



Why You Should Trust Your Employees With Social Media

By John McGee

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, over 13.6 million Americans are employed as sales professionals. However, gone are the days of the traveling door-to-door salesman who spent face time with customers learning about their personal lives and developing relationships. Consumers now make purchasing decisions based on online research, often never setting foot in a store. As more companies embrace social media, building one-on-one relationships with existing and potential customers is experiencing a revival and creating new avenues for more effective marketing campaigns.

To make social media an effective marketing and sales tools, companies need to:

- Create opportunities for sales people to build their own communities and relationships as company spokespeople.
- Use the relationships their sales team builds to stay in touch with customer needs.
- Develop an internal system for monitoring and regulating employee's work-affiliated social media accounts.

More than 15 million businesses and organizations are now part of Facebook. Many corporations also have company Twitter pages. In the corporate world, these pages are typically followed or liked by customers and employees. Companies with large customer bases and thousands of employees might have impressive numbers of likes or follows, but all too often, posts or tweets are stagnant, void of real interaction and results.

The solution is to keep the company pages as placeholders and maintain the corporate social media presence, but push all sales and marketing activity to the individual level through employees.

Local sales representatives often have a much better pulse on the wants and needs of customers compared to a social media manager located at company headquarters hundreds of miles away. Individual employees need to be empowered to develop relationships with their local communities on behalf of the company. By doing so, they can stay in touch with local customer service issues on a personal level and develop more efficient solutions, relate local events to company news and products, and better integrate the brand into customer's lives.

For example, an insurance company with agents and representatives scattered across the country can use social media to reach new customers and increase services for current customers. If a hail storm occurs in Kