

Social Media Refresh

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Are you committing one of the seven deadly sins of social media?

The importance and effectiveness of social media as a mainstream marketing tool is not news to any of us.

According to a recent HubSpot report, the amount of time global consumers spend on social media has grown 250% in the past two years. Even small mom-and-pop businesses are recognizing the importance of

Key Takeaways

- ❑ The amount of time global consumers spend on social media has increased 250% in the past two years, according to HubSpot.
- ❑ To make sure you're not misusing social media, ask yourself whether you're attracting and retaining fans and followers with consistently engaging, recognizable brand images across your social channels.
- ❑ Don't just target your social media to millennials. The Pew Research Center reports that people age 65 or over are the fastest growing age group on social media.

social media as a cost-efficient marketing tool. But there continue

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to be misconceptions about the use of social media as a part of a marketing program, and these misconceptions are hurting brands of all sizes.

Is your company a victim of one of the continued misconceptions or misuses of social media? Here's a checklist of important questions to ask yourself.

1. Are you attracting and retaining your social media fans and followers with a consistently engaging and recognizable set of brand images or image styles across all of your social media channels? Take a tip from Amazon, Square, GoDaddy and other social media greats who have turned social media engagement into an art form with core storytelling techniques. Target and Skittles have also created Facebook cover pages that tell their brand story in a visual and memorable way.

2. Are you offering ways to engage in social media that make your brand more human? Consider the approach of Unilever with their Axe brand of male grooming products promoted on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Per Unilever, Axe is "more than just a leading men's grooming line, it's a lifestyle brand that reaches guys unexpectedly through unique experiences where they live, work and play."

The Converse brand builds social media spin around the use of their products in customers' daily lives, sent in by an adoring and engaged public. Perhaps the best of all is Nutella, whose use of great timeline links truly set them apart from other brands in an original and highly memorable way. Many of these brands help humanize themselves by bringing the public inside the process. Pose interesting and perhaps even offbeat questions in your social media channels to engage with your audience and also to generate a sense of fun, which quickly becomes a part of your brand promise.

3. Does your social media have a consistent voice? Is it in sync with the more managed aspects of your brand?

Developing and delivering a consistent social media brand voice is not an easy task, and it's equally as difficult for large companies with whole social media departments as it is for a handful of employees who share social media admin responsibilities in a smaller company. It's easy to delegate the "monitor and response" functions to younger employees who may express more of a feel

for social media, but all employees should have a broad enough sense of the company's vision, mission and ethos to adequately represent a public face of the firm. Developing a voice in social media is an effort that should be given some attention. Is the approach, language, style and manner of delivery consistent across all those with social media input? If not, the development of a style sheet might be in order.

4. Does your company position its social media to people age 18 to 34?

If the answer is yes, you may be missing out on a key social media demographic group: seniors. People over the age of 65 are the fastest growing demographic group on social media, according to the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project. Laura Carstensen, who directs the Center on Longevity at Stanford University in California, stated during a November 2013 interview on NPR that people age 65 and older, more than half of whom are now on the Internet, are "coming to old age with a lot of technological sophistication." Those 65 and older are aging baby boomers with a greater wealth stream than any prior generation—they're very tech savvy and youth-oriented. Make sure your social media posts and messages don't leave this group disenfranchised. Decide who your social media target is based on the style and subject matter of your posts. If you haven't taken inventory of your social media brand position, we suggest a post-haste review.

5. Are you failing to respond in a timely manner or responding defensively to complaints and unfavorable customer comments posted in social media?

Responding with true concern, without defensiveness and in a manner and style that lets every one of your social media fans know you care about all of them and their experience with your brand or company can be true marketing gold. Some of the best companies quickly take a complaint offline but respond publicly with a willingness and openness that leaves a lasting and favorable impression. And most importantly, don't delete those comments—no matter what, they will have been seen by a few, who will watch for your response with interest.

6. Does your social media content include links to your products and company website?

While your social media activity should avoid predictable or sales-y content, you can keep your social media followers interested and engaged with your brand, company and products by linking to your website content. Is

your company involved in green initiatives, has it recently won industry awards, or do you have an interesting blog? Brands that demonstrate sincere passion for their products, and the people who use them, are very compelling to consumers. Consider openly advertising your website on your cover page or including it in a social media graphic that makes it memorable. This helps to build traffic to your site but also points your social media followers to different products, content and places within your site that they've never visited.

7. Are you over- or under-posting? Too few posts and there's never a reason for followers to remain engaged. Too many, and you just end up an overbearing nuisance. While there's no magic formula for frequency, it's important to monitor the outcomes in the same way you would approach any advertising campaign. You can't really manage what you don't measure.

While social media shouldn't be considered a silver marketing bullet or a replacement for mainstream marketing programs and efforts, it should be a core part of your public strategy and one that deserves a smart approach to support your marketing efforts. Make sure your social media manager, team or collective admin group are in sync with approach, tone, volume and attitude, and you'll quickly become a social media marketing superstar.

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Joan Mancuso and Karen Stuth are both founding partners of 5 Square Research. Mancuso has more than 25 years of research experience with a background in sociology, psychology, econometrics and clinical research. Stuth has more than 25 years of experience in marketing, business development and marketing research management.

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