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B2B Social Media

Rather than relying on an elevator pitch, use social media to build lasting relationships.

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Many business people, especially entrepreneurs, are familiar with what is described as an "elevator pitch."

In the most basic terms, it is a quick but concise discussion of a business idea, a company or a product that someone is trying to sell.

When given an opportunity to do an elevator pitch, most people take the time to promote their companies, their products or themselves.

However, according to Bill Moller, a sales and communications expert based in Chicago, that really is the worst thing they can do.

"Instead of promoting yourself, take the minute or two you have to try and get to know the other person, what they are looking for and, most importantly, how you can possibly help them or their business," says Moller. "Instead of trying to sell someone something, look for how you can help them with something. That can pay dividends."

Interestingly, taking a "helping" rather than a "selling" approach using social media may be the way businesses, such as JanSan manufacturers and distributors, can make social media sites like Twitter, Facebook and scores of others work for them.

Until now, success with business-to-business (B2B) social media has proven elusive for many B2B industries, including our own.

A new way of using and thinking about B2B social media may help turn this around.

Skepticism Abounds

"I'm certainly open to it and we have been experimenting with it, but we have not found social media to be really relevant within our industry, at least not yet," says Mike Schaffer, a senior executive with Tacony Corporation's commercial floor care division, which includes such brands as [Tornado Industries Inc.](#) and [CFR Corporation](#).

Schaffer is not alone in his observation: Many B2B executives have expressed reservations about jumping into social media.

To some, it seems like a waste of time, a waste of company resources and, to still others, downright silly.

This was borne out in a June 2010 [study](#) by the digital marketing agency [White Horse](#).

For example, they found:

- More than 60 percent of B2B companies surveyed did not have a single staff member involved with social media marketing
- Only 10 percent of the companies surveyed had retained an outside agency to help them with social media marketing

- And, possibly most telling, 46 percent of the respondents reported that they believed social media as a marketing opportunity was "irrelevant," at least for now.

All of this may come as a big surprise to such companies as [Dell](#), [Southwest Airlines](#), [Burger King](#) and other business-to-consumer (B2C) companies that have experienced good — and in some cases, phenomenal — marketing success with social media.

They might conclude that B2B companies are simply slower in "getting it" and getting on the social media bandwagon.

But, what is likely more accurate is that B2C companies have different relationships with their customers and prospective customers, and social media is a perfect marketing fit for them.

Additionally, more traditional selling and marketing techniques can work and work well in the B2C social media environment.

This is not necessarily true for B2B companies, and that is why a different strategy, the helping approach, may prove to be the golden ticket for B2B social media marketing.

As a matter of fact, many social media experts argue that B2B commerce, once it really takes off, will really put the "social" in social media.

B2C often involves a onetime purchase of a product or service.

The need to develop a social relationship between company and customer is limited.

On the other hand, B2B relationships are often more ongoing and involve the buying of several products and services over time.

In this type of situation, a comfortable, helpful and ongoing social relationship is typically necessary.

Making B2B Social Media Work

So, how can JanSan businesses make social media websites work for them?

Schaffer says one strategy his company is following is posting scores of equipment maintenance tips as well as other helpful cleaning-related topics on various JanSan-focused social media sites.

The tips are written by one of the company's technical support representatives whose name appears on the tips.

The representative prepares them based on end-user customer service calls to the company, making them very timely and relevant.

"What we post is solid, helpful content about how to use, service and maintain professional cleaning equipment," says Schaffer. "It is not necessarily specific to our company or our own products and there is no sales pitch."

In fact, Schaffer says his company has decided, at least for now, to avoid using social media as a traditional advertising tool.

"Blatant promotions of products or manufacturers fall flat on a social media website," he says. "[On such websites] all credibility flies out the window as soon as someone starts 'pushing' a product or company."

As to other B2B social media tactics, Schaffer offers the following suggestions:

- **Write a blog.** Blogs often get picked up by the search engines, so they can help optimize a company's online exposure. It is important that the blog be updated regularly with solid content. It should contain links back to the

company website and have a similar look and feel as the company site.

- **Experiment with [Twitter](#).** Twitter also gets picked up by key search engines. Posting company news items, case studies and product releases can help increase their exposure.
- **Interact with peers.** Some [Linkedin](#) groups in our industry are a "who's who" of the industry. Interacting with these people can elevate yourself and your company.
- **Don't spread yourself too thin.** Find two to four social media communities that matter to your industry and specialize with them. Expending your efforts on more websites than you can handle is time-consuming and ultimately defeating.

"One more thing: Pay attention to not only what your competitors are doing, but also watch what other firms are doing," adds Schaffer. "No one owns the road in social media. If someone in the B2B market appears to be having success in their [social media] efforts, look for ways you can emulate and improve upon what they are doing."

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