



Achieving Engagement

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True dialogue and a meaningful relationship with your audience requires more than a “one size fits all” marketing strategy.



On Sept. 21, 2009, Zappos.com CEO Tony Hsieh tweeted, “Embarking on a social media strategy to help with marketing is like embarking on a facial muscle strategy to help w/ smiling.”

In many ways, he's right. The beauty of the social landscape is its ability to empower consumers everywhere to connect with one another in a way that is meaningful, immediate and, above all, honest. And just like all branding initiatives, if an organization puts out a communication that isn't reflective of the company's true product offering or actual brand experience, the results are sure to be damaging.

But here's where Hsieh is wrong. When a company does have a solid, competitive product offering (i.e. strong facial muscles), there are strategic moves that you can make to use the social universe to your advantage.

From a consumer standpoint, social media is arguably the greatest example of how the overall marketplace is shifting to be controlled by the consumer. Thanks to brands like Tivo, Netflix, Hulu, the iPhone and countless others, consumers are becoming accustomed to demanding the media they want, and when they want it. By engaging in social media, consumers deliberately choose which brands they want to hear from. And they can voice their opinions with complete free reign.

I don't know if it's accurate to say that social media is bigger than all of us — because it quite literally IS all of us.

The social landscape is all-encompassing; marketing is merely one of the purposes it can serve to a company, including customer service, human resources, etc. Before you can start implementing strategies, it's important to be aware of and understand the concept of true Social Engagement.

Social Engagement is using the appropriate social channels to achieve true dialogue and a meaningful relationship with your audience. Different audiences should be spoken to through different social channels and with slightly different messaging. Just like any other targeted marketing initiative, with social media, a “one size fits all” strategy will not work.

In achieving Social Engagement, generally, the end goals are simple:

- Give your existing loyalists an outlet to express their passion for your brand.
- Get every-day consumers interested in you enough to genuinely want to hear what you're saying.
- Further delight consumers so they want to say positive things about you.
- Effectively distribute offers to increase sales/traffic.

If you choose to use social media for more of a business-to-business or recruitment strategy, these goals might also include acquiring talent or focusing on potential customers/business partners. From a branding and awareness perspective, however, they remain generally the same. Social media should be used for communicating your brand personality and announcing relevant information your readers will want to hear.

In a nutshell, here's how to do it.

Make the commitment. First of all, you have to understand that social media is a commitment. Probably the most misunderstood aspect of social media as a marketing tool is the idea of the social media “campaign.” While social media tactics can be effectively used to support marketing campaigns — by serving as a valuable extension of them — social media is not a campaign in and of itself, but an ongoing conversation. To invest in social media solely on a promotional level is selling yourself short and could make you look unprofessional.

To achieve Social Engagement, it is important that you identify and commit a resource — whether it is an employee, agency, consultant, etc. — to take ownership of all social media efforts to ensure that all announcements are effectively communicated and all social “chatter” is closely monitored.

Be there when they look for you. If a loyalist of your company seeks out your brand on a social network and it isn't there, it is just as much a wasted opportunity if he or she had gone to the store looking for your product and it wasn't on the shelves, if not more so. For example, when Engauge began working with Sonny's Bar-B-Q, the company didn't have an official Facebook fan page in place. By simply setting it up, the fan page instantly attracted hundreds of fans. By filling the void, existing supporters of the brand could now be engaged.

The very first basic step you have to take is establishing a presence on the appropriate, popular avenues of social media such as Facebook, Twitter account, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc.

Make concerted efforts to build your social following. Facebook has more than 400 million users. Twitter had its 10 billionth tweet last month. The popularity of social media is astounding, and it's only going to continue to grow. From a numbers standpoint alone, it would be remiss of your organization to invest in marketing efforts but not specifically address the social universe. Whether you run a promotion to gain Twitter followers or use traditional media to promote your Facebook page, building your social following should be an important part of your marketing plan.

Once you've got them, keep them engaged. If you decide to provide an incentive to increase your social following, it is important to keep followers engaged with valuable information or continued special offers. Otherwise, there's no reason for them to stick around. For our client International Delight, we chose to give coupons for a free creamer in exchange for becoming a fan. At the height of the program, we were accumulating fans at up to 1,000 per hour. To prevent drop-off, we continue to engage in meaningful conversations with our fans pertaining to the product and keep them updated regarding special promotions.

It's also important to remember that you can't entirely control social media. People are going to have their opinions, and they're not always going to be positive. Yet, as long as the facial muscles are there, social media can help you give people a reason to smile about your product.

Editor's note: Barb Scherer is president of Engauge, a full service-marketing agency in Orlando. Scherer has more than 22 years of experience in providing clients with expertise in research/planning, account management, creative, public relations, media and interactive.

Food for Thought

Here are examples of how Engauge has driven results for client Chick-fil-A:

“It’s Linner Time” Microsite

- Encouraged consumers to stop by Chick-fil-A to enjoy a milkshake for “Linner” to increase store traffic during the hours of 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.
- Used various social channels to support the effort

Cow Appreciation Day Web site

- Promoted the concept of “Cow Appreciation Day,” when consumers are encouraged to dress as a cow to receive a complimentary chicken sandwich
- Used various social channels to support the effort