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Using social media tools? If not, you're losing sales

Posted on January 28th, 2011 Written by [Wanda Kenton Smith](#)



I recently spoke at two major retail events – the Marine Dealer Conference and Expo in Orlando and the Powersports Business Conference and Expo Profit Xcelerator in Las Vegas. As part of my presentations on getting maximum marketing value out of minimal investment, I asked each group about their social media and marketing activities and was somewhat surprised by the responses.

In the marine group, about 50 percent were active in some type of Facebook activity. Some 20 percent also were involved with Twitter and/or YouTube. I found that impressive.

The power sports audience – motorcycle, ATV, RV, snowmobile and water sports retailers – was less active. About 25 percent were on Facebook, and there was a smattering of Twitter and YouTube involvement.

Few in either group had used LinkedIn.

While I haven't yet received the feedback from the marine presentation, the power sports folks let me know that the social media information I provided was one of the things they liked best about my presentation. After both seminars, people spoke to me about how they might leverage social media opportunities at their businesses.

Let me address some common misconceptions about social media and provide some suggestions on how to jump-start a program for success.

There was an assumption within these two audiences that social media requires a great deal of time and manpower. One business owner feared his salespeople would be "playing on the computer" rather than selling.

Let me state for the record that social media does not require a great deal of time. In fact, it can be done effectively in 30 minutes a day – perhaps even half that. While I obviously can't offer any assurances on how a particular salesperson will spend his or her time online, I can assure you that tweeting once a day can be done in minutes and Facebook posts can be done nearly as fast. Producing video for YouTube naturally requires more time, but this isn't a daily necessity. So if you're concerned about a steady drain

of time from salesroom activity, forget it. It just ain't so.

That being said, some serious time should be invested in social media, but I strongly believe this should be committed at the outset – before the first content keystroke. If you already have a program under way and you haven't clearly identified what you want your social media activity to achieve, then stop what you're doing right now and take the time to set goals with your team.

Be explicit. Write the goals down and share them with your crew so everyone knows what you're doing and why. Keep in mind that this medium is not intended for hard-core selling. The minute you try to shove sales down the throats of your followers, your program will falter. While you can and should offer promotions and incentives occasionally, this content alone will not sustain a social media marketing program.

What can you do to drive traffic to your business? Here are some ideas for a strategy that should build loyalty and lead to sales.

How about educating your customers about your products or services, or finding ways to excite them? What can you do in your social marketing activities to engage your customers to gain their valuable insight?

I really like the idea of positioning yourself and your business as the authority in your niche and your market. You can achieve this status by providing timely, relevant content on their local boating activity.

Ask yourself what you can do to create loyalty. How can you create a better sense of community? Have specific goals in mind so each contact you make is framed to achieve those objectives.

A word of caution: If you haven't started a social marketing platform yet, take it slowly. Don't jump in with both feet and try launching everything at once. Consider each of the platforms available and then determine which is best suited for your business and your customer base.

Ask your customers what they are doing in their social media activities. Start with one thing and see if it works. Once it is running successfully, consider phasing in new opportunities. It is smarter to do one social media program really well than to start several simultaneously and fail at all.

Another way to boost your chances of success is to tap someone at the dealership to shepherd your program. Assign this person to take ownership and give them the time and tools to get the job done. Look at your team and find someone who is already personally engaged in social media. You might consider a younger staffer for the job since this is often already a part of their daily communication culture. Not that you can't teach us old dogs new tricks – I know plenty of contemporaries who dabble in social media regularly and enjoy it. Find the right match, so whoever is at the helm is enthusiastic and committed and has the passion and desire to communicate with your customer base.

Let me share a few staggering statistics that come directly from the sources themselves. Twitter has nearly 106 million users, is adding 300,000 a day and has 180 million unique visitors monthly. Collective users produce an average of 55 million tweets each day.

Facebook has around 500 million users, and I was astounded to learn that 50 percent of them log in daily. Users spend 700 billion minutes a month on Facebook – many of them from mobile devices, which I suspect is a growing trend.

YouTube began five years ago, and already there are 2 billion video views daily. In fact, every minute

there is an upload of 24 hours of video content to the site. And here's a statistic that boggled my mind: There is more content created on YouTube every 60 days than aired in 60 years of network programming.

LinkedIn, the professional network with the goal of a globally connected economy, has 80 million members in 80 countries, with a new member joining every second.

Does this get your attention? These statistics should be a wake-up call. If you haven't already done so, you need to get with the program today. Get yourself educated on social media. Bring yourself up to speed through research. There are plenty of free white papers to scour online.

Another great idea is to follow what other businesses have done. It will help you to benchmark what works, both within and outside the industry. I'm a rabid proponent of peer networking. Talk to others you know about what they're doing and what works. The boating business does have social media success stories that are uniquely its own.

I believe social media is here to stay. It's the fastest-evolving marketing platform in the world and I firmly believe it's the wave of the future. Are you on board for the ride ... or have you been left on the dock?

Wanda Kenton Smith has spent more than 30 years in marine marketing. She is president of Kenton Smith Marketing and president of Marine Marketers of America. If you have comments about this column or want to share your own social media successes, e-mail wanda@kentonsmithmarketing.com.

This article originally appeared in the February 2011 issue.