



Social Media: A Business-Booster or a Time Killer?

YOU'VE PROBABLY ALREADY HEARD BOTH SIDES: SOME SAY YOU CAN'T HAVE A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS WITHOUT SOCIAL MEDIA, WHILE OTHERS RESPOND THAT USING SOCIAL MEDIA IS NOTHING MORE THAN A WASTE OF TIME. BOTH VENERATED AND VILIFIED, SOCIAL MEDIA CAN'T BE BOTH, CAN IT? AS WITH MOST THINGS, THE TRUTH PROBABLY LURKS SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE.

There's no question that businesses can put social media to good use. Most large companies use social media and some even have highly explicit guidelines on how employees may use social media, even on their own time and with their own equipment when the topic involves the business. The power of the various social media is significant.

Large organizations have enough people, probably in either the marketing area or the public relations area, to provide immediate responses to posts that concern the company. And they probably have an IT department with sufficient savvy to create an application that monitors the various social media and alert those who can respond when the organization is mentioned.

If you're running a 1-person business or any small business that doesn't have a marketing department, a PR department, and an IT department, the challenges are going to be more problematic. I have met business owners who feel that they must have a website and that they must be on Facebook and that they must be active on LinkedIn and that they must have a Twitter account. Somewhere along the way, they have lost track of the fact that the goal of their business is to sell a product or a service and not to create a never-ending stream of Facebook posts, LinkedIn updates, and tweets.

Because they spend so much time posting updates, they forget to perform the very tasks that might make their business grow: Prospecting for new clients, taking care of existing clients, looking for ways to be more effective. They're so caught up in the need to communicate that they fail to communicate with existing prospects and clients.

This is no way to run a business. This is no way to grow a business. This is a good way to become irrelevant to the very people you hope will buy (or continue to buy) your product or service.

Consider this: You're flipping through a magazine and see an ad for a shiny new truck that gets great mileage and provides a larger capacity than competing trucks. So the next day, you rush into the office, call the local truck dealer, and arrange to have a new truck delivered that afternoon. Great, right? Not if your company specializes in providing pedicures for Pomeranian puppies.

Think of social media as a tool because that's what it is. Just as you would never buy a new truck if you didn't need one, it makes no sense to sign up for Facebook unless you have a need for what Facebook can do. How much time are you willing to waste on distractions that will have no positive effect on your business?

That's not to say that social media can't help your business, but you need to figure out how it can be made to work for you before you set aside

large blocks of time on what will be essentially little more than a distraction.

Focus on the potential return on investment (ROI). How can you determine the value of social media to your business? The first thing to do is to ignore the social media consultants who claim that they will triple your business in a year by using social media. That much should be obvious and it requires only a bit of skepticism and critical thinking.

But then what?

PROBABLY THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION IS TIME. YOUR TIME.

Could the time you will spend dealing with social media be spent more productively making cold calls, arranging presentations at service clubs, writing articles for publication, or performing any of the myriad other marketing activities that are available?

Using multiple social media isn't a cut-and-paste operation. You'll have to adapt content to each platform, and it's not all about the length of the post. Social media activities generally don't scale well because most of your effective interactions will be one-to-one conversations. (Yes, you can broadcast a tweet or a status report, but these have far less impact than individual conversations.)

You'll also need to keep in mind what you're doing elsewhere because social media do not exist

in a vacuum. You'll need to integrate your activities on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter with what you're doing in print, on radio or television, and in direct mail. One of the most common problems people create for themselves involves sending mixed messages.

What do you want to happen?

A SOCIAL MEDIA CONSULTANT, GARDEN MEDIA GROUP, IS ADAMANT ABOUT MAKING GOALS PART OF YOUR PLAN SO THAT YOU'LL KNOW HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS.

"Success looks different for businesses in different sectors," the report says, "and even for individual businesses within the same sectors."

Let's consider Facebook. Maybe you want to get 1000 "likes". That's at least a measurable goal, but what would it mean to your business? So this is a goal, but as a goal it's nonsense.

The only measurable goal that counts is this one: How much business can you trace back to Facebook? Or Twitter? Or LinkedIn? If the answer is "I don't know", then you need to find out. If the answer is "none", then you need to be spending

your time doing something that will generate business.

A business-to-business company might want to increase traffic to their website and could view social media as a means to that end. So what do you want to do? Increase brand loyalty? If so, what are the metrics you'll use to measure it? How about drawing more people to the site? (By what percentage?) Or increasing time on site? (By how many minutes on average?) Whatever the goal, it has to be something you can measure.

And you need to know the costs.

What will it cost to train your staff in the use of social media? What will be the cost of their time spent away from normal duties? Will you have to purchase content or pay to have audio or video produced? What about research to determine both a baseline for where you are now and where you will be in a month or six months or a year?

Will you have to outsource any function? What hardware or software will you need to acquire?

Social media work in tandem with all of your other marketing and communications efforts.

Will you need to buy advertising to pull people to your site, your Facebook page, or your Twitter stream? What modifications will be needed to any existing online content? Will you need to change e-mail templates or direct-mail campaigns?

Time can be a significant cost. You'll need to learn how to use tools and procedures and then develop the discipline to keep it up. Bear in mind that any time you or your employees spend on social media is time that can't be spent working on core business functions.

If you're thinking about using social media, I'm not trying to be discouraging or to dissuade you from doing so. But it is important to set reasonable and measurable expectations, and to understand the many and varied costs. Ω

Clear and complete communication is one of the most basic requirements of social media, but clear and complete communication is even more essential within your organization. With that in mind, I offer the following article.

Communication Can Make or Break an Organization

IN AN ORGANIZATION, COMMUNICATION IS DEFINED AS THE FREE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION. MAJOR GENERAL CHARLES HENRY DISCUSSES THIS IN HIS BOOK, A GENERAL'S INSIGHTS INTO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT. IT IS ALSO DEFINED AS THE TRANSFER OF INFORMATION FROM ONE PERSON TO ANOTHER.

The concept of clear and complete information is not difficult. There are 4 primary aspects: Information, motivation, control, and emotion.

Information. Communication provides information to be used to make decisions. Managers need information about alternatives, the future, and potential outcomes to make appropriate decisions.

Motivation. Communication encourages commitment to organizational objectives which enhances individual and group performance.

Control. Communication makes clear everyone's duties, responsibilities and authority, and thus permits control.

Emotion. Communication permits the expression of feelings, opinions, and attitudes that help satisfy social needs.

In 1975 Henry Mintzberg estimated, in a *Harvard Business Review* article ("The Manager's Job: Folklore and Fact"), that communication consumes 59% of the time of first level managers (supervisors) and 89% of the time of middle managers.

Over the last 25 years, the successful and profitable executives and managers I've encountered have all spent a somewhat larger percentage of their time communicating than indicated in the Mintzberg article.

Is communication within your organization as effective as it should be? Ω

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