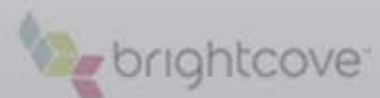
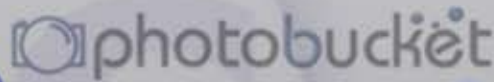




Don't Get Left Behind: Make Social Media Marketing Part of Your Business Plan





Don't Get Left Behind: Make Social Media Marketing Part of Your Business Plan

Introduction

Social media tools are changing the face of marketing communications and PR. Have you mastered Blogs, podcasts, wikis, social networks, or YouTube? At a time when the economy is less than desirable and many organizations' marketing budgets are being cut or scaled back, social media can offer a fast and cost effective way to reach new and existing clients, employees, stakeholders, and the media.

This white paper will outline what social media is, explain why it is relevant, and teach you how to become one of the most innovative organizations to tap into this new communication by:

- **Understanding the definition of social media**
- **Identifying how to use social marketing to achieve your business goals**
- **Learning about the plethora of social marketing tools available to you**
- **Weighing the pros and cons associated with social marketing**
- **Facilitating in-person meetings through social media networking**

What is Social Media?

Social media is text, video, images, photos, audio and other media generated by and shared with "everyday people" from decentralized sources. Therefore, any website that invites you to interact with the site and with other visitors falls into the definition of social media.

How can you use Social Media for your Organization?

Have a plan before you jump into social media. It's tempting to join a social networking site just because others are doing the same. If you want to get anything out of your time and effort on an online platform, you should ensure that you identify the following:

Know your objective:

- Do you want to gain more unique visitors to your company website?
- Do you want to interact with your clients?
- Do you want better overall brand awareness?
- What is the point of you joining this particular interactive site?



Have a measurable goal:

- How many people do you want to reach?
- At what point for example, do you want to have a 10% increase in unique visitors to your company website?

Know your story:

- Be able to clearly explain who your organization is, what you do, and your overall goals.
- The most successful organizations are those that have grabbed our interest so much that we want to share their story and be associated with them as much as possible.

Deciding which Social Media Network to Join

Study your social marketing options. LinkedIn, blogs, podcasts, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are just a few social networking sites that you can join. However, it is best to start out small. Do not resort to joining all of these unless you or a dedicated team member has time to commit to updating your pages on a daily basis. If you cannot keep up with the accounts you set up, the online community will take notice, and your absence on the internet could be taken as a reflection of how your company operates (i.e., slow, outdated and non-responsive). Therefore, your goal of leveraging social media could become counterproductive, and your organization could actually end up losing business as opposed to gaining it.

Understand the Pros and Cons of Social Marketing

Just like any personality, social marketing has its share of good and bad traits. Some of the pros and cons are highlighted in the list below.

Pros

- Much of social marketing is free, which makes it desirable while dealing with today's economic climate.
- Social marketing is constantly evolving and instantaneous, and the more frequent content is updated, the more response you will receive from viewers.
- One of the biggest conveniences of social marketing is how it is organized. Developers have done excellent jobs of laying out applications and sites, so even people with limited computer experience can access their account efficiently. This saves time and keeps headaches at bay.
- Along with their simple layouts and navigation, social networking sites organize friends and clients, so finding names and contact information takes merely seconds. You can also see how many new contacts you have gained, making the reach of social marketing measurable.



Cons

- One of the greatest aspects about social marketing is that it welcomes interaction between customers and businesses, and both sides must be active for this to work.
- The internet has fallen prey to spam and other downfalls, and unfortunately it's difficult to permanently curb this. Solid virus protection on your computer is one option to keep unwanted hackers away. Luckily, most, if not all, social media sites have excellent customer service and can block people who do not use the internet responsibly.

Using Social Media Networks to Facilitate Face-to-Face Meetings

Some businesses prefer to meet potential clients or partners online than in person. While it is exciting to be online and chat with others in cyberspace, nothing beats face-to-face contact. Computers may be groundbreaking and convenient, but it is impossible to read body language and get a sense of the other person's tone or emotion. Even webcams cannot replace the warm exchange between human interactions. So use social media to cultivate your network, and when it's time, facilitate the face-to-face meeting.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the purpose of marketing is to influence action. Social media marketing is a key part in doing just that, as well as bringing interaction between companies, clients, and other publics. The most important fact to remember about social media marketing is that it is a tool that is not meant to replace in-person contact. On the other hand, social media tools provide a two-way street that gives you the ability to communicate and provide feedback via the internet.

