

Managing the Brand and Communication in Social Media



Cosmin TĂNASE

ABSTRACT

Social Media is today among the best opportunities available to a brand for connecting with prospective consumers. Social media is the medium to socialize. These new media win the trust of consumers by connecting with them at a deeper level. Marketers are taking note of many different social media opportunities and beginning to implement new social initiatives at a higher rate than ever before. Social media marketing and the businesses that utilize it have become more sophisticated. One cannot afford to have no presence on the social channels if the competitor is making waves with its products and services. Global companies have recognized social media marketing as a potential marketing platform and used them with innovations to power their advertising campaign with social media marketing. Companies have realized the opportunities of social media as one way of marketing. By involving and being in direct contact with the customer the branding has reached a new level.

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JEL Classification: *L20, L80; M31*

Significantly different from conventional marketing strategies, Social Media Marketing (SMM) offers three distinct advantages. One, it provides a window to marketers to not only present products / services to customers but also to listen to

customers' grievances and suggestions. Two, it makes it easy for marketers to identify various peer groups or influencers among various groups, who in turn can become brand evangelist and help in organic growth of a brand. And, three, all this is done at nearly zero cost (as compared to conventional customer outreach programmes) as most of the social networking sites are free.

The role of social media in marketing is to use it as a communication tool that makes the companies accessible to those interested in their product and makes them visible to those that don't know their product. It should be used as a tool that creates a personality behind their brand and creates relationships that they otherwise may never gain. This creates not only repeat-buyers, but customer loyalty. Fact is social media is so diversified that it can be used in whatever way best suits the interest and the needs of the business.

Kaplan and Haenlein provide a renowned definition of social media and describe it as a "group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content". Web 2.0 is the way software developers and end-users co-operate on different applications; the content is created, published and managed not only by individuals, but all users.

The Web 2.0 has enabled people to contribute with their information and to share content easier than with 1.0. A reduction of technological barriers has enabled anyone to create profiles and web pages, which makes the Web a perfect platform for personal branding. The Web 2.0 includes blogs, social networking sites, content communities, collaborative projects (such as Wikipedia), virtual social worlds and virtual game worlds. Social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content.

If the Internet previously was used to watch, read and buy content, nowadays the social media functions as a platform to discuss, share and modify what can be found on the Internet. Social networking sites are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. The profiles can entail any form of information, such as photos, video, audio files and blogs, and one of the most well known social networks is Facebook.

Social media is about creating, influencing, and sharing; and, importantly, it can have a powerful impact on performance. It seems that these interactive platforms change the ways of marketing enabling us to connect and collaborate around the clock.

Developing the image and brand identity

The company's image is an asset due to its impact on how the customer perceives the company. If a brand image is good, it can protect the company and when minor, as well as more serious problems occur the problems can be overlooked. Often upcoming problems can though affect the brand negatively. Gronroos identifies four effects of image; "image communicates expectations, image is a filter influencing perceptions, image is a function of expectations as well as of experiences, image has an internal impact on employees as well as an external impact on customers". The less clear and distinct the image is, the more this may affect employee attitudes. The image management cannot be applied on personal branding, but the layout of websites, advertisement, packages and other visibility can support the company's image.

It is the customers, not the seller, who builds the brand. The seller can create the right circumstances for the desired brand to develop, but it is through a brand formation process that the brand emerges for the customer. Hence, formation of a brand is complex, but the branding process can be illustrated. The branding process is based on the elements of Gronroos' service branding process, but can be applied to any sort of branding. Firstly, the brand image that the company, in this case the designer, wants the customers and stakeholders to have should be analyzed. The story the seller wants to communicate should be clear. The outcome of the analysis is the wanted brand identity. Looking from the seller's perspective identification, differentiation and coherence motivate the creation and maintenance of a brand. Differentiation can be attained through brand identity. Basing the differentiation strategy on the marketing theory of price, place, product and impact competitive advantage is accessible.

