

The Social Media Dilemma:

Is Your Content Being Trashed?



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Article Summary:

With the growing importance of social media, marketers are facing a dilemma. It's important to have content shared, but what does that mean to the brand? Does having a social media presence imply that branding and brand messaging must be sacrificed? In short, is your content being ripped apart and parts of it trashed due to the whim of the social channel, and if so, is there a way to keep it intact?

The Importance Of Social Media Is Undeniable

If your company is like most businesses, you have been paying attention to the social media storm that is revolutionizing the way we communicate.

The statistics and numbers are overwhelming:

Facebook tops Google for weekly traffic in the U.S.(1)

Social Media has overtaken porn as the #1 activity on the Web (2)

There are over 700,000 new users on Facebook every day

60 million status updates are posted daily on Facebook

Twitter has 5 million tweets per day

Bloggers post 900,000 new articles each day (this could fill the NY Times for 19 years)(3)

80% of companies use social media for recruitment; % of these using LinkedIn 95% (4)

The importance of social media is growing and companies are struggling for ways to fit it in their marketing strategy **“2009 was about learning about Social Media. 2010 is about learning how to use it well”** Jason Falls. (5)

Social media is growing more and more prevalent in terms of adoption by business. Businesses are adopting and investing in social media and social media marketing.

“One hundred-eight (22%) of the primary corporations listed on the 2009 Fortune 500 have a public-facing corporate blog with a post in the past 12 months.

In our 2008 study of Fortune 500 blogs, 81 companies (16%) met the criteria.

The Fortune 500 companies are blogging at a lower rate than other business groups, specifically the Inc. 500. The Inc. 500 list is composed of the fastest-growing, private companies in the US, while the Fortune 500 is based on total revenue not growth and may include public and private companies.

One hundred and seventy-three (35%) of the primary corporations listed on the 2009 Fortune 500 has a Twitter account with a post within the past thirty days.

Nineteen percent of the 2009 Fortune 500 is podcasting and 31% are using video on their blog sites. The data collected previously on the 2008 Fortune 500 showed less involvement with 16% of that group podcasting and 21% using video in their blogs.”(6)

There is no question that social media is a critical way to share information, however with so many bloggers and interpretations of the marketing messages, it’s difficult to maintain integrity of the brand message across social media channels.

How To Maintain Brand And Message Across Multiple Social Media Channels

A challenge that continues to be unresolved by many marketers is the choice of vehicle (format) for distributing information into a social media stew.

As a marketer, it's important to have some control with regard to whether/when/how people share content in social media.

More important, marketers cannot control the spin people may put on the story.

The nature of social media is uncontrolled and unedited. Content is shared based upon factors that have little to do with how the marketer wants it to be presented. There are some interesting observations, however, with regard to what factors enter into the decision of whether to disseminate a piece of information through social channels.

John Bell, of Ogilvy and Mather cites a study by University of Pennsylvania (8) that states the 6 factors that involve whether a reader will elect to share information or not. The study, which is discussed in an article in the New York Times (9) describes the factors that influenced emailing an article to another person to read.

Cialdini organizes compliance techniques into six categories based on psychological principles that direct human behavior: reciprocity, consistency, social proof, liking, authority, and scarcity. (10)



For the purveyor of social media, the criteria and threshold for sharing would rely on at least 4 out of the six above factors. In other words, to be considered for passing along or recommendation, the information must be engaging, shareable and contain sufficient authority. It must be recognizable information that is presented by authority and which suggests that the information conveyed is usable.

Even with this understanding, the information that is shared is typically digested by the consumers of social media, then parceled out and interpreted in multiple formats such as blogs, tweets, Facebook commentary, Linked In questions, etc. It's unusual for the original information to be presented with branding and embedded detail intact.

This creates a difficulty for the marketer. How to present information in a format where the full information is shared, not bits and pieces. To take parts out of context may dilute or even change the intent of the message, yet with social media, most information is parceled into small, shareable segments. Or worse, the information is re-interpreted and regurgitated in a manner that may be inconsistent with the original version.

