



Social Media: Not Just for National Brands

Once you understand the social media basics, you can put them to work to help achieve specific store brand goals.

By Chris Douglas

Yes, social media is the ad industry darling right now. During the MLB All-Star game, it seemed like three out of four TV commercials ended with a drive to “visit us at facebook.com/brandnamehere” instead of referencing a website.

And if you haven’t just stepped out of an episode of *Leave it to Beaver*, you’ve probably spent some time on one of the thousands of social communities online today. The question you’re probably asking yourself as a manager who deals with store brands is: “How can I get my products talked about in these groups?”

My answer? “Listen up!”

Seriously, the first and most important step is to listen. Bazillions of conversations happen every second of every day. Consumers talk about what they like, what they don’t like and, most importantly, what they want. If you have a private brand, you should be auditing these channels (these conversations among consumer groups).

So, now that you know what people are talking about, what do you do? And more important, how does social media really work?

Before the advent of the Internet and before social media existed, brands and retailers talked at consumers through one-way conversations (the 1950s-1970s comprised the Golden Age of advertising — if you don’t believe me, watch *Mad Men*). Private label products were (and still are, for the most part) behind the scenes, with retailers providing little in the way of consumer interaction. Retailers simply told private label manufacturers what types of products to provide based on the sales of national brands within their stores.

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Now, with the birth of social media, many brands and retailers are engaged in two-way conversations with their consumers. The consumer now has the power to tell brands and retailers what they want from a product, a shopping experience and, in some cases, even how they want to receive marketing messages.

A perfect example: Mountain Dew’s dewmocracy campaign. Mountain Dew asked consumers to select the new soda flavor, name it, pick the package design, create advertising and even select the ad agency to execute it all. All of this was communicated via social media.

“I’m not Mountain Dew,” you might say. Maybe not, but the rules of engagement still hold true. And how did Mountain Dew decide that a grand promotion like this would be successful using social media?



Much like a traditional marketing/media plan, the first thing companies need to do is to step back and determine a strategy. At Schupp Company, we like to use six simple steps to help set the framework for our social media campaigns:

Step 1: What's the role of social media for your store brands?

What would you ultimately like social media to accomplish? It could be a number of things: building awareness to drive sales, PR, customer service, new product development ideas — the list goes on and on. And how will your social media presence be supported in other forms of media? After all, you can't expect to open up a conversation if no one knows you're speaking.

Step 2: Do you know your customer?

Who is buying your products (or your competitor's), and what gets them talking? To get into a conversation with your consumers, you need to know exactly what they're passionate about.

Step 3: How does your customer use social media?

This is probably the most important step in the process. Social media is not much different than a modern-day sewing circle. It's a space in which groups of like-minded people hang out and converse.

Like in any other conversations, consumers are engaged at various levels. Some people like to participate and be heard; others are just there to listen. Not everyone uses social media in the same way. You need to define your customers' level of involvement and where they spend their time online. There are tools and even companies that offer assistance in determining these specifics.

Step 4: What is your brand differentiator?

The differentiator typically isn't a product benefit or attribute. It's something that defines or humanizes your brand — the extrinsic values. It's your brand voice. This is what will get people taking sides and make them talk about your brand passionately.

Step 5: How will you make it real?

Social media is about people and passion. It's not a slogan or a logo. To make it real, you need to build a conduit to your consumers that allows you to earn their trust. You have to create an experience or interaction in which people want to participate.

Step 6: What is success?

The key to success depends on your ability to define goals and know what those metrics are before you launch a campaign. Success metrics can be measured in many ways. They can be as simple as the number of social mentions, followers, fans, website traffic or even sales. Regardless of the metrics you choose to measure, ultimate success occurs when you earn the trust of your audience and they continue to share positive information with one another.

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I'll end with a caveat: It's important to remember that social media is constantly evolving. Rules of engagement exist, but they are loosely defined. To marketers, social media is almost like open-ended consumer research.

When talking to consumers, the most important rule is to truly be you — to be transparent. Don't talk to your consumers about your company or your products or tell them what you want your company or products to be. You are no longer partaking in one-way messaging. Talk to them about their interests, and in turn, they will tell you what they expect from you and how your company or products fit into their life. ■

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