Everyone belongs to a group or network. After having launched the brand, awareness must be created. Brand awareness is generated through planned market communication. Communicating the symbol, product, personality and the brand creates value. Identification enhances repurchase and can establish loyalty among customers. The segments of possible heavy buyers and involved customers must be reached through marketing communications efforts. Online sales, specific tips, offers and events are examples of how forerunners can be treated in order to reach and satisfy buyers who are engaged with the brand. Usually a group has a leader which opinions are looked up to and respected. These persons influence the rest of the group and are called opinion leaders. The opinion leaders can be professionals or experts in some field, hobbyists or people most involved in a category, and these pre-organised groups should be targeted through direct contact and virtual intimacy. Branding means getting closer to the mediator of influence.

The brand fulfilment is formed by customers' experiences with the firm and the services and leads to perceived brand image developed in the customers' minds. When the brand has established a clear positioning the buyer creates a trustful relation to the brand. If the brand cannot establish coherency the brand identity and -image can be dislodged.

Managing the brand and communication in social media

In social media the communication of a brand finds its perfect platform. In the age of Web 2.0, selfbranding tactics involve creating and maintaining social and networking profiles, personal Web sites, and blogs, as well as using search engine optimization techniques to encourage access to one's information. When engaging in social media the designer has to be aware of the culture and rules of the entered networks.

In order to show credibility the information on the different forums and networks where the brand is presented should be continuously updated. Through Web 2.0 anyone has access to add information or content to others profiles, which results in people not having total control of ones own profile. The key element of creating a brand image is through a proper profile, and others contributing to this element can lead to interference with the brand identity.

Managing the brand is a balance between preservation, renewal, extension and growth of the prototype on the one hand, and on the other the creation of new products and services to capture new circumstances of use and new customers, and to open new segments. This includes both the essentials of maintaining the brand as well as securing the future brand. Innovation is important in order for the brand to survive in the long run. Instead of putting all focus on developing technological competence and creating new products, the brands future, and what values and meaning the brand will symbolize in the future should be emphasized. Taking the customer into account can be of help not only when it comes to branding. If the designer takes the customer into account in the designing process the social media can be a tool for learning about the target market and what the customers preferences are. This can help preserve the brand's success in the future.

Integrated marketing communications

Integrated marketing communications is a strategy that integrates traditional media marketing, direct marketing, public relations and other distinct marketing communications media as well as communications aspects of the delivery and consumption of goods and services and of customer service and other customer encounters. Thus, integrated

marketing communications has a long-term perspective”. There are four kind of communication messages:

1. Planned messages
2. Product messages
3. Service messages
4. Unplanned messages

The planned messages can be the result of a message sent online through social media. These messages are the least trustworthy as people know the messages are planned to influence customers. Messages about the company and its offerings, including the physical products design, its functions, materials etc. form the product messages. The communication between customer and seller, the way technology and systems function and the seller’s attitude and behavior are the service messages. The most trust worthy of the messages are the unplanned messages. These can be good or bad word-of-mouth communication, which can be spread through social networks.

The word-of-mouth travels fast in social media and networks. Word-of-mouth can be positive, neutral or negative, but is usually either extremely positive or extremely negative. Total absence of communication, either deliberate or accidental, which can be not communicating with the customers or not answering questions sent through social networking sites, might impact negatively and confuse the total communication effect. Especially in critical situations if the product is defect the customer needs to be kept well informed about the process. Lack of updates on the chosen social media and networks can reduce interest of the brand and hence also damage the brand. When total communication is mastered properly a powerful market communication impact can be achieved which can lead to positive word-of-mouth, the message with the strongest influence on buyers.

Conclusion

Researchers believe in the consumer having the most influence on the branding process. It seems that it is traditionally considered that the seller forms the brand identity, which then is as such transferred to the consumer who perceive it as the brand image. The newer literature tries to prove that it is the consumer that holds the power of forming the brand and the seller should try to form the brand identity according to the consumer’s brand image. In the branding process it is preferable that the seller takes this in consideration. The brand can be shared through social media and the channels best suited for ones business should be chosen carefully. According to existing research the seller should update the channels chosen for the branding frequently. Effective branding and maintenance of the preferred brand identity can result in word-of-mouth in social media

channels, social networks and content communities. All kind of buzz around the brand is positive, but unplanned messages with a negative tone should try to be avoided, due to the possibility of it harming the brand. The unplanned messages, including word-of-mouth, is what people rely most upon and thus affects the brand most effectively.

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