



Social Networking 2-fer

Tweet Like You Mean It & The Numbers Social Networks Don't Want You to See

By Drew Zagorski
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I get asked pretty regularly about the value of Twitter: Do I Twitter? Is it a good idea to Twitter? What is Twitter? And on, and on... My answers and feelings about Twitter are ambivalent at best. I'm just not drinking the Twitter Kool Aid yet. I don't find Twitter to be as useful to me, as a business to business marketer, as LinkedIn and even Facebook. Can Twitter be a good arrow in your quiver? Sure. So can direct mail, adwords campaigns and any number of marketing tactics. I think any place you can get positive exposure for your business is a good place to be. But the reality is that you needn't spend all of your time and energy in every place you've positioned your name.

In the first half of this issue of The Grey Matter, I'll provide some answers to the Twitter questions, along with some tips you can use if you want to make Twitter a center piece of your marketing strategy.

In the second half of this issue, we'll share some statistics that are pretty eye opening. According to some recent studies, the numbers just aren't telling us that social networking is a viable place to market products. Of course, for every study out there, there's usually another one that counters its findings. The bottom line is that the jury's still out on whether social networking is a viable tool for marketing products. That said, I do believe that certain social networks are excellent tools for keeping in touch with your business partners and networking your way to new contacts. Take a look at the numbers and judge for yourself - just remember that with all things internet, what's down today can be up tomorrow.

PART I : TWEET LIKE YOU MEAN IT

WHAT IS TWITTER?

At its core, Twitter is a blog site. It allows you to make single sentence blog posts - tweets - and send them out to the world. Twitter isn't an advertising channel. To effectively get a marketing message across, you need to send out dozens of tweets, each with a snippet of what you want to say. It's just not effective for that purpose. Twitter won't attract or engage prospects and customers. Twitter is a tool for establishing relationships. It's a conversation tool.

RELEVANT TWEETS

When you tweet, Twitter asks "What are you doing?" Don't fall into the trap of thinking that people care about the fact that you're attending your networking group's meeting this morning or that you're heading to the coast this weekend. Be relevant and timely. Ask a question that matters. Let people know that you're doing something groundbreaking, meaningful or that will position you to win their mindshare (i.e. ABC Co. has launched a new website - www.abcco.com). Also, and this is important, don't make your tweets sales pitches (i.e. Buy now and save X%!!!). This will only turn people away.

WHY TWEET?

Twitter is growing fast - it's grown from just under 3 million unique visitors in August of 2008 to about 14 million in March of 2009 (Source: Compete, Inc.), so there are a lot of eyeballs there. Most users are age 25-54, (and here's a surprise) with the largest segment the 45-54 age group. (Source: comScore Media Metrix)

I believe that Twitter has done a phenomenal job of marketing itself and creating buzz. I suspect a lot of the growth is due to curiosity. Twitter does have a fun factor to it. But what happens when the novelty wears off? Only time will tell, but I suspect that like some other networks it will slow down... and I know that Twitterites will want to slap me for saying that.

USING TWITTER

My analogy for blogs - and Twitter is a blog - is that it's like having a toddler in the room. It requires constant care, feeding, changing and sometimes you need to jump up from your desk to stop it from sticking a paper clip into an outlet. So if you want to commit to Twitter as part of your marketing strategy you've got to go in with your eyes open and with a plan.

Add a mission statement or value proposition to your marketing plan that spells out what your purpose for tweeting is. Put a schedule in place for when you're going to tweet and stick to it. If you don't tweet on a regular basis, your following won't grow. Be consistent in the tone and tenor of what you're tweeting, and as mentioned earlier, be relevant - all the time.



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TWEET LIKE YOU MEAN IT

Here are some tips for getting the most out of your tweets:

Create an avatar. You can use your logo, a photo or some other icon. Use something that fits your brand.

Create a tweeting schedule. Figure out the days that your customers or prospects are most likely to be online. Select a scheduler to post your tweets and run your tweets for an 8-12-hour cycle, then repeat them to expand your coverage.

Build a tweet library. Create a library of tweets (50-100) that fit your brand and objective, keeping them to approximately 120 characters so they can be easily retweeted (re-posted by others).

Backlink some of your tweets. Make sure that some of your tweets (not all of them) have links back to your website, which will make it easy for people to find you. Don't expect them to go to your profile for your link.

Create a background. Create a unique background that fits your brand and company. There are services available to do this, but you can do it in-house. You want it to have the same look and feel as your corporate website. Make sure that the background-text details are visible on different types of monitors. Not everyone has the latest and greatest technology.

Test. Consistently tweet for a minimum of 30 days (90 is better). Watch your traffic and sales to ensure that you're receiving a return on your investment. At the end of the trial period, decide whether to continue or quit.

Don't get addicted. This is the hardest thing for some folks. Set a schedule and stick to it, and keep your focus on your business, not on who's commenting and following you.

It's permanent. Remember that your tweets are permanent and reflect on your brand. You can delete tweets, but they will still appear in searches.

Engage your followers. If you don't plan to stay involved in the 'conversation,' then don't bother tweeting. Engage your followers. That's what Twitter is all about. Create a regular schedule to check for comments, retweets, and new followers, and respond when it makes sense to do so. The idea is engagement, not blasting.

Take it for what it's worth. Twitter is still growing and there's really no way to know where it goes from here. If you're going to commit to tweeting, do it right and be willing to change plans if you don't see a return. Use it to connect with new people and maybe it will lead to new business.

PART II - THE NUMBERS SOCIAL NETWORKS DON'T WANT YOU TO SEE

A recent study by WorkPlace Media outlines some of the hurdles facing major brands as they attempt to harness social networks, to create an impact with consumers. The study, which polled office Internet users, found that 55% maintained at least one social networking account. However, of those respondents, only 43% reported accessing their social networking accounts at work, and even for those with access, 78% reported spending less than 30 minutes per day on their site(s).

Time Spent	% of Respondents
Less than 30 minutes	78%
30 minutes	13
1 hour	5
Open all day	4

Source: WorkPlaceMedia, May 2009

The overall impact of a brand's presence on social networking sites was shown to be minimal in terms of impact and perception. 96% of respondents said their opinion of a product brand did not change if that brand had no presence on a social networking site, and only 11% of social networking users reported following any major brand through a social networking site, and just 12% of respondents said their opinion of a brand changes if that brand maintains a social networking presence.

Activity	Yes	No
Follow a brand's social network account	11%	89%
Opinion changes if brand has no presence on social	4%	96%



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media site		
Opinion changes if brand has significant presence on social media site	12%	88%
<i>Source: WorkPlaceMedia, May 2009</i>		

Product or Brand Recommendations From Social Networking Site (% of Respondents)		
Activity	Yes	No
Recommended business/product via social network site	25%	75%
Received a business/product recommendation via social network site	33	67
Acted upon business/product recommendation from social network site	18	82
<i>Source: WorkPlaceMedia, May 2009</i>		

A recent Harris poll also supported this assertion, showing that word of mouth is a much stronger influencer than social networking. When a group of adults were asked about their information-gathering process for the most recent purchase they made,

- ☛ 21% of Harris poll respondents cited "face-to-face with a person not associated with the company, such as a family member, business colleague or friend."
- ☛ 12% cited a phone call with someone similar
- ☛ 4% mentioned using "public online social-networking sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn or MySpace"
- ☛ 4% mentioned "private social networking sites, such as customer communities"

According to additional findings from the WorkPlace Media survey, Facebook was the clear winner in terms of users:

- ☛ 89% of respondents reported having a Facebook account
- ☛ 40% MySpace
- ☛ 31% LinkedIn
- ☛ 18% Twitter

When asked what appeals about social networking:

- ☛ 89% said it "allows me to stay connected to friends/family."

Of the 18% who reported acting upon a business or product recommendation from social networking sites, the leading categories were:

- ☛ Entertainment (53%)
- ☛ Dining Out (50%)
- ☛ Groceries (23%)
- ☛ Beauty Care/Cosmetics (21%)
- ☛ Apparel (20%)
- ☛ Electronics (15%)
- ☛ Pet Care (15%)

THE COUNTER POINT

As a counter point to the numbers above, a July 2009 study by wetpaint and Altimeter Group, indicated a correlation between social-media engagement and revenue: The revenues of those most engaged increased, on average, 18% over the past 12 months, whereas the revenues of those least engaged fell, on average, 6%.

The study also stated that despite the apparent correlation, it's not clear whether there's a cause-effect relationship between social-media engagement and revenue growth.

WRAP UP

So, at the end of the day, we still need to draw our own conclusions. I believe that social networks are here to stay and that they should be an important aspect of your marketing and outreach. Which networks you use needs to be driven by who you're attempting to connect with (i.e. Facebook for social connections and LinkedIn for business connections). It's all about relevance and managing your time and efforts so that you're getting the maximum return on them.

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