

## **Social Media Marketing to Increase Brand Awareness**

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### **Abstract**

Social networks are becoming more and more widespread and they are literally conquering the World Wide Web. Facebook has managed to arrive even in poor and remote territories which apparently have nothing to do with our always on the move modern world. However, only on the African continent there are more than 100 million active Facebook users who represent 50% of the African population having access to Internet. Thus, it would be huge marketing mistake for businesses not to take into consideration this opportunity to get in touch with prospective customers (Neti, 2011). Social media is hot and has turned into a “must” for businesses looking for brand awareness. Therefore, the techniques used to attract customers by means of social networks have gained quite a high degree of sophistry (Neti, 2011). In an age in which the average internet user accesses his/her social network account at least fourteen times a day, companies cannot afford to be absent from this medium. The aim of the present paper is to present the concept and characteristics of social media and how it can be used in order to increase brand awareness.

**Keywords:** social media marketing, social networks, social media strategies, brand awareness.

### **Introduction**

Kietzmann J.H. (2001) explains that consumers used the Internet for its content: they read it, they watched it, and they used it in order to purchase various products and services. Nowadays, more and more consumers are utilizing content sharing sites, blogs, social networking and wikis - to create, modify, share and discuss Internet content. This represents the social media phenomenon, which can have an enormous impact on a business' reputation, sales and why not on its survival in an environment getting fiercer and fiercer as days pass by.

The Social Media Marketing is not such a new phenomenon as many might be tempted to believe. It did not begin yesterday or the day before yesterday. It is actually more than ten years old. The entire phenomenon began with the launch of LinkedIn in 2003. But since this is a network targeted mainly to businesses its popularity is much lower than that of the social networks dedicated to the public at large (Pradiptarini, 2011).

LinkedIn was soon followed by MySpace and Facebook in 2004. The hysteria of sharing pictures, videos and thoughts on line was augmented by the launch of YouTube in 2005 and of Twitter in 2006 (Pradiptarini, 2011). These are the main players on the market. They are doubled by some minor ones like LiveJournal (highly popular among Russian speaking internet users), MyLife, MySpace, Reddit, Tumblr, Netlog (popular in Turkey, Europe and the Arab World), Pinterest, SumbleUpon. Google decided to enter the game in 2011 with its social network platform named Google Plus, better known to users as Google+. According to reports revealed in 2013, Google+ had 300 million monthly users; quite far from the 1.32 billion monthly active users reported by Facebook in June 2014.

Companies and businesses did not remain indifferent to the increasing popularity of social media sites. A study conducted by Burson and Marsteller pointed out that 86% of the 100 most important companies present on the Fortune 500 list had an active account on at least one of the most popular social media sites (Pradiptarini, 2011). The study also revealed that companies prefer Twitter over Facebook.

### **Research issue**

The 2014 Manufacturing Content Marketing Report conducted by CMI showed that manufacturing marketers used the social media platforms less than their B2B marketing counterparts. The report also pointed out that the most important goal for manufacturing marketers was brand awareness. Moreover, the marketing divisions of companies expressed their need to connect with customers in a new and engaging way (Grieshammer, 2014).

Thus, it is not an exaggeration to say that social media marketing might soon become a vital part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marketing mix. The absence of social profiles on the “Big Three” (Facebook, Twitter and Google+) would definitely be a strategic mistake for businesses which want greater exposure and popularity on the digital market (Angelova, 2013).

### **Literature review**

Heidi Cohen (marketer for Citibank and The Economists) explains that it is quite difficult to define social media marketing since the social media environment continues its expansion and change. Lisa Buyer (employee of The Buyer Group) defines social media as the most interactive, transparent and at the same time the most engaging form of public relations. It is a combination between real time content and authentic communication.

Michelle Chmielewski (working for Sythesio) considers that social media marketing is not about individuals but about what people do in order to communicate by any possible digital means.

For SisiraNeti, social media marketing means engaging with consumers online. The websites which permit users to share opinions, ideas, content and encourage interaction can be ranked within the category of social media sites.

Marjoria Clayman from Clayman Advertising Inc. considers social media as a new marketing tool which permits marketers to understand clients in a way that was not possible previously. Clayman believes that social media marketing marks the beginning of the marketing revolution; it does not represent its end.

Waad Assaad and Jorge Marx Gómez (2011) warn that marketing done by means of social networking sites is not at all a substitute for traditional marketing. Thus, marketers should consider it

an additional channel which has its own unique characteristics and can be used in order to complement other marketing actions.

Lazer and Kelly's (1973) define social marketing as "concerned with the application of marketing knowledge, concepts and techniques to enhance social, as well as economic ends. It is also concerned with the analysis of the social consequences of marketing policies, decisions and activities."

Sisira Neti points out that social media marketing is a strategic and methodical process which can be used in order to increase the company's reputation and brand awareness among consumers.

Social Media Marketing commonly known as SMM refers to a series of techniques which target social networks and their users in order to increase brand awareness or to advertise a certain product. Marketers perceive SMM as a more targeted advertising. For this reason it is considered as being highly effective in the creation of brand awareness.

Burke (2006) defines social networking sites as: "... a loose affiliation of people who interact through websites. The web enables any person to build a vast number of relationships with others, regardless of geographical distance."

### **Research methodology**

Why Social Media? Social media marketing has numerous benefits such as: brand credibility, increase in sales, increased exposure, strong online presence which enhances the company's reliability, reduced market costs, rapid access to consumer feedback and a strong business-client relationship.

Neil Patel (co-founder of Crazy Egg, Hello Bar and KISSmetrics) informs us that 33% of consumers make use of social media networks in order to gather new information on various products, services and brands. He also reveals that 86% of the marketers acknowledge the role and importance of social media marketing for their business. The vast majority of the businesses using a social media platform within their marketing plan have experienced an increase of their exposure. Moreover, 82% of costumers have said that they have more confidence in a business if it is active on a social media platform.

Petty (2008) states that businesses and companies would be naive if they dismissed the amount of site traffic, generated by social

networks. At the beginning, online social platforms targeted a young audience (teenagers and young people in their early and mid-twenties), but now they are attracting other demographic groups as well. As a consequence, the online environment is filled with career-based social networks, shopping based social networks, as well as employee groups (Petthey, 2008).

Sachoff (2008) believes that social networks offer companies huge amount of information about its customer base. The social media gives the marketers the possibility to personalize their brand and to spread their message in a more efficient and relaxed manner.

Huge companies like IBM, Dell or Burger King have understood the potential of SMM. Thus, IBM is the owner of about 100 blogs and of various islands in the popular virtual game “Second Life”. The company has several official Twitter accounts and it is highly active on YouTube and Slide Share (Zarella, 2010).

Social media is not a platform or a recipe for instant success. It is a tool which can be used in order to obtain success if hard work is done.

### **Effective Social Media Marketing Techniques**

Weston (2008) is convinced that brand awareness is extremely important for social network marketing. For him the widgets are the perfect tools to create a visible presence in the online environment. He states that widgets offer businesses the possibility to market themselves and add value to their business ecosystem (Bolotaeva, 2011). According to Weston (2008) brand awareness can be raised only if employers encourage their employees to involve themselves in the network marketing and create an online community. Nonetheless, these activities need to be monitored in order to prevent abuse of any type.

Yu-Kai Chou (a Gamification Consultancy partner) points out that most people wrongly consider Social Media Marketing as being one gigantic technique. It is of utmost importance to understand the fact that different companies and budgets need different social media techniques. A company having a low budget cannot afford to have videos and ads shown all over the place on the display network. Business owners have to understand that SMM requires patience. A blog or a Facebook account cannot attract thousands of visitors per day in just two or three months. It is true that SMM helps you reach your target audience faster

than a billboard placed near the highway, but the reach cannot be obtained at the speed of sound.

In order to increase brand awareness by means of social media, it is very important to set clear goals which are easy to control. Such goals include: how many times per day or per week to post on the social media platform, how fast to answer to the customers' questions and inquiries and how much content to produce.

The fact that "content is king" is a well-known fact in the social media environment. Interesting and engaging content is extremely important for the brand reach. If the company blog has new, original and insightful information, there are higher chances for it to be shared by more people.

The branding strategies and tactics have changed a lot in the last years. Marketers over the world had to learn an entire new textbook filled with new rules which change constantly as the new technologies and social media platforms evolve. It is becoming more and more difficult to reach new customers and audiences in the absence of an efficient social media strategy and an engaging and solid content. According to the data obtained by iMedia Connection seventy percent of the marketers acknowledge the importance of content marketing by recognizing that it actually increased their brand awareness.

Richard Reed (founder of Innocent) advises the newbie's in the domain of Social Media Marketing to keep in mind that every business started small and also not to forget to think like a publisher. For example, Innocent has launched on the market recipe books which have managed to influence a lot the growth of their brand. Due to their content, Innocent is not perceived only as a company trying to make money but as one whose purpose is to help people live longer and healthier lives.

But Innocent has not limited its actions to the recipe books. It has a very popular blog which is characterized by extremely valuable content which engages the audience. Furthermore, the Innocent Community Manager, Joe McEwan says that it is very important to find a suitable tone of voice. This voice has to be natural, honest and engaging. Marketers must bear in mind that they address to people, to individuals, not to some robots. Thus, the clients' needs, goals and challenges need to be identified.

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Lilach Bullock considers that shareable content is the key to success when it comes to social media marketing. If the audience is given what it wants and needs, the brand awareness increases. There will be an organic engagement due to people sharing the content with friends and co-workers.

The co-founder of Upworthy, Eli Pariser, believes that a good head line is the one making the difference between 1,000 and 10,000 reading a certain blog post. Eli Pariser explains that at Upworthy the writers have to come with 25 headlines for every piece of content they produce. The curators select four headlines and the editors the last two ones which are used to experiment with.

The content should be shared more than once. The greatest benefit of this action is that the company's or the business's site gets more traffic because the content reaches people living in different time zones. Moreover, new followers can be reached in this way.

Brand awareness can be increased only if the marketer chooses the right social media sites. Thus, Pinterest is perfect for companies which sell products for women. However, it is the worst media site for advertising DIY items such as saws or drills. Wholesale companies should use LinkedIn while retailing companies should forget about it. Popular social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Google+ or YouTube bring benefits to all companies, whether small, medium or big. A blog is a must in the era of SMM.

According to Business Insider photos represent the most engaging posts on any social network. The audience and the customers should be offered links, texts, audio and video files but the photos and the infographics have a value that should not be underestimated. People remember better what they see and therefore there are higher chances for a visual add to gather more appreciation and be distributed by more people.

Yu-Kai Chou considers that one of the most effective social media marketing techniques is to manage efficiently the social media brand. This management implies creating and keeping up to date a blog, a Twitter Account, a Facebook fan page or a LinkedIn group. It means engaging people that are really interested in the products or services of the company. An efficient brand management has as result followers, visitors to site and most important of all the customers' trust and loyalty. The accounts on social networks allow companies to get in touch with their target audience and create value for them.

The greatest disadvantage of Social Media Brand Management is that it consumes a huge amount of time resources. Companies and marketers opting for this technique need both, persistence and patience. People need to trust a company or a business before signing-up for a newsletter or purchasing an item online. Trust is difficult to build and it might take months or even years.

Social Media Marketing techniques are more efficient if the marketer creates a social media marketing calendar. This can be used in order to clearly organize ideas and avoid any repetition of them. Content calendars can be used in order to make decisions such as what to post, where to post it and when. Thus, the blog post can be related to various holidays or to a certain theme.

Madhur Chaturvedi advises marketers to establish a two-way communication model. He explains that businesses which make usage of the social media tools just to spread information might not get what they expect from them. Companies that use social media networks to communicate with their client and establish a relationship with them have more to gain. There are various techniques which can be used in order to make the two-way communication more efficient. This can be achieved by posting surveys and various questions which are related to the company, its products or just general interest questions. Customers and employees can share their photos and stories on the company's Facebook or Twitter page. The setting up of dedicated customer service pages has turned out to be highly efficient.

The competition should not be forgotten. Therefore, it is advisable to analyse the opponents' strategies in terms of social media marketing. The analysis should not overlook the content of the competitors' websites, their hyperlinks and the number of their "pals" or "followers".

Clients must be offered a choice. The marketer must understand the communication preferences of his/her audience. There are people who like Facebook, while others prefer Twitter. Customers should have the possibility to choose the social platform they like in order to get more information about a certain business or company. However, the same information has to be posted on all pages. Free tools like HootSuite can be used in order to manage and schedule time on all social media pages.



### **Pitfalls of Social Media Marketing**

Attractive as it might be, social media marketing is nothing without its weak points, such as: lack of e-commerce knowledge, aggressive advertising, invasion of the users' privacy and various legal issues (Bolotaeva, 2011).

Aggressive advertising might drive costumers away. Pettey (2008) points out that, companies have to calculate their online presence, so as to annoy customers. Add scheduling should be a must while advertising a new product or service. Customers' emails should not be invaded night and day with newsletters reminding them of the latest promotions. Not even the most loyal client is pleased to see his/her Facebook or Twitter wall invaded by the same ads inviting him/her to buy a certain product. Pettey (2008) also clarifies the fact that users will not stay on the platform if the network is perceived as being too commercial.

There are various legal issues related to social networks. Skul (2008) points out that there are some media laws referring to the publishing and sharing of online content. For this reason, companies have to pay attention to a number of different advertising laws so as not to infringe one of them.

Lack of brand control is another weakness of social media marketing. Customers can use the social networks to express their opinions and experiences with a certain product or service. Their comments might be positive or on the contrary totally unfavorable. Companies have very little control on what clients write and share on social networks (Bolotaeva, 2011).

### **Conclusions**

The social media tools can be very powerful and if they are used in an efficient manner they can raise brand awareness in the online environment and not only. The social media phenomenon is growing at an incredible speed. Multinational companies having branches on two or more continents have recognized the importance and the potential of social platforms. We have reached a point in which it is impossible to make a clear distinction between social media and the online environment.

Individuals, startups, small, medium-sized and large companies need to have an online presence if they want to be competitive in today's world, in which real time information and news are not an exception, but a characteristic. The time has come for companies to adapt their marketing strategies for the online word and to take seriously the social media platforms.

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