

06: Should social media be a pillar of your marketing strategy?

The sixth [Thought Leadership Digibate](#), recently hosted by [Aegis Media](#) in conjunction with [Bizcommunity.com](#) in Johannesburg, centred around whether social media should be a pillar of a marketing strategy.



Panel of experts

The panel of experts that was moderated by [Dawn Rowlands](#), CEO of Aegis Media Sub-Saharan Africa, included

- [Jerome Touze](#), co-founder, [www.wayn.com](#)
- [Mike Stopforth](#), CEO, [Cerebra](#)
- [Dr Sarah Britten](#) - new media & communications strategist
- [Uno de Waal](#), senior social strategist, [Trigger Isobar](#)
- [Dom O'Brien](#), head of innovation, [Isobar UK](#).

The panelists noted that more and more businesses are using social media as a part of their daily communications, customer service and operations strategies.

As businesses, the use of social media enables engagement between the brand and the customer on both a marketing and customer service front where real-time response is expected amongst the consumer. A few years back, social media was seen as a craze amongst those who tend to procrastinate, however now it is part and parcel of an overall business strategy when it comes to all levels of customer understanding and engagement. The question therefore is should social media be a pillar of a marketing strategy?

Where is social media heading?

The panelists are seeing social media go way beyond the marketing element and more into the creation of social business, where other elements such as customer service are included in the mix. The monitoring of social media has reportedly become better therefore there is a far better understanding of communities which will enable marketers to make better decisions on the online sphere.

It was noted that the consolidation of general social media players and niche players will become far more focused. Every day there are more and more brands entering into the social media sphere and social media strategies will become way more strategic from a brands' perspective and the use of personalities to drive the brands' social media strategies will become way more evident. Converting social media into sales has become the big area of focus.

Delving into return on investment

It was said that the return on investment model will largely depend on whether or not clients have the correct understanding of social media. Do they have the right approach? Have they been given the right advice and what are their ultimate business objectives? A few years ago when the online sphere was becoming more a part of the business model, business owners were concerned about the number of clicks. Nowadays, they want to put a monetary value to the consumer engagement via social media.

Social media allows brands to cut through the clutter and get directly to the consumer to engage with them. This said - as in

usual business practice - a strategy and a goal must be set prior to implementing a social media strategy in order to engage with customer properly. It is also going beyond the number of 'likes' on a fan page and is starting to engage with the content and we need to really understand what our consumers want from our brands for it to be effective in order to see a return on investment.

Investing in a social media campaign should not be done for the sake of it. Ask the following first: What do we do? What do we offer? Who is our market and what do we want to achieve in the market place? In some cases, social media may not be the best way of engaging with customers and other aspects of marketing will need to be explored.

Having the conversation before your competitors do

If one is not prepared to have a conversation with a consumer, then someone else is going to. Brands have to be strategic in their approach. Firstly establish what the objectives are and look at the long-term strategy. Social media should be viewed as a sustainable business tool and not a short-term project.

Social media should be used as a resource for what consumers are actually saying and not what we think they are saying. All brands fear negativity and should rather invest time and energy in creating positive conversations and consumer engagement tactics so that in the event of any adverse conversation, the positives far outweigh the negatives.

Content is king - where there is good social content, there is conversation among people who want to share and talk about it. Viral content on the other hand are things people see and want to share amongst their social peers. Often brands ignite the initial conversation and put out the first pieces of content, but the conversation is sustained by the consumer who becomes the content providers whilst the brands remain the custodians.

Outsource or keep internal - managing the social media "beast"

Panelists discussed that it's natural for brands to have these anxieties about not having control of social media, but the strategic approach is to create internal content and then allow it to flow into the social arena and allow people to add to the content. Social media for brands can reportedly be broken up into three stages - Emergency Room (trying to figure it all out), the Reactive Stage (responding to what is being said and put out content wise) and the Proactive Stage (where real engagement and interaction is happening).

It was said that the work that strategic agencies do must not be discredited, but more and more social media champions are said to be emerging and moving the content into the direction that they choose it to and this is not controlled internally by the brand. Often clients are over anxious about control, if you go and do a Google search on any brand you will see that more than 80% of the content out there has not been generated by them.

Final thoughts

There is a new trend word on the block, "Flawsome", which is a combination of 'Flawed' and 'Awesome' and this is what people want to see in brands - they don't want perfect, they like it when people are just people with flaws, the negative stuff along with all the wonderful stuff.

Don't ask if social media should be a pillar of the marketing mix; rather ask what matters to the people you want to engage and what is relevant to them. Be relevant, engaging and adaptable and understand that social media is just one of the elements in the marketing mix today.

The debate was held on Friday, 29 June 2012.

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