



Three foundations of social media

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Social media has gone mainstream. There are millions of people using it and the lure to directly tap into a vast number of people is extremely appealing to business. The technology enables a two-way discussion, a unique conversational tool that facilitates people connecting and sharing information. Valuable information can be gained in respect to customer insights, what they buy and what they care about. Social media, however, is not all about marketing and press releases although this can be part of it. It is primarily a 'social' tool. How to leverage this for business means understanding that the conversation is where the value is. The ease of using social media tools does not necessarily link to how successful they will be for business objectives. To create real business results takes focused time and effort involving a gradual and measured approach.

By giving thought to how your business can approach social media improved opportunities are achieved which are more likely to suit your business needs. At the moment it may appear that there are no ground rules in respect to social media. This, however, is far from accurate as there are key foundation principles that allow guidance when implementing a social media plan. Three of these foundations are:

- Develop a strategy
- Listen to your audience
- Create content for your customers

Let's now look into these in some more detail.

Develop a Strategy

This is an important part of social media. If you don't have a strategy in place when choosing to have a social media presence you are basically squandering time and money. Don't be under any illusions that because the technology is free it won't cost you money. A sustained amount of regular time is needed to interact with the technology to eventually gain results.

There are a number of aspects that go into developing a social media strategy. One of them is identifying the business goals for the social media plan. Without a clear understanding of this your program is worthless. If you don't know what you are trying to achieve or whom you are targeting then how will you know if your plan is working? Some examples of viable goals could be to increase brand awareness, source new ideas or grow the customer database. Your strategy need not be a complex plan. Depending on your goals, it could actually be quite simple. Each goal may have a different approach that is why it is important to know what you are trying to achieve. It also allows measuring return on investment, difficult as it may be to do for social media, much more feasible.

Listen to what your audience is saying

Social media is a tool that facilitates conversations. Before a business can be a part of those conversations, they need to know what people are talking about so as to determine how best to contribute. You are probably wondering how this can help your business? These conversations hold valuable information if you are prepared to hear what users are saying.



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Listening is becoming a new type of marketing. Although this may not appeal to marketers who are more renowned for talking, listening is compulsory in the social media context.

Social media is not simply a matter of marketing or being online and setting up a Facebook account. Listening involves monitoring what people are saying and then understanding what is being said so you can engage in the conversation. It provides an opportunity to learn what people really think about your brand, what they are saying about your competitors and what they actually want. This is significant intelligence that can be used by business to their benefit if they are willing to stop marketing and are prepared to listen.

The online tone of voice is also crucial to understanding whether conversations are negative or positive. If they are negative, it is up to the incumbent to find the cause of the issue and put it right. By being proactive important consumer issues can be solved, trust and confidence can be increased and your business can be seen in a positive light.

Create valuable content

One of the most challenging aspects of social media is creating the content. It can be time consuming and frustrating particularly when nothing happens and you feel as if you are wasting time. However, the point to remember with social media is that it takes time to get results. This is the reality of the participatory aspect of the web.

Creating quality content is neither about marketing nor a matter of press releases or making statements. It is about giving information that solves the consumer needs. It is a process to build trust and credibility, to show the audience that you have experience and expertise in your field. If you have done your research accurately you will be tapping into the right audience and therefore building up users. Once you have built up trust and confidence, users will turn to you when they have a very specific need. However, this may take months so be patient and do your research.

What this article has explored is a very basic outline of some social media fundamentals that allow a structure to be formed around an online media presence. Creating a plan can be time consuming but it is necessary. The practice of jumping in and utilising every platform available will guarantee frustration and disappointment. Allowing some time for planning will in the long run put you on the path to success. It is important to remember strategy first, tools second.

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