

5 steps to engage in social media

Using traditional PR to enhance your social media network





Overview

If a tree falls in the forest, does it make a sound? If you build it, will they come? It's not enough to simply create something, you must spread the word to achieve success.

Today's world is filled with the clamoring of Twitter and Facebook and all things social media, but joining in does not automatically lead to success.

While the Internet and social media are effective methods to further your campaign, yesterday's tools are not yesterday's news. Traditional PR techniques are just as relevant, if not more, in contributing to successful social media campaigns. One cannot exist without the other. Success relies on integrating your traditional PR toolbox with the new tools.

The Internet is now the third-most popular news platform. According to the Pew Research Center:

- 47 percent of online adults use social networking sites, up from 37 percent in November 2008.
- 92 percent of Americans now use multiple platforms to consume news each day.
- 46 percent of Americans say they get news from four to six media platforms and a mere 7 percent get their news from a single media platform on a typical day.

To effectively take advantage of the Internet, you must find the right balance of traditional and social media tools. Developing the strategy can be daunting but will produce measureable results. If you employ the following five traditional media tactics, you can develop a strategy that will not only help you reach and build your audience but also ensure the maximum results.



1. Distribute Your News

The first step in any process is to create awareness. Your company does something and you need to get the message out to consumers about it. Generating buzz will help get people excited about your product or service.

The Internet has made it possible to distribute your news in a way that not only sends it but also allows people to interact with the content. Using video, audio and other multimedia, the press release has become a way to “show” your news, rather than just “tell” it. These releases also play a key role in evaluating and tracking campaign success using clickable links, keywords and tags.





The State of the Union won in mainstream media, but the film-making chimpanzees were all the rage in the blogging community.

A well crafted, search engine optimized press release distributes your information to traditional media outlets, but also directly to consumers. Raising your online visibility with news releases reaches the millions of people on the Internet and offers them access to your social media network, where they can get even more great information.

As the news now goes straight to your customers – yesterday’s gatekeepers have become today’s key influencers. With the advent of the Internet and consumer journalism, the media no longer have strict control over the flow of information to the public. But, try selling the newest gadget without getting tech reporters and early adopters on board, and you will see they clearly continue to influence the impact of your news. The general population knows your gadget is out there but they still want confirmation from “the experts” that it’s good.

While the media used to determine the day’s biggest news, now that scale has tipped towards the everyday news consumer. For example, while the State of The Union dominated the mainstream press as expected, blog coverage focused on another story—a BBC production shot entirely by chimpanzees. The cute little animals won over the hearts of bloggers and overshadowed politics on the ‘net.



2. Leverage Your Relationships

Now is the time to build your relationships with the media and other key influencers to get them involved in your communications.

Apply the same rules of traditional media to this new realm of influencers; get to know them, do your research, don’t jump in and expect to know it all because no one likes a know-it-all. What will help build strong relationships? Become a trusted source who can get to the point, contribute relevant ideas, products and services and provide access to a well-spoken company representative.

According to Middleberg Communications and the Society for New Communications Research (SNCR), 70 percent of journalists said they use social networks to assist in reporting (compared to 41 percent the previous year).

PR professionals and the media have always had a give and take relationship. PR gives the media important information and the media helps PR achieve a goal. With the addition of social media, now even more influencers play a crucial role in helping drive customers to your online community. Reporters and influencers have the power to direct customers to or away from your company.

They assist in creating an open communication channel by linking to your social media, shouting out your website on the air and touting your brand.

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3. Talk to Your Customers

While reporters and opinion leaders are important, do not neglect your existing customers. Who better to sing your praises than the people using your products and services every day? Your current clients represent a wealth of assets, among which is their ability to advocate for your brand and the benefit it brings to their lives. Include them in the conversation! Real people like to get their information from other real people.

These current customers are the foundation of your social media network. They already know about and believe in your product or service. Remember the Pareto Principle - 20% of the customers create 80% of the revenue. While this may be a generalization, the principle holds true. It costs more to get new customers than it does to keep the ones you have. Treat them well, and they'll return the favor. Email them, send them coupons, ask them to join your community – and, give them an incentive to do so. You can offer anything from product discounts, an online community to exchange ideas or easy access to customer service representatives to foster brand loyalty.

