

CEOs and management should be in tune with social media

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Educating CEOs and management is an ongoing process that requires formal interventions as well as valuable development through mere experience and years of trial and error. And when it comes to social media, CEOs and management have no choice but to embrace it.

After attending the Social Media World Forum (SMWF) held in London earlier this year, here are some key learnings from the event.

Learning 1: Align business objectives with social media initiatives

Social media is no longer the responsibility of one department viz marketing, it spans all key business areas and divisions. The entire organisation has to be educated and become familiar with what social media is all about and how it can be used on a daily basis.

Facebook is now 10 years old and when it was introduced many CEOs (due to age or lifestyle) never engaged personally with Facebook. It was, and is, often seen as a foreign and uninvited 'thing' that they cannot relate to. In fact, many CEOs and leaders were impatient with the topic and even precluded employees from having access to Facebook at work.



Source: [123RF](#)

Things have shifted and so has the CEOs approach. CEOs and senior executives are now realising the significant impact that social media is having on their brands. They now know that consumers use social media as a platform to comment about their product and services, give their views freely and engage with their brands. A platform that exposes how a consumer responds to your business or product is now a powerful channel that cannot go unnoticed by businesses.

Social media initiatives need to tap into and support the overall business objectives. Metrics must be set for social media to actively measure return on investment and track customer's sentiment. Unless it is key to your business then don't do it.

Businesses need the stats to know what their customers are saying. We need to listen more and use the valuable information to get some power back in a subtle way. On social media platforms, customers have the power and are able to express their thoughts and opinions which are widely shared.

Learning 2: Create content that is relevant to your brand and your users

Marketers can be more powerful too if they listen to their users and customers and take action with what they learn. They need to be agile and nimble to respond effectively to what customers are saying and what they want.

It's not merely about following the buzz on the social media landscape. Make it relevant to your brand and your customers. For example just because it is Valentine's Day it doesn't mean that you should jump onto the love and hearts bandwagon. If it's not appropriate or relevant to the product or service that you are selling, then don't use it.

Ensure that your content is made up as follows - 80% interesting with relevant topics and information that add value; but no more than 20% hard sell content. The content you post for your brands must have 'share value'. It has to be newsworthy and SO GOOD that your customers want to share it with their friends.

Unlock the passion of your customers and let your audience be content creators. Many companies are using customer created content in their above-the-line advertising.

You have to be connected to your customer or you will be left behind.

Learning 3: The importance of managing risk and being prepared

Social media is the single largest source of unsolicited consumer opinions ever. Social media is the voice of the consumer, it's viral and moves with speed. 24/7 monitoring is essential in detecting possible threats. Everything is shared and nothing is hidden.

Companies must have policies in place to manage a crisis. A crisis process should include the CEO, an appointed task team, a formal notification to customers, a PR plan and a legal advisor. If these critical factors are in place, then brands can shift the sentiment in hours.

Social users want a response and they want it now. Companies must be prepared to predict, spot check and address any risk issues that may emerge.

Learning 4: Social media is instrumental in building small business and start ups

Two impressive case studies were presented at the SMWF to demonstrate how social media and online are the key channels of growing a business. WAUWAA: A site of new parents. This business first started as a blog for new parents discussing their new born babies and young children. Parents would share information so users were creating content online. The blog then evolved into a business website which offered advice, products and services for new parents. Ad spend in the past year for WAUWAA was only 5000 pounds.

Fetcham Park is a wedding venue service. It was started by an ex corporate individual who wanted to do something different. At first the service was advertised on Twitter and then the owners realised that brides-to-be didn't want to expose their wedding plans and definitely not their wedding venue. So they realised that no pre advertising could take place and shifted their marketing to a 'post wedding' focus.

Photographs on Instagram became their main source of advertising. After a wedding has taken place, a bride is only too happy to show off her dress, the venue and the entire experience. From photo's taken at the wedding, desire from other future brides to possibly enjoy a similar experience were used on social media platforms such as Instagram.

Learning 5: Use social media metrics to measure the ROI of your social media spend

If you know why your customers do what they do, or say what they say, you can grab the power back. It's not enough to just measure LIKES, you need to measure reach, platforms engaged, click through rates, audience profiles and sentiment. Basic sentiment alone is incomplete (sentiment measure is a vanity measure) - you have to dive deeper to ascertain reasons why your brand is receiving positive or negative comments.

Engage with companies who can formally measure social media metrics and integrate them into your business by collating findings into your existing customer data base.

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