

Social Media Marketing

As we have discussed, social media marketing appears to be evolving into a powerful venue for all types of industries. How much it will impact the professional cleaning and building industries is uncertain.

Overall, I think it will be more powerful and have greater impact in the business-to-consumer arena than in the business-to-business markets. Also, the janitor industry tends to lag behind in the adoption of new electronic technologies, so their impact may be even less.

Further, we cannot discount trade publications. I think trade magazines will continue to play a key role in our marketing efforts because they serve a unique niche—they are where end customers go to learn about products and services that serve their businesses and industries.

With this in mind, I trust the following helps you better understand these new venues and the opportunities they may provide us.

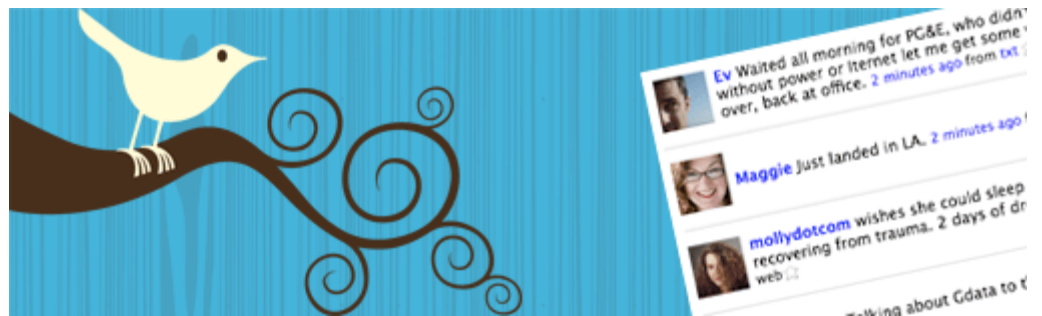
What is social media marketing?

Social media marketing is an engagement with online communities to generate exposure, opportunity, and sales.

The number one advantage is generating exposure for your company, followed by increasing traffic to your Web site and building new business partnerships.

Social media marketing refers to such things as message

boards (now known as blogs); Web sites, such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and YouTube; and other open online forums.



Some of the key social media Web sites of business interest include:

- Facebook: This was started as a personal interaction Web site, but many companies now have their own pages as well. A good example is CNN at www.facebook.com/cnn. We have also started a Facebook page to display press releases.:
<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/pages/Chicago-IL/AlturaSolutions-Communications-Inc/104425496795?ref=nf>
- LinkedIn: This is a social networking site for professional use. It is sectioned into groups, and there are several for the professional carpet cleaning and building industries as well as facility managers.
- SlideShare: SlideShare is to PowerPoint what YouTube is to videos. Users can download PowerPoint presentations, and visitors may comment on the presentations.
- Twitter: This site is for micro-blogging. Only 140 characters (including spaces) are allowed for each "tweet." One company, Zappos, which manufactures shoes, has been active on Twitter and encourages all employees to be on it as well. It also has its own dedicated page on Twitter that has proved successful in developing a strong and positive image for the firm. For more info, go to www.readwriteweb.com/archives/zappos_twitter.php.
- YouTube: Many companies are now uploading product videos on this popular site where anyone can post videos for public viewing.
- MyCleanLink: This site does not yet get a lot of traffic but at this time appears to be the main blogging site for the cleaning industry. There is also a Twitter version of the site at www.twitter.com/sm_distribution.

Note: Facebook has as many as 30 million registered users. But just because a site is large with a huge number of visitors does not necessarily mean it will be effective in marketing your company.

Industry-specific social media sites will likely prove the most powerful for the professional cleaning and building industries.

Why should I know about social media marketing?

End customers are talking about our products and services. Social media sites let us know what they are saying and, especially if there is a problem or complaint, take steps to address any issues.

Further, companies are making money using these technologies. An example:



Three years ago, the Clorox Company was considering spinning off its Brita water division due to poor sales. However, in one last effort to save the company, their PR agency came up with the idea of reminding consumers how most bottled water containers end up in landfills and can take up to 1,000 years to biodegrade. The Brita system, on the other hand, filters water, does not require bottles, and its dispensers are

reusable.

Note: Although Clorox is paying a public relations firm to promote Brita, most of the budget was taken from advertising, which has been reduced significantly. There are several cases where consumer-focused businesses have reduced advertising and put greater emphasis on social media marketing.

What does this example have to do with the power of social media marketing? To tell the story, the company used YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media tools. Brita is now profitable, and there is no longer talk of spinning off this division.

In another example, Scott Monty, who heads the social media department at Ford Motor Company, has a huge following on Twitter and calls himself an evangelist for the company. He is credited for changing the perception of Ford from “just another American

automobile company” to that of a socially responsible, Green automobile company.

Do you think we will have sales success using social media marketing?

The world of social media marketing is evolving rapidly. The rules and playbooks are being written as you read this.

One presenter at the May 2009 conference I attended said you must “make mistakes quickly.” Try blogging, Tweeting, etc., and give it a few months to see if it is having an impact. If not, reevaluate, make changes, or move on.

Will social media sites have an impact on the jansan and building industries?

In the late 1990s, there was actually considerable resistance to the Internet from some segments of the professional cleaning industry. I had one distributor tell me in 1999 that he had just acquired his first fax machine and was not interested in hearing about another new technology.

