
Leveraging Communities to Create Social Media Momentum



By , INSEAD Assistant Professor of Marketing

As social networks become increasingly ingrained into brands' communication strategies, organisations need to take a more global and creative approach to understanding the dynamics and cultural fabric of their target communities

Successful digital and social media strategies rely on a company's ability to leverage online connections and develop real relationships within social networks relevant to its businesses in both business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) settings. But in an ever changing world with stifling (often unexpected) competition, strategists need to think deeply about the market conditions and cultural fabric of online communities. In doing so, they should look at ways to not only access them and initiate relationships but make a meaningful impact on the daily community that can help meet the company's needs and goals of their company.

There is no fixed path to success. The perfect strategy should be tailored to suit the idiosyncrasies of target communities as well as the specific objectives of the company. Put simply, companies need to be creative and systematic in the way they go about designing their community strategies.

Looking back at **Nokia's Push Snowboarding campaign**, a pioneering example of this approach, provides rich insights into how companies can initiate a powerful brand momentum.

How Nokia found its niche

Social media was a fairly new phenomenon when Nokia launched its N8 smartphone in 2010 – the first device to run on its Symbian 3 mobile operating system – but it was already widespread enough for the company to realise that it would have to take an innovative approach to promoting its latest technology if it was to trump the smartphones launched by early market leaders, Apple and Samsung.

Getting back on top required their device to be seen to be better than their rivals. They had to find ways to stand out and create a buzz around the product.

To do so, they sought to create a campaign that would highlight both the new N8 technology and the many different ways phones could be used, by demonstrating the device's ability to capture, share and communicate information that consumers within their communities would value.

As a first step in designing the campaign, Nokia had to decide what community to target. Based on secondary research the company decided to target the snowboarding community, a niche group of sports fans who embraced new and exciting technologies and were looking for ways to enhance their sporting experiences. The snowboarding community were already well versed in cutting edge social media and sharing experiences over platforms such as YouTube. Research showed snowboarding was one of the most watched sports at the Winter Olympics in 2010. Its eye-catching nature convinced Nokia, that while the community was small (too small as it turned out) this was the ideal target for the N8 social media launch.

Careful customer analyses noted that snowboarders had no means to track their runs and compare their performance with peers or professionals – although this was at the heart of their conversations and interactions. To address this gap Nokia's global marketing team came up with the idea of developing a set of sensors that could be attached to a snowboard and snowboarder, record performance data – speed, air time, heart-rate and rush – and transfer the information to an app on the phone, effectively turning the Nokia N8 into a dashboard for the rider, enabling them to share

their information on social media and compare themselves with their peers and the professional snowboarders who were engaged on the Nokia team. As such, the device acted as social glue within the community, providing significant value to community life.

Becoming an intrinsic part of the community

The “Push Snowboarding” campaign integrated partnerships not just with snowboarders but with snowboard makers (Burton), and amateur developers and creative technologists who were engaged to use the collected data to develop their own projects.

By involving these influencers and identifying common practices, goals, aspirations and habits, Nokia was able to target the culture of snowboarding – the jargon and rituals – to revolutionise the user experience through digital.

The strategy was primarily executed through platforms such as YouTube and Twitter, with smaller contributions from TV ads which were used to redirect the target audience back to Nokia’s Push Snowboarding website where consumers were able to actively engage with snowboarders and put forward ideas for improving the app. This involved them in product development and provided more material to feed its growing digital community.

The campaign was unique both in how it was implemented – integrating partnerships with brands and its use of social media at a time when companies were only beginning to understand the new media platforms and communities – and by the way it introduced metrics through which its success could be evaluated. Measuring more than just visits to a Facebook site or mentions on Twitter and LinkedIn, it tracked customer engagement, changes in brand and device preference, ROI, awareness and sales.

More than just marketing

Push Snowboarding was a bold step that used social media to develop the N8 while generating awareness and engagement with the product. It was not just about marketing the device, but about proof of concept, demonstrating the feasibility of the new technology and giving hints as to what the digital future might hold.

A post-project assessment of the campaign carried out in four countries showed an improvement of 3.2 percent in brand preference and 14 percent in device preference. The campaign delivered 18 times more value than

invested, with more than 4 million phones sold in the year following its launch.

It reached 290 million people across the world, largely through its social media platforms and channels such as Sky Sports - including 8.2 million people via Twitter - while generating 35,000 hours of viewing on YouTube.

While they reaped many benefits; increasing awareness, engaging a community and strengthening the brand personality, this campaign alone was not enough to meet Nokia's ambitious goal to beat iPhone sales and ultimately expand its technology and reputation among the general public. Experience has since proven that in order to give a brand full momentum, brands need to not only pay close attention to the qualitative and quantitative fit between communities and their strategies, but like Nike+, they should place their community approach at the heart of their digital strategy.

Finding a unique edge

While the N8 did not become the leading smartphone in the market, the Nokia strategy broke new ground. Through its bold vision and open, avant-garde approach the company was able to integrate itself into a community and leverage this relationship as no other company had, using creative partnerships and a unique blend of social and traditional media, ultimately paving the way for a new generation of community-driven strategies.



David Dubois is an assistant professor of marketing at INSEAD. You can follow him on Twitter [@d1Dubois](https://twitter.com/d1Dubois)

Follow INSEAD Knowledge on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/inseadknowledge) and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/inseadknowledge)

Find article at

<https://knowledge.insead.edu/strategy/leveraging-communities-create-social-media-momentum>