

Making brands social. Getting brands talking.

If you're reading this, the chances are you have an interest in branding. As a brand strategy, design and communications agency, we see branding as a tool capable of transforming every aspect of a business. Branding influences all the ways people experience and interact with your business.

Social media moves fast. It is made up of constantly growing and dynamic platforms, even as we talk about it, it is changing. Until quite recently, the Internet was mainly an informative medium, not too dissimilar to a library, however it has become increasingly social and is perceived as one of the most important aspects of brand building and marketing, enabling powerful streams of communication. Social media has transformed how we interact with each other, so much so that we forget the medium is still quite new. Using it well is a steep learning curve – knowledge is gained through trial and error – and sometimes what works for one company, may not work well for another.

Generally speaking, the core function of social media is not new, it is something that most of us know how to do, and do so daily. It allows people to connect. For businesses, it means an opportunity to harness the power to communicate with customers, prospects, partners, government departments, other businesses and more.

Whether your business is on social media or not, there will always be people talking about your brand, your industry and what it is you do. So why sit on the side-lines when customers, investors, journalists and competitors are defining your brand? Instead, as marketing specialist Seth Godin pointed out:

“Turn strangers into friends, friends into customers and customers into salespeople.”

Why join?

It is not uncommon for B2B companies to question the benefits of social media for their types of businesses. But research has found social media adds value through providing educational and engaging content to those who may not be ready to speak to the company directly. It makes available another channel of research to buyers and an important hub for business. Once a following is well-established, it can even turn your existing customers into brand ambassadors and advocates.

“Social media can be more transformative for a B2B company than a B2C Company. B2B has a smaller potential customer base, a higher average price point” – Jay Baer

Put simply, social media is a tool to:

- Increase **Brand Awareness**
- **Create Relationships**, connect with prospects and industry influencers
- **Humanise Your Company**, display the person/people behind the company
- Establish the company as a **Thought Leader**
- Build **Brand Value**

Making brands social. Getting brands talking. *continued...*

“Social media is a two-way street as opposed to the traditional methods of media, which were previously one-way.”

Overcoming challenges

Social media can be overwhelming, frustrating and confusing; with more and more brands finding a place, many face challenges in joining the conversation. You might ask;

1. There are so many channels, which one is for me? 2. How do I keep up to date?
3. How do I differentiate myself from the rest of the pack?

Rather than creating an account with every platform available, focus on the channels that are most appropriate for your business or most effective. LinkedIn for instance, is the number one source for B2B companies, in building network and pipeline through connecting with partners, prospects, clients and peers.

At its core, social media is not too difficult to keep up with. Once established, regular posting falls under management and discipline. Setting up an Internal Social Media Policy within your company will help to guide external communication and appropriate responsibility levels should be assigned to the correct people. Consider promoting employee advocacy – the idea of leveraging your workforce on social media, encouraging them to like the company’s pages, posts and articles.

However, if you are posting the same thing as everyone else out there, then you risk becoming repetitive and what you say can become a bit redundant. There are many brands that have original accounts, such as Microsoft, General Electric (GE) and American Express OPEN. Studying how others approach communication can give you a better idea of what is achievable in your own business.

How can you be more effective in your social media engagement?

One of the hardest skills to learn, are the essential skills needed to succeed in building a social media profile and a voice that is both relevant and exciting, yet still professional. Then on top of that, applying your own individuality and creative styling – a tone of voice and brand language.

Essentially this boils down to the successful communication of your own brand identity. As with any platform out there, your competition is likely to occupy the same space as yourself, however what they don’t have ownership of is your unique personality. Having a strong understanding of your brand is important because it dictates how you go about projecting yourself in the big wide world (in this case, the World Wide Web). Work out who it is that you are speaking to and what you are talking about; once you have honed in on these core elements, creating content for social media will become far more original and creative. This is crucial in helping you rise above the noise and will reap the most rewards in adopting social media as an intrinsic part of your B2B marketing plan.

Making brands social. Getting brands talking. *continued...*

Additional points to take away

- **Outline your goals.** What are you trying to achieve as an organisation? What are your objectives for using social media?
- **Focus on brand awareness and community engagement.** The difference between social media and traditional methods of media, is that communication is now a two-way street as opposed to one.
- **Keep your messaging simple.** This usually means short and direct. Visual media tends to do well, so use this to attract your audiences and include pictures and videos whenever possible.
- **Vary the content published.** Use a mix of questions, images, videos, links, tips and insights. Show content that is relevant to your industry and field.
- **Create campaigns that are specific.** If you have multiple channels of social media, tailor your campaigns to the platform.

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Page 3 of 3