

The Power of Integrated Marketing

Direct mail, e-mail, mobile messaging, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, MySpace, Yelp, FourSquare, blogging, microblogging, podcasts—today there are a lot of different communications channels available for interacting with customers. For some businesses, keeping marketing strategies relevant and effective in the digital age can seem overwhelming. But for a savvy marketing professional, having all these channels available represents an unprecedented opportunity for: complete multi-channel marketing integration, ongoing brand building, highly targeted messaging, higher response rates, more loyal customers and, most importantly, increased revenues.

The Advent of Social Media

Social media marketing includes participation on social networking websites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and MySpace; video and photo sharing websites, including YouTube and Flickr; blogging; microblogging, as on Twitter; podcasts; forums; product reviews, such as those on Amazon; and social book marking websites.

Although it can be difficult to gather and analyze reliable metrics on the affect social media outlets have on sales and revenues, there is no question that it is a powerful communication tool that consumers interact with regularly and often. The main advantage of social media and other digital channels is the ability to send unobtrusive outgoing communications to massive relevant audiences, in real time, with minimal cost and effort. Failing to integrate social media channels into the marketing mix would be a mistake and a missed marketing opportunity for any business today.

As more and more companies include interactive and digital strategies in their campaigns, Forrester Research predicted, back in 2009, that social media would see the highest rate of growth among all digital media through 2014.

Going Social with Customers

Social networking not only provides businesses the opportunity to share information in a one-to-many dynamic, it also makes it possible to learn even more about the consumers with which they are interacting. Most social media sites have intelligent ways to capture valuable consumer demographic and psychographic data, including but not limited to: age, gender, education level, social patterns, preferences, and tastes. This type of information is valuable for any marketer because it allows them to target customers even more accurately in future campaigns.

Conversely, social networking websites give consumers an easy method for researching companies more thoroughly, such as reading customer reviews before making a buying decision. Ultimately, social networking offers an effective way to build consumer trust and long-term loyalty.

Blogging and microblogging can further build the customer relationship, providing a medium for companies to promote new products, share news and updates, express gratitude towards the customer and stay in constant communication without being pushy. Microblogging, using services like Twitter, allows messaging to be instantaneous, giving businesses a level of flexibility and speed the industry has never seen before.

Blogger comments give businesses direct customer feedback, helping them to better understand their customers' perceptions, preferences and needs. Blogs and microblogs increase brand saturation and improve both search engine rankings and word-of-mouth marketing.

Marketing Goes Mobile

Mobile phones, specifically smartphones, have evolved into an indispensable tool for millions of consumers. Smartphones provide a means for completely mobile digital interactions, such as sending and receiving text messages, browsing the Internet, or reviewing e-mail correspondence. With all of the applications and capabilities of today's smartphones, many workers in the business world could perform much of their jobs right from the device, if they chose to do so.

Unlike social media and other digital communications channels, e-mail and mobile marketing offer more segmentation and targeting for communications that take on a more direct one-to-one tone. Because people carry their phones practically everywhere, communications and marketing messages received via mobile phone are often the most timely and relevant, and are therefore typically very effective in generating response. E-mail and mobile marketing allows marketers to reach customers and prospects instantly—anytime and anywhere.

Use Customer Feedback to Evolve Your Campaigns

One of the most exciting aspects of digital marketing is the ability to create an informative, two-way dialog. But it doesn't help to learn about customers unless the information is used to communicate more effectively in the next effort. Marketers must become proficient at using what they learn about their customers to continuously evolve and improve their ongoing marketing strategies.

You'll have to be diligent in responding to consumer questions, compliments and even complaints. A complaint that goes unanswered is out in public for everyone else to see.

Multi-Channel Synergizing Strategies

When e-mail marketing first became popular, people suspected it would take the place of physical direct mail marketing—but physical mail is still a primary marketing channel. Dollars spent on direct mail marketing is expected to grow 3.6% annually between 2010 and 2014.

Once again, there are beliefs that digital and social marketing, with the help of smartphones, will replace more traditional marketing channels like mail and e-mail. However, consumers are not all alike and they don't all have the same habits and preferences when it comes to receiving communications from businesses. Each individual marketing channel has its strengths and weaknesses, and they all perform best when combined with the others to create a comprehensive outreach strategy.

Today, every company should be integrating complementary media—social networks and mobile—with traditional tactics like direct mail and e-mail, to most effectively communicate with customers and prospects. The strongest impact comes from blending all channels into a single, comprehensive, interactive marketing strategy. Integrating multiple marketing channels and using them intelligently, over time, creates a cumulative effect of brand awareness and loyalty.

Social Media Statistics As of March 25, 2011

- Twitter: 175+ million registered users
- LinkedIn: 100+ million registered professionals—100% growth in less than a year
- Facebook: 640+ million users worldwide
- 320 million users log on to Facebook every day—representing 40% growth in daily usage in 12 months
- 200 million users access Facebook through mobile devices—a 200% increase in 12 months
- 95 million tweets are sent on Twitter every day—a 250% increase from 2010 to 2011
- Flickr has grown 25% from 2010 to 2011

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