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SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING: AN OVERVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

Social Media Marketing is a new niche spun out of Web 2.0 gaining a lot of attention. It is a low-cost, permission-marketing technique that allows customers to find businesses and products. The consumer uses social networks to advertise the company's brand and promote their products on their behalf.

TRADITIONAL MARKETING

Before we can understand the power and reach that a social marketing strategy affords, we first need to understand traditional marketing. The American Marketing Association defines it as:

> "Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders."[1]

Traditional marketing principles are based on the "Four Ps": price, product, promotion and placement.[2] The promotion element historically has been an in-your-face approach with advertisements in newspapers/magazines and on TV in an effort to create brand awareness. Seth Godin describes it as "corporate anonymous actions aimed at the unwilling masses".[3] These mass-marketing tactics often either annoy potential customers or get ignored completely.

PERMISSION-BASED MARKETING

With the popularity of the internet and our obsession with web 2.0 technologies, new approaches in marketing were made possible. Rather than delivering advertisement flyers in the Sunday paper and hoping people would peruse through them, companies now can gather groups of individuals who they know want to engage with their brand. With the advent of email newsletter subscriptions with targeted marketing campaigns, companies now know that they have an interested audience.   "Permission marketing is the privilege (not the right) of delivering anticipated, personal and relevant messages to people who actually want to get them."[4] This is the antithesis of

traditional marketing where broad aggregations of a market segment are used for classification and to push advertisements. One-on-one marketing is a much more efficient use of resources because you are only sending your promotional message to people who are interested.[5]

INBOUND MARKETING

You can take the permission marketing idea to another level. Let consumers seek you out. Position your company where you get found and the consumer asks for your promotional information. Inbound marketing is a style that focuses on 3 key elements: content, SEO (search engine optimization) and social media.[10] Writing meaningful information related to your product is really important. For example, if you are a home contractor, you could write a post about how to use a mitre box when cutting crown molding. In addition to your search engine rankings, you also distribute this information across social sites where it gets discussed. Your reach grows as you bring more qualified customers to your site. And these customers might decide that they aren't do-it-yourselfers after all and call you for a quote.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Regarding traditional marketing, "technology is making these techniques less effective and more expensive. Caller ID blocks cold calls, TiVo makes T.V. advertising less effective, spam filters block mass emails and tools like RSS are making print and display advertising less effective. It's still possible to get a message out via these channels, but it costs more."[9] So, if you aren't pushing promotions on people, where do you get found? Facebook or Twitter? Where are the websites that your customers flock to daily? How do you focus your energies? HubSpot says to "listen and take notes."[11] Engage in conversations about the items that interest them.

LEVERAGING TOOLS IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

The process to successful results can take three to six months.[6] Creating a campaign the utilizes the websites your customers frequent can be difficult to develop and should be a combination of broad-based and niche tools. If you want to know where to go for Thai food, which social website do <u>you</u> go to? Probably one that focuses on food!

BROAD-BASED TOOLS

- Facebook: Create a fan page for your business or organization, link articles to your blog, interact with your customers.

- Twitter: Create an account for your business or organization, follow regional people, respond to relevant hash tags.

- Foursquare: Offer incentives for people to FourSquare your business or organization and participate in offline events.

- Yahoo! Answers: Search keywords and participate.

NICHE TOOLS

- Yelp: For restaurants - Create your profile, respond to reviews, offer incentives.

- Kaboodle: For retail - Create a shop profile and respond to comments.

- Twitter: Create a specific track for your business or organization, like shoes_at_bigstore.

- LinkedIn: For business – Create groups related to your product and initiate and participate in discussions.

A CASE STUDY: HOW TO SELL OUT A CONFERENCE IN 5.5 DAYS

I dissected the processes followed by drupalcampnh.org to market its conference. This was a new event to the area targeting a different audience than usual Drupal Camps which consequently posed a challenge to the event organizers: how would they find the attendees? Twitter was the primary vehicle for distributing information and creating a buzz. A well-planned process utilizing available social networking tools subsequently reaped a higher than expected success rate: all tickets sold in 5.5 days.

EXPAND THE NETWORK OF AN EXISTING PRODUCT

An existing product, developedbymiche.com, is known for giving presentations on Drupal that follow a systematic process.[8] As a result of many international presentations, developedbymiche.com already had an internet presence and following among developers. This was integral to the success of the drupalcampnh.org's marketing strategy. However, the desired audience at drupalcampnh.org was drastically different. The goal was to introduce

Drupal to those in the marketing industry where there currently is a poor awareness. So, the first step was to introduce a well-established, solid product to a new group of people. Developedbymiche.com cultivated another niche network by attending PodCamp in June 2009. "PodCamp NH is an innovative gathering of new media enthusiasts, professionals, and anyone curious about what comes next in blogging, social media, podcasting, video on the net, film, music, and so much more."[7] This event garnered a significant following on Twitter and consequently <u>gave permission</u> to developedbymiche.com to tweet to its expanding and welcoming audience.