Although one might not expect the jansan industry to embrace social media marketing technologies as quickly as consumer-focused industries, it is likely the industry will gravitate to them faster and with more enthusiasm than they did the Internet a decade earlier. One reason: the economy. Everyone wants to take advantage of any medium that might help bolster sales.

Another reason is the fact that digital and online technologies all play a greater role in our lives today. These technologies are not foreign to us any longer; we are able to adapt to them and take advantage of them much more easily and with less resistance.

Is there a formula (literally) for success when delving into social media marketing?

Yes.

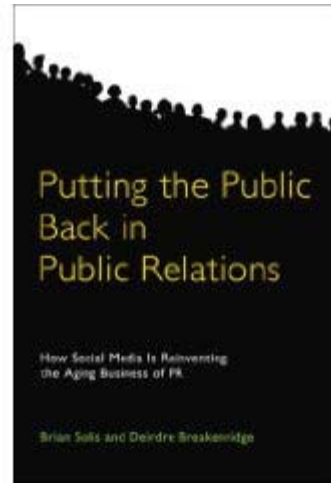
Yes. The formula is:

Frequency + quality + responsiveness + focus x stakeholders (number of visitors to the site) = community building, corporate branding, and product awareness.

What are our goals for getting involved with social media Web sites?

This is probably best answered by author Brian Sollis, who was one of the presenters at the conference and is considered an expert in the field. He says:

“As you participate and contribute content, advice, and information, you build an online portfolio of knowledge that enhances your reputation, boosts your brand, and raises the profile of your company. And most important, the participation encourages customer loyalty. You earn trust, and trust is priceless.”



Are there any social media marketing rules or etiquette that we should be aware of?

Yes, there are four important rules: be authentic, be honest, be helpful, and be conversational.

What seems to work best is when our focus is on helping others. This is similar to the way we submit articles now—be educational and helpful while tactfully presenting the benefits of your products and services.

Also, social media marketing is conversational. Big words and canned expressions still found in some press releases fall flat on a social media site. Instead, online messages should be written as though we are talking face-to-face with someone.

On which social media sites should we focus our attention?

We already have a presence on CleanLink, LinkedIn, MyFacilities, and some other facility management sites. I think we should expand to the message boards on *CMM*, *CleanFax*, and Twitter.

Again, this medium is rapidly evolving, and we will have to give it a little time to see if this channel has an ongoing impact on marketing and sales. As to the sites and platforms, their impact may change as well. Three different presenters said they thought Twitter, which is now a sensation in the United States and England, may fade away in the not-too-distant future. However, some sites, such as Facebook, look fairly solid for now.

What types of social media marketing are we doing now?

Most of what we are doing now involves responding to blogs with thorough, informative, and credible answers under client or expert bylines. Additionally, we are also posting articles, press releases, product releases, and other items on pertinent social media Web sites.

As for Twitter, we are announcing new press releases, product releases, and items of interest and providing a link in the "Tweet" that goes directly to the item discussed.

Does our company need a social media corporate policy?

Every business is a media business today. Most likely, many of your employees are already on Twitter, Facebook, and other sites. As soon as these employees discuss your company, they become company spokespeople. There have already been embarrassing incidents where employees have written disparaging things about another company, coworker, vendor, etc.

Because of this, some consumer-focused companies have strict social media corporate policies. In some cases, employees can state where they work and for how long but nothing more when on social media sites. Some firms have blocked access to Twitter, Facebook, etc., at their offices. More relaxed rules allow employees to write about their companies as long as they do not reveal secrets and are not critical of the company or any of its competitors, vendors, or staff.

A recommended approach:

Clearly outline a company policy for social media sites covering what types of behavior and comments and what amount of time during work hours are acceptable. Additionally, the policy should state what is acceptable company-related commentary on social media Web



sites when employees are off-site or at home. Having clearly established rules helps avoid misuse by employees.

Where do we go from here?

I think we should jump in and get our feet wet and see what happens. At the very least, we will be ahead of the game just by starting early. I may be mistaken, but I have noticed only a

few manufacturers in the professional cleaning/building industries involved with social media marketing, and often their comments are advertorial and lose value.

I think we have to be educational and helpful in our messages and keep our eyes open for new opportunities as they evolve. Social media marketing is part of Web 2.0. And what we are venturing into is PR 2.0. Right now, a lot of what we learn about this movement will come about simply by being a part of it.

Sidebar:

My Own Social Media Experience

In 1998, I wrote two books on the professional cleaning industry. Realizing there were few ways to market the books, I had a Web site

made—still a bit of a novelty at the time—and started visiting the few cleaning-related message boards then available.

One of the most active was with America Online (AOL). I would answer questions based on my years of experience in the industry and would always leave a “signature” that included my Web site with a reference to the books.

In time, the books began to sell surprisingly well, but what evolved from the message board activity proved of even greater value. A jansan Web “portal” for the industry was started in New York. They found me through the message boards and hired me to work for them, eventually moving me to New York City.

As their funding started evaporating, and with the Internet bust that occurred in 2000, I contacted ISSA for a position. It turned out ISSA had also heard of me through both that job and the message board postings. They offered me a job and moved me to Chicago.

The bottom line: this form of marketing can work and is something we should take advantage of to supplement our other forms of communications.