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This challenge is not insurmountable if given parameters that define the way the content is presented:

Must be easily shared

Must retain format despite sharing- that is, the format itself must be so compelling that the social media passes it in its entirety

Must provide great user experience

Must be suitable for multiple channels and audiences: Digg, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.

Must be suitable for online mobile sharing as well, especially as the movement to places becomes more important and prevalent.

Must be engaging and interactive, yet present the information at the users pace.



How A Digital Magazine Format Solves The Issue of Consistent Image and Brand

With a digital interactive magazine format or “zmag”, the ability to share the content in a manner that is comfortable and familiar for the readers is inherent. Ability to page through the content at the readers pace is supported, and the best part is that all of the content stays intact and together. This enables the branding to stay complete, instead of being disassembled and re-created, sometimes incorrectly, by a bevy of bloggers with good intention.

The ability to share content is also a part of the functionality, since the magazine can be passed along as a link embedded in a tweet or a Facebook link.

The zmag blends a creative presentation with a format that is easily shared in it's entirety. In fact, dismantling the information makes it less interesting. The digital magazine presents the information in a style that is engaging – it keeps the attention of the reader.

Factors Involved In Making Content Shareable

Content novelty

Because the zmag or magazine format is ‘cool’ and ‘sharable’ the effect is to increase the likelihood that the company or product info will be shared intact. It certainly has that “content novelty” feeling. The ability to weave a story into the flow of the zmag encourages the reader to follow the progression and development and thereby engages the reader.

Entertainment factors

To many, the page flipping, magazine format, is entertaining, plus it enables marketers to syndicate several content types (copyright, video, images, etc.) into one sophisticated publication.

Visual impact

The ability to integrate various content types coupled with the streamlined viewing and page flipping technology make a zmag the epitome of eye candy. Dependent upon whether you elect to use upscale fashion photography or bold graphics, the digital magazine will faithfully represent the images as they were originally presented, making the visual impact of a zmag among the top options available for digital content.

Authority

Authority is conveyed by the inbound links and sharing through sites like the new Digg, Stumble-upon, Delicious. Dependent upon content, the zmag will gain authority based upon pass-along readership and number of bookmarks. Sharing the content through multiple social media sites is critical as well as providing a consistent user experience. The pre-configured and logical flow of the digital magazine makes an excellent vehicle for presenting information that is likely to be shared through social media channels.

Ease of understanding

Ease of understanding is enhanced by having information presented in logical order. Progression through the material is facilitated in a zmag because the reader is able to digest the material at their own pace and level of engagement. Coupled with the embedded media, the format lends itself to a rich dissemination of pertinent information in an order that is predicted. sion and development and thereby engages the reader.

Cost Efficiency For Reaching Social Media Channels

Creating multiple messages for various social media channels is a time consuming and costly exercise. The beauty of the digital magazine format or zmag is that it is easily shared through multiple social media sites. One publication efficiently provides a consistent user experience regardless of channels and media. The creation of content is cost effective since it can be shared on all social sites (Facebook, Twitter, Linked In, Digg, etc. and online, mobile, etc.) vs. the need to create a separate vehicle for each channel and media

Social media integration (promote sharing from within publication) is facilitated with a format such as a zmag's page flipping, magazine style format.

Robust Tracking Features To Analyze Readership And Social Media Reach

With social media and the extent of ‘pass-along readership’, it’s typically difficult to track the results of social media efforts. There are monitoring services that externally measure the number of mentions of your company or keyword. In fact, the ability to track the results of your efforts is typically not available.

One unique advantage that zmags offer is the ability to track and continuously optimize content through integrated behavioral analytics platform. For example, Zmags has the ability to measure the actual readership of the magazine, as well as analyze the page by page viewership/readership and see where the readership is coming from. This info is not typically associated as a benefit of social media sharing and can be another reason to elect to use a zmag format.

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