What Is Social Media Marketing?

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Juan needs to buy a new car but he's tired of all the commercials on the radio and TV. He considers going to Google to search for a good dealer near him but instead decides to post a question on his Facebook status: "Juan is looking for a new car. Any suggestions?"

Within minutes his friend Beth wrote on Juan's Facebook wall leaving him a message, "I just got a new car from ZZZ Dealers. As crazy as buying a car is, my experience was really good. Want the guy's number?" She also provided a link to the local dealer.

ZZZ Dealers is fortunate that one of their satisfied customers is willing to not just tell Juan, but also tell all of Juan's Facebook friends that ZZZ Dealers is a good company to deal with. Meanwhile, YYY Dealers missed the opportunity. They spent all of their marketing resources on radio commercials and Google placement. Juan never even acknowledged their marketing efforts.

The oldest and most reliable form of marketing has always been one friend referring another friend to a product or service. With the proliferation of so many online, social websites, people are connected to each other in new, agile, and quite public ways. The marketing practices of any business who wants to be successful today and tomorrow will be involved in online social media marketing.

What is Social Media?

Media communications have changed. Traditionally, the term "media" has been expressed in the context of how one communicates to another. Today, as applied online, new forms of media have emerged that not only allow one to communicate to others, but allow the recipient of the message to interact with the author.

In traditional forms of media such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and billboards, the author sends their message to many people and is often disengaged from any reaction about the message. New social forms of media such as blogs, wikis, and online communities allow the receiver of the message to interact in real time with not just the author, but also with a community of individuals. It's as if the media author is standing at the intended audience's office water cooler engaged in the thoughts, excitement, and even complaints about a topic.

What is Social Media Marketing?

Social media marketing is the marketing strategies that smart businesses are employing in order to be a part of a network of people online. Just as friends gather in public pubs, coffee shops, or barber shops, groups of people are gathered and connected through various online tools and websites. These people rely on their online network of friends for advice, sharing, and socializing.

Many different styles of online communities have surfaced over the years. However within the last few years, newly created communities are offering more rich interaction. These marketing strategies allow conversation, connection, and a sense of community among its members.

Online Community Groups: MySpace & Facebook

Two of the most popular **online community groups** are MySpace.com and Facebook.com. What sets these as leaders is how they allow anyone to create content on their own personalized, free website and connect with their friends' websites. It's more than just linking to their friends; they are interacting with them and sharing content. These groups have become very popular because they provide the ability to connect with individuals or join groups and networks. Community members share messages, photos, videos, music, play games and socialize all inside the context of their group of friends.

Communicating One-to-Many: Blogs, Media Blogs, & Microblogs

Blogs were the first kind of websites to really leverage the ease and structure for one person to create content for the purpose of communicating with many people. Services such as Blogger.com and Wordpress.com have become the default free services for new and consistent bloggers. Blogs allow people to subscribe to website updates and the site structures and archives all content with ease. The site allows comments to be made by visitors interacting with the author (and other commenters).

Blogs are very versatile in that the content can contain just about anything allowing various sorts of **media blogs**. One can create a **video blog** by posting videos to YouTube.com, a **photo blog** by posting photos to Flickr.com, or audio files creating a **podcast** (such as one might find in the popular music program iTunes). All of these methods allow one to have a rich media presence with interactivity built in.

A business or individual may have a public profile for many of these services such as with YouTube and Flickr. Similar to online community groups, people are able to

comment, share, and connect with others around a multitude of niches.

One of the newest trends in the one-to-many content creation websites are **microblogs**. These sites, such as Twitter.com and FriendFeed.com, follow some of the same methods of connecting with each other. The difference here is that the messages are short. Twitter, for example, is limited to 140 text characters so that one can use SMS mobile text messaging to send and receive updates. Others, such as Tumblr.com, allow a more rich experience using photos, videos, links, and a few other forms of sharing. Microblogging values brevity and speed.

Communicating Many-to-Many: Multi-Authored Blogs, Discussion Boards, Collaborate & Share

Sometimes content is created online by a several contributors, not just one person initiating the topic. One of the popular ways for this to happen is to simply have **multi-authored blogs** or podcasts. Since blog technology is so flexible, it is easy to manage several authors posting content and inviting conversations thorough the commenting on their blogs.

Discussion boards are one of the technologies that have been around in one form or another since the early days of the Internet. Content is generated by many authors in a threaded conversation typically following a question/answer or discussion format. One may begin the topic thread but many subsequent interactions fill the pages with valuable content.

Collaboration sites have arisen allowing multiple authors to create a "living webpage" called a wiki. Each person in the community can edit the pages live. Instead of having discussions as the main subject, people edit the page itself. With a free account, hosted wikis are created daily by individuals, groups, and businesses on websites such as WetPaint.com and PBwiki.com. The most popular use of this technology is the web resource Wikipedia.com.

