOCIALISING MEANS BUSINESS

Reach more customers through Facebook, Twitter and blogs

YESTERDAY, Part I of this article covered how social media can help companies in their B2B marketing strategy. Now that you understand the benefits of social media, here's how to get started.

Strategy

The first step is to plan your social media strategy, which is basically an extension of your overall marketing strategy. Think of how you can leverage the various social media channels to cultivate relationships and integrate methods of communicating and selling to buyers.

At the start, focus on just a few marketing goals, for example, to boost lead generation, assist customer retention, establish yourself as a thought leader or increase brand awareness. Once you have identified your objective, you can select the social media platform that best suits your needs.

Everyone in the company must be familiar with this strategy, as all staff can be involved in actively blogging, "tweeting" or interacting with customers in forums.

Research

The next step is to do your research. Find out which social media platforms your target audience use. Some platforms may be more appropriate based on user demographics.

Different platforms have different advantages, and you should use a combination of platforms in your social media campaign to maximise the benefits.

For example, Twitter allows you to engage and interact with customers, as well as regularly provide information, updates or discounts to the follower base.

The use of viral videos like YouTube is a good way to generate customer demand and build or manage your brand. And blogs are additional tools for customer retention, brand building/ management and boosting customer demand.

Feedback

Once you have identified the right social media platform, spend time finding out what your customers are saying about your brand on tools such as ViralHeat (www.viralheat.com) or Google Alerts (alerts.google.com).

You can gain a better under-

standing of the customer's perception of your brand, including any negative ones, and that of your competitors. You may also be able to identify your evangelists and detractors, and how influential they are.

Guidelines

The final step is to put in place the right guidelines. A social media campaign will involve all parts of the organisation, from sales to PR and technical support.

Do not assume that your staff members know what to do. Establishing basic rules so that staff will know what to do when they are blogging, tweeting or responding to comments in a forum.

Here are some general guidelines you may wish to consider:

- Do not preach or focus on advertising a product or service. Instead, use social media as an opportunity to provide value to the consumer, by giving them useful information.

- Be transparent and genuine. Welcome participation from consumers on how to improve your products/services.
- Engage and participate with your audience in conversations.
- When posting comments or



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replying to others' comments, speak in the first person. Be mindful of tone, and take extra care when responding to negative comments.

- If a mistake has been made, admit and correct it. Do not alter previous posts without indicating that you have done so, or this will seem as though you are not genuine.
- Post regularly and frequently. This will encourage more followers and give readers a reason to check your blog for updates and new content.
- Make it clear when you are giving an opinion and when you are stating a fact. Your audience must be able to tell the difference.
- Participate. This includes reading others' contributions, linking

to different social media platforms and understanding underlying themes and issues.

- Reply in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate. Having said this, always re-read your message before posting it. In difficult cases, discuss the reply with your manager or, if necessary, a legal representative.

In the social media space, perception is reality. When you post, your words represent your company and the brand. Be responsible, and ensure your content is consistent with the company's brand, values and standards. — Source: ST/ANN

■ **ARTICLE** by Jaspreet Sidhu, operations manager at GetIT Comms.