



## Why social media are 'absolutely crucial' to businesses

**In today's age of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and MySpace, social media constitute "an absolutely crucial part" of doing business, as many consumers around the world use social networks, says Thomas Crampton, Asia Pacific Director of 360 Digital Influence, an internet marketing communications arm of Ogilvy Public Relations.**

According to a recent report from advertising research firm Nielsen, the number of people around the world using social networks grew by nearly 30 percent from 244.4 million in February 2008 to 314.5 million in February 2009. The report also found that web users across 10 countries spent about five and a half hours on social networks in February this year, an increase of over two hours from the same period a year ago.

"The consumers of any business now are using social media whether that business is a consumer-focused business, or one that is selling business-to-business," says Crampton, a former journalist at the New York Times and the International Herald Tribune.



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Social media are "a crucial way for consumers to make a decision before purchasing. They'll do searching and they'll often end up on blog sites or forums. And for somebody in a business-to-business company, considering the services or products of a business-to-business company, will look at the reviews. They will research and look online and often again what they will end up on are social media websites."

"So pretty much every company should have some sort of social media policy and strategy. If they don't have a social media strategy that is a strategy in and

of itself, because they are going to be spoken about by consumers and by people online whether they are involved or not.”

Speaking to INSEAD Knowledge on the sidelines of the Reporting New Realities international media conference in Hong Kong, Crampton says social media is a useful marketing tool. “If you can connect with people who are interested in your company or like your products, then you will have a much higher likelihood of keeping them as loyal customers who will come back and recommend you to their friends.”

Furthermore, using social media can help companies deal with bad press, or in the case of one client company, a perennially hostile blogger, Crampton notes.

The client, a major technology firm in California, had been getting negative comments about its products from an influential Australia-based blogger. Whenever the client rolled out new products, the blogger would consistently write scathing criticisms.

Crampton’s company, 360 Digital Influence, believed that the blogger had an implacable hatred of its client company, and that the problem could not be resolved by arranging for a “friendly conversation” between the blogger and the CEO.

“It was clear that this was a passion that this person had against this company for whatever reasons. We couldn’t really understand what the root of it was.”

Crampton’s company therefore advised the client to ignore the blogger and to instead engage with the Australian technology community to improve its public relations. To that end, the community was given access to the client’s senior research and development officials, as well as tours of upcoming products.

Subsequently when the hostile blogger again panned a new product of the client’s, the comments were met by hostility from other bloggers, says Crampton.

“Many of the bloggers whom we had engaged with, and some with whom we had not, started turning on the blogger who was attacking that company.”

“And they said, ‘wait a minute, you call yourself a professional tech blogger but you write bad things about this company. What are you thinking? Why are you doing this? What is your problem? Are you really an objective observer or are you somebody who is running a crusade?’ And what quickly turned from a negative review of this product became the blogger defending himself against these

accusations, so it changed the entire dynamic.”

Asked how he developed a different tone of voice as a blogger after working as a journalist, Crampton says writing for social media is very different from writing in the traditional media.

“The writing is much more of an iterative process. You’re not trying to get a final product, you are developing something over time. I would never have dreamed of writing a newspaper article where I would put out a question, you know, ‘does anybody know anymore about this?’”

“Whereas in blogging you would tend to do that. The length of what you write is quite different ... I tend to break into chunks what I write online. So it’s a very different style of writing and approach to what you’re doing. You are more trying to spark conversation within a community than you are trying to give the definitive answer to what happened today.”

So is it easy for companies to develop a conversational tone rather than to just use methods that look like pure marketing?

“Developing a personality is something that we cannot do for a company. Companies have to develop their own personalities and we can help them through the process of figuring out what their personality is, but we can’t invent something,” says Crampton.

You can’t fake social media. If you’re faking social media, you’re misleading people, which is a bad thing to do. You’re misleading your customers and somebody is going to figure out that that’s not really you. So we need to develop an authentic tone of voice. We really need to have an authentic sense of what that company is, who they are. And what we do is help enable them to bring that authentic voice out and amplify it as much as possible.

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