UTILIZE NETWORK OF EXISTING PRODUCT TO INTRODUCE NEW PRODUCT

The camp, drupalcampnh.org, was at the final stages of planning when it was announced publically. An initial step of many online marketing campaigns is fondly known as "spam your friends". Drupalcampnh.org created a Twitter account and requested all of developedbymiche.com's "real life" friends to follow it. Several introduction tweets about the Drupal Camp and a dozen followers created credibility prior to a full launch of the campaign. The next step was to use developedbymiche's established network across several niches (Drupal development, geographical, social marketing) to seed drupalcampnh.org's network. One by one, drupalcampnh.org followed on Twitter each relevant contact of developedbymiche.com. During this process, developedbymiche.com tweeted about the camp as well which resulted in a high number of follow-backs due the authoritative linking.

EXPAND REACH USING SECONDARY TOOLS

While continuing the efforts on Twitter to create a solid following, the website for drupalcampnh.org became ready to launch. At 4:30am Sunday morning, the tickets went on sale. During the first few days, drupalcampnh.org used several regional Twitter bot accounts that auto re-tweeted their announcements. This allowed them to reach many more potentially interested people.

In addition to tweets, they posted the camp announcement in the Boston & New Hampshire groups for Drupal. This gave them exposure to potential presenters and sponsors. Lastly, they used the regional groups on LinkedIn.

ESTABLISH REGULAR, MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATION

From the beginning, drupalcampnh.org followed an exponential curve on the frequency of tweets. At this campaign's inception, five months prior, they tweeted once a month and then ramped up to a couple times a day on the day the event sold out. Each tweet announced a significant milestone or statement and linked back to the website. Being in regular contact with their network encouraged people to register for the camp.

SUCCESS

Drupalcampnh.org defined success as filling the seats. Interestingly enough, they only envisioned 50 people would want to attend so they only made that many tickets available. As they monitored the website daily and saw the number of tickets sold increase, they realized that they needed to release a few more seats and subsequently fill the room to its maximum capacity. At the moment, drupalcampnh.org has sold 65 tickets, and has a waitlist of 29 people. The registration period has far exceeded their expectations. Effective usage of social media created a greater demand than anticipated.

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

Big Companies have big marketing budgets. How does an independent shop compete with that? In the past, large companies "where able to control the public's perception of a product, issue or event with far greater ease".[12] But now, via social media, the consumer is controlling the brand's image. And they have the same power to do so with smaller companies as well. Many companies spend an average of 10 hours a week executing their social media campaigns.[13] All it takes is listening to your customer, offering free information and engaging in conversation. All companies have access to the same tools.

CONCLUSION

Traditional Marketing, Permission Marketing, Inbound Marketing, Social Media Marketing. There is a natural progression to the change in these industry trends. Understanding how marketing started allows one to

appreciate the transition. Learning how to use the Web 2.0 skills effectively is important. This is a paradigm shift that companies need to learn to stay competitive.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW ON DRUPALCAMPNH.ORG

WHAT WERE YOUR CHALLENGES?

Drupalcampnh.org was an inaugural event, so we did not have a following from our target audience. Our challenge was to get the word out and sell tickets to people we didn't know.

WHAT STRATEGY DID YOU EMPLOY TO OVERCOME THESE CHALLENGES?

We used existing networking channels that were connected to another related product. By leveraging that community, we were able to create our own following on Twitter.

WAS TWITTER THE ONLY TOOL YOU USED?

We also used groups.drupal.org to announce the camp and look for our technical sponsors and presenters. Additionally, the camp was announced in the regional groups on LinkedIn.

WHAT TECHNIQUE DO YOU THINK ACCOUNTED FOR YOUR SUCCESS?

On regular intervals, we communicated with our audience and encouraged them to spread the word. Our announcements were informative and linked back to a website with more information.

NEXT YEAR, IF THE CAMP IS BIGGER, WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?

We would need to expand our following on Twitter. This is not something you can do right before the camp. We will need to engage them throughout the year and follow new relevant people. Additionally, we need to explore more avenues that will do some networking on our behalf. There are many calendars specifically for technical, web and social marketing events out there and we need to make sure we are listed and utilize their network to find our audience.

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