Another way of viewing online collaboration is when users **share**, **save** and/or **submit** an entire webpage for others to see. Similar to bookmarking a website, these sites allow others to see what sites are being saved and shared. There are several of these social bookmarking sites such as the popular Yahoo-owned delicious.

Some of these sharing sites allow others to submit a website allowing the community to vote the submission up or down based on if they like it or not. The popular sites move up the list while the unpopular slide to the bottom. The more popular (or most voted) sites begin to attract a lot of traffic. Two examples of submission voting sites include Digg.com and StumbleUpon.com. In each of these, one may connect with their friends to see what they are voting for.

Why Be Involved in Social Media?

Knowing that these resources are available can simply be an education for those not in the know. However, we want to help you understand the importance of being involved in these social networks for your marketing purposes.

These sites begin to serve as hubs on the web where large groups of people, usually with similar niche interests, are gathered together. The philosophy is simple: show up where your target audience is spending time. Showing up serves you in several ways:

1. Exposure to your target audience

2. Interact with your target audience

3. Share your business personality

This social marketing strategy speaks to the need for proper branding and customer service strategies in place.

Another reason it is good to be involved in social media is that your content can be sent to those interested in receiving updates. Subscribers are often offered several methods to be updated. They can sign up and can unsubscribe with ease. Therefore the ones connected to you are the ones who are most interested in who you are and what you offer.

It is also important for you to participate in the online conversation about your brand. These user-generated social media tools are where the conversations take place. Since it is easy for people to publish content, they can and will talk about your brand – for good or for bad. Being a part of that conversation is valuable and important. Your fans who write about you are influential. Your enemies can be won over by showing up, listening, and interacting. When a content-publishing enemy becomes a fan, their voice becomes quite valuable in the network – and the Internet always remembers!

Case Study: Dell

In early 2007 Dell opened a website at IdeaStorm.com. The site mimics a public suggestion box but with voting enabled for each suggestion. Anyone, after creating a free account, can add a suggestion to IdeaStorm.com that they would like Dell to read. Other members of the site are allowed to comment on each user-submitted suggestion (including Dell employees) and vote the suggestion up or down. The more votes it receives the higher priority it becomes for Dell management to take notice

and make decisions based on the popular ideas.

Since IdeaStorm.com went live, Dell has listened and implemented many suggestions generated from the site calling them "Ideas In Action" and are archived on their website (http://www.dell.com/content/topics/global.aspx/ideastorm/ideasinaction). Immediately after its launch in February of 2007 one of the highest voted suggestions was for Dell to provide a Linux-based operating system. Dell listened and within a month created an online survey to help clarify the specifics of what the public wanted. The survey was overwhelmed with feedback (http://direct2dell.com/one2one/archive/2007/03/13/7985.aspx) but Dell took it all to heart when it released Linux-based machines by the end of May that year.

Case Study: Zappos

Zappos.com sells shoes online and they thrive on great customer service. Offering a 24/7 Customer Service toll-free number isn't enough for them. Along with their store-front website, Zappos keeps a network of blogs (http://blogs.zappos.com) open with new conversations constantly. They also use Twitter.com to participate in the "Twitter Universe" by monitoring and even publishing all Zappos-related conversations on their own website (http://twitter.zappos.com).

Though Zappos also publishes casual company videos on YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/user/insidezappos), CEO Tony Hsieh admits their launch into MySpace and Facebook were not met with the best success. However, Zappos has seen a lot of fanfare and buzz by interacting with people through blogs and Twitter. Employees do not just engage with the public on their own network of websites, they monitor and comment on other people's blogs when appropriate. Most of the roughly 200 employees use Twitter (including Hsieh) to engage with each other and the public. Hsieh is also using FriendFeed to aggregate all of his social media ventures (http://friendfeed.com/zappos).

Conclusion

New social media has changed the way people connect and interact today by allowing businesses to exchange in both private and public conversation with the public in new and exciting ways. There are many tools at our disposal each with its own set of social norms, goals, and audiences. Though one can jump right into the social media marketing arena, it is advisable to have a strategy and plan to gain success. When done strategically, one may see great success by being able to have a more personal relationship with people who are interested in who you are and what you offer.

Social Media Sites Mentioned

Provided below is a list of a few of the top social media sites for each category we mentioned.

Online Community Groups

- www.myspace.com

- www.facebook.com

Communicating One-to-Many

- www.wordpress.com

- www.blogger.com

- www.youtube.com

- www.flickr.com

- www.twitter.com

- www.friendfeed.com

- www.tumblr.com

Communicating Many-to-Many

- www.wetpaint.com

- www.pbwiki.com

- http://del.icio.us

- www.digg.com

- www.stumbleupon.com

You can learn more about social media and Internet strategy by visiting www.orangejack.com and www.11marketing.com and connecting with us there. You may also consider subscribing to the Orangejack Updates at www.orangejack.com/subscribe.

Thank you for downloading, reading, and distributing this eBook!

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