
The Danger of Siloed Social Media



By Joerg Niessing , INSEAD Affiliate Professor of Marketing

Many companies treat social media as a separate entity to their branding and marketing channels. Those able to integrate it with their brand and marketing strategy are the standouts.

In early 2012, McDonald's launched a social media campaign to try and inspire customers to tell heart-warming stories about happy meals under the "golden arches" using the hashtag, #McDStories. But the community responded in a less appetising way than McDonald's had anticipated, with stomach turning horror stories about bad experiences with the food and the brand in general. The brand had tried to engage with its community by giving it a blank cheque that was quickly filled in by anyone with an axe to grind. Without a solid objective in mind, the brand position was damaged.

This is a good example of a lack of integration between a social media campaign and the overarching brand strategy of a company. Often, companies forget to think about these strategic aspects:

What does my brand stand for? What are the functional and emotional brand benefits that I want to communicate? What customer group(s) do I want to target? What is the right platform to use? Often companies don't think about these questions when designing their social media campaigns and a single

YouTube video or tweet can dilute the value of a brand that took many years to build.

On the other hand there are very good examples of brands that ensure their social media campaigns fit into the brand promise they would like to send, such as Evian or Heineken.

Where social media campaigns go wrong is when marketers tend to think of social channels as yet another push channel such as TV or radio advertising. Many marketers are too reliant on traditional approaches and they underestimate the fundamentally different nature of the medium as a platform for engagement, a two-way street with customers.

The mistakes brands make

In general, there are three common mistakes brands make in social media strategy:

1. Not staying customer oriented
2. Targeting everyone instead of focusing on key brand benefits
3. Not integrated with the marketing mix

A very important rule in marketing is to be customer oriented. As simple as it seems, the concept is lost in many social media campaigns, where the marketers have forgotten to come back to their end consumer. What do they want? What do they expect from my product/brand? Many campaigns focus narrowly on brand awareness and forget about the brand image. It doesn't help to have millions of views on YouTube if the brand is sending the wrong message. While subtle and indirect engagement is desirable, it should always be done with customer service in mind.

Brands also think that being on social media means they need to reach a wider audience. While the channels give them that potential, they often try to overstretch their brand positioning and dilute their brand equity in the process. Sticking to "who is my target audience" is essential and exponentially more important in the digital world. It is more important to engage and communicate with your target than being passive with millions of followers. The expression from Paul Ricard, founder of Pernod Ricard, before social media had even been invented is even more true today: "You have to make a new friend everyday". In today's social media landscape, one true friend is more important than 10 passive ones.

Social media is another channel and its nature is different to the traditional push channels of marketing, but it should still be integrated into the mix of existing channels to complement their activities.

According to an IBM study of Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs), 68 percent of them feel unprepared to manage social media. But according to Forrester Research, 70 percent of U.S. online adults trust brand or product recommendations from friends and family and 46 percent trust consumer-written online reviews. Therefore, there is a worrying disconnect between the ability of companies to be there for their customers and the opportunities that these increasingly social consumers represent.

The winning formula

Those able to create campaigns that gain resonance and a following are those using social media as a package of efforts to connect and engage with consumers, as we can see from Heineken, a company that has successfully integrated social media into its fun and experiential brand image.

Heineken knows something very important: 65 percent of its target audience watch television while using another device. While TV advertising is used as an entry point, the brand also distributes commercials on YouTube and is present on Twitter and Facebook to meet this younger target group on multiple touch points. But even more importantly, they are sending *consistent* messages that fit their desired brand positioning.

This is critical for building trust and rapport. Its fun television advertisements of **comical walk-in beer fridges** full of Heineken, go hand-in-hand with online campaigns, such as “**#Dropped**”, that enter real-life airport travellers into games of destination roulette. The approach consistently relays a fun and experiential brand promise.

It's like organising a party

The best way to envision setting up a social media strategy is to think about it like you're organising a party. What is the occasion? Who do you want to invite? What is the theme? Where are you having the party? These questions are all relevant elements of a social media strategy. The occasion is your objective, the invited guests are your target audience, the location is your channel(s) and your theme is your content.

As the host, you own your party, it's happening in your house or venue. You also set the agenda with the activities. In a social media setting, we call this owned media. But what happens at the party among the guests is earned media, which is when the guests take over. Everything that is done or said about the party, i.e. your brand, is what you've earned by having a party. What they say afterward is a gauge of your success.

Where do you sit in the funnel?

Before positioning such campaigns, however, consideration should also be given to where the brand is in the branding funnel. The approach taken by **Blendtec** to create video content of its blenders by putting iPhones, keyboards and Justin Bieber DVDs in a blender was about building brand awareness. The 300+ million views on YouTube of over 150 videos took an ailing brand to world fame, boosting sales by 700 percent in four years.

Heineken on the other hand, is a brand that already has awareness because of its legacy and mainstream marketing. Its social media campaigns aim to take it from awareness to consideration and purchase where dialogue with the audience is a key element of engagement as shown in the #Dropped campaign.

A strategic approach is a must. Clarity of objectives, target customers and channels is essential. But the most important link in the chain is the one that hooks your social media strategy to your brand or business strategy. How do you measure the effectiveness of social media within a broader marketing strategy? That will be the subject of my next post.

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