

FaceBook as a platform for brand-management or marketing

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[Facebook **Inbox** 33,636 people like your changed Brand...- Click to comment.....2:10 am]

Channels creating opportunities for consumer led business growth have exploded in the last five years. A company having to wait months together to put up an extensive survey, to identify target sample of people and quantify customer perception is pre-historic. Social networks have commanded big brands to change their methodology of reaching out to their customers and building customer loyalty. Would Facebook, one of the leading social networks, work magic for the existing big buck brands and build base for the upcoming brands? Would this channel be sustainable in the years to come and give early adopters a competitive advantage?

“Should Nokia include an inbuilt lighter in its upcoming phone model?”, “Should Maggi ketchup release a tangy version?”, “Pulsar planning to enter the 300cc segment. What features are you looking for?” are questions that could be posing at you in the social network that you are operating in.

The Social network - Death race

400 million active users, with each user extending to an average of 130 friends, 25 billion pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc.) with more than 70 translations available on the site engaging close to one million developers and entrepreneurs from more than 180 countries*- the Facebook rise to power since 2004 amidst severe competition.

And what are the brands looking for?

People - More technically, Consumers - Existing, Previous and Prospective! With options of dissecting this universal set by geography, demography, Psycography or Behaviour, Facebook gives brands the leverage to reach out, understand, apply and execute specific marketing plans on their intended target segments. Capturing one person’s attention is reaching out to an additional 130 people as per statistic. Facebook’s open post mechanism makes the opinion available to all of an user’s friends.

Perception - To take realistic stock of the way the brand is perceived, quantizing brand loyalty over a larger sample, reaction levels to a recent strategic move by a firm or to measure likeliness to products belonging to a brand or multiple brands. Facebook gives the option of dedicated groups, event schedules, platforms for content sharing and public variable commenting threads to achieve the same.

Connection - To send a strong message of an exclusive relationship with its customers, give an opportunity for share of voice and reinforce consumer ownership of the brand by involving them in

deciding future strategic moves and build brand loyalty. Facebook provides options for seclusion, inclusion, privileged invites, surveys, applications, ads and contests to push brands towards a stronger connection with its consumers.

The 9 hole Strategy Commandments

1. **Number Hummer** – Social networks give the power of numbers, a high impact tool to influence opinions and build a positive feel about the brand among the masses. All that a company has to do is pick the right spread of people across different segments and make them aware of the value the brand brings with relevance and context. They initiate the viral effect.
2. **The Exclusivity Hot rod** - Nothing sells like exclusivity. The feeling of being part of an exclusive club enjoying special privileges. Firms need to spot opportunities to segment within segments bringing down the size of the fragments through contests, promotions, surveys and Questionnaires. It is matching spaces with a summation of like minded interests.
3. **What's in today is out tomorrow** – Social networks thrive on waves of multiple components. e.g. Facebook had a wave of Mafia Wars, FarmVille which pulled in a vast variety of people on to the network. Finding a way to associate with the top rated components gives leverage in terms of brand visibility, re-call value and sustains the connection.
4. **When it's Social Capital, Show Social concern** – Being a good brand in the market and establishing the social network route would be incomplete without dedicating time and resources to addressing social concerns about the environment or people either through the firm's competence or through the people who are driving the brand.
5. **Being predictable is good after all** – Showing a predictable pattern in terms of announcements, strategic decision making styles, timelines with respect to action on consumer feedback, suggestions and ideas propels the community to withstand a steady flow of participation and reduces anxieties.
6. **Advertising may be the last supper** – With the amount of content on social networks, time value of the ad to the consumer is reduced to the level of a blink. Over-advertised products tends to kill exclusivity and negates the effect of a social network connection
7. **Your primary ammo will save you** – Diverting key announcements, news, new product launches and information to social networks as the primary source of release will keep your community more aware of your brand and keep it hooked on to you.
8. **When all dogs bark, never growl** – You are positioning yourself in a social network space. Never get too formal with any of your language, content or events. People exist in social networks to remain at ease. Never startle them.
9. **Do as you do to vegetables** – Social networks are perishable products. Make it a point to be creative, infuse new energy to sustain all initiatives whether successful or not.

Achtung

Volatility – There is no living model of a social network. It's compared to a dynamic stock exchange market. Thus continuous monitoring is mandatory to predict your ground better.

Make or Break – The speed of transmission is way beyond control. In fact no control exists in a social network. One miscommunication or mishap, you could be all over the web.

Regulatory Quake – Recently, Pakistan banned the use of Facebook due to government regulation. Social networks faces this risk which might hamper your marketing efforts targeted towards specific geographic regions or might give you an unrepresentative sample.

Quicksand – If not managed in the right manner, you could end up diluting your brand by opening it up in a social network and the harder you try, the deeper you will fall. Consistency and value addition is critical to survival in social networks.

Dormancy – While many brands have managed to build big communities in these social networks, unavailability of regular content would orbit the brand and the community into a dormant stage and it requires twice the efforts to surface as against building from scratch.

Lost & Not found – With the explosion of brands in the social network community, you could be lost sooner than you think. Unless there is a clear mission or a clear value that you can provide to the consumer, it is not the time to enter the network yet.

Maybe it ain't bad after all

Stories of several disasters associated with popular brands have been dealt with and corrected only by timely and extensive communication. Facebook, as among other social networks, provide reasonable amount of advantage in the aspects of speed and coverage. But it should be done on a very selective basis. Over doing it would send a high negative current in the network snowballing the brand out of orbit despite resurrection measures.

Epilogue

As of today, Facebook is positioned well and companies already on board with a clearly defined value proposition and engagement cycle are reaping the benefits. But this will only be short-lived until another form of social network takes over. While Tweeter is one of the newer entrants to this space and may not replace Facebook completely, it is definitely a sign of a rapidly changing world with dynamic needs and patterns. Brands that wish to sustain the test of time need to be flexible and adaptable to the different channels that continue to rise with time.