Comcast took advantage of the social media arena to interact to change their public image. With customers online expressing their disappointment with the company's service, Comcast created Twitter accounts to respond. Each customer complaint was met with a response from a real person, promptly and publically to address the issue.

Give your customers a chance to get involved again. They'll help build your online community and keep your brand top of mind.

4. Have Fun

Communicating with your consumers doesn't always include a sales pitch, at least not an obvious one. Sometimes, it's about giving them an opportunity to get something for their loyalty.

Remember Publishers Clearing House? How many of us religiously put those stickers on a mail-in form in the hope that Ed McMahon would show up at our door with a giant check, a handful of balloons and a TV crew? Even though it was a one in a million shot that you, "just won a million dollars," we took it and so will today's consumers.

Promotions and contests allow for bursts of communication. Traditionally, promotions drive consumers to enter to win contests, attend events and engage with their community – the perfect audience for social media. For example, listeners are loyal to their favorite radio stations (famous for contests) and are likely to engage with the station's social media tools, creating a perfect bridge to yours.



Applying this concept to social media is a snap. Log on to Twitter and you'll find your chance to win giveaways of all shapes and sizes. Creating your social network using contesting gives you an edge. You begin the relationship by "giving" rather than "taking." To grow your social media site, capitalize on, well, capitalism. Everyone loves to win, so offer them a chance to win just for joining your online community. Once they're in, you have the chance to "win" them over with great info.

5. Birds of a Feather...

Creating events and conferences has long been a traditional PR tactic to engage with your customers and give them an opportunity to network with like-minded individuals. These on-site events are great for gathering information and meeting people with similar interests. After all, everyone wants to find a community of peers where they can talk about their joint interests...and flock together.

If you like networking with us in person, you should check us out online.

These events are also a great way to move people from the conference room into the chat room. From webcasts to parties, don't miss the opportunity to promote your online presence.

The Internet has broken down barriers and made it possible for customers to interact with you in real time, rather than wait for the big event. And, while they still like the big events, use them to draw your customers in and develop an online conversation that keeps them going until next year's conference.

Einstein Bros. launched a nationwide Facebook coupon campaign. During the last week of January, anyone who became a fan of the Einstein Bros Facebook page received a digital coupon for a free bagel with shmear. The company's Fan Page grew from around 4,000 fans to well over 400,000 in about two months. Thousands of people redeemed their coupons and actively engaged in conversation on Einstein's Facebook page. The company has built a huge online community and converted online marketing into sales.

The Verdict is In

Using your traditional media, you've created a shiny, new online community. You've announced your news, leveraged your relationships, invited your customers, had some fun and met them in person. And in return, you've created a social network ready for engagement. Now what?

Now is the time to measure your success. PR professionals today have the tools and technology to get the hard numbers to back up their efforts and can now compete with marketing and sales for company dollars. Ensure your social media strategy has met your public relations objectives and achieved quantifiable deliverables such as sales, contest entries, advocacy





and click-throughs. All the impressions, followers and hits in the world, don't mean a thing if no one is taking action. Get results that contribute to the overall company success and tie back to the bottom line.

Conclusion

By combining social media with traditional PR techniques, you can develop a strategy to truly interact with all your audiences: customers, prospects and the media. Remember what separates PR from advertising – two way communication. A fully developed program promotes action. Whether it's following a link or re-tweeting, give your audience a chance to engage with you.

You have now begun the conversation. Remember to use it to listen, inform and enhance your community.

About zcomm

zcomm, short for z communications company, is a nationally certified Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) marketing and public relations firm located in Bethesda, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C., and ranks as one of the top 15 PR firms in Washington, D.C. Founded in 1989, zcomm produces audio and video packages and distributes client content via radio, TV and Internet. Specializing in services such as radio and online news releases, satellite and radio media tours, social media, podcasts and radio promotions, zcomm uses the latest technology to deliver measureable results to industries including consumer products, food & beverage and healthcare. zcomm's services are available in both English and Spanish. For more information, visit www.zpr.com or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/zcommunications.

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