

CGC: The new consumer economy

 By Leigh Andrews

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Today, effective marketing is all about making use of user- or consumer-generated content. Here's how to get over the initial fear of doing so and trusting consumers to be your brand advocates...

Prelini Udayan-Chiechi Bazaarvoice's VP of marketing in the EMEA region, was a speaker on the first day of last week's CEM Africa Summit. She says that today, people use mobile devices to do more than just talk, they also engage, search for products and services, share their experiences, compare price points and engage in shopping. Seeing as consumers are so active in this space, we also need to look for new ways for consumers to engage and connect with our businesses using mobile.

It's simple: Think about how consumers are interacting and use that to move forward in your business interaction with them. Interestingly, most people are influenced by CGC or content-generated content and millennials tend to trust the online opinions of strangers more than that of their family and friends. The US is the most advanced market when it comes to this, having done so for about 12 to 18 months, and Australia is the most similar CGC market to South Africa.

Three CGC realities to think of:

1. **Smart devices:**

In South Africa in the next three years we're expecting 48% of shopping to be done on handsets, so focusing on e-commerce and creating a seamless online experience should be top of mind.

2. **The Internet of Things:**

The IoT has integrated everything. Udayan-Chiechi shared her own experience of being at a conference in one city, receiving an alert that the alarm has gone off at home on another continent, and instantly sending a chat message to your husband to turn it off - all within the space of minutes.

3. **Consumer-Generated Content:**

CGC has exploded with the rise of the 'status update', as has the importance of offering your consumers a seamless online and offline experience - so make sure shopping in-store is as much of a pleasure as it is to click and purchase online.

There are three main eras to note when talking about CGC. The first started about ten years ago and was all about convenience. The second era, which we're operating in today, is about offering your consumers convenience and delight: "Amazon in the UK taught us that it's not acceptable to wait up to 2 weeks to receive your order." In addition to this, consumers want to enter their credit card details just once, they also want a choice of delivery options, to their home or work address. With this in mind, it's clear that shoppers are more likely to shop online if we provide them with better services on experiences when they do so.

The individual customer experience

We can't expect two customers to have the same purchase path, touch point or customer experience. It all comes down to the right brain-left brain split: Some tap more into the creative and emotional, others want the logical and detailed purchase journey. So, when searching online to make a purchase decision, some will want to see a photo of the product, some want all the stats and product specifications - you need to cater to all types of consumer.



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This works the other way around too - we want the in-store experience to include everything we can access at our fingertips, online. This means all members of staff need to be knowledgeable. Online, we want fresh information often, even if it's just a new review added daily. We give up our privacy, likes and dislikes when we check in somewhere, and tend to forget that consumers also provide this information when they make an online purchase. We need to use this data to personalise the shopping experience.

To do so, you need to disseminate information in the most valuable places online by being in the right channels that let you respond to your consumers fast and accurately. In store, we are bombarded by choice and forget that there's even a difference between products listed as best-selling and top-rated, based on consumer reviews - that's the heart of CGC. Learn from your customers, as they are your greatest advocates.

A mobile word of warning

In a workshop session following lunch, Aurelien Dubot of Bazaarvoice's Product Marketing division spoke of growing your business and winning with consumer-generated content.

He stated that the only business constant is change. Added to this, mobile is the most disruptive force in a number of sectors, ranging from retail to property and banking. So watch out, especially in South Africa, where consumers turn against the company if their mobile site doesn't work.

Added to this is the fact that some brands have cracked the code and are seen as more trustworthy than others, especially in the social media space. When it comes to CGC, consumers got a voice in the late-1990s when they started generating their own social content. In 2015, CGC like reviews and sharing online experiences reach further than ever before.

So, in dealing with a company's nervousness of expected negative feedback in having consumer-generated content like product reviews and ratings on your website, you need to figure out whether it's a case of not trusting in your business

enough, or not trusting your customers. At the end of the day, if they had a bad experience you need to know about it and deal with it, as the transparency of social business means the ostrich approach is a thing of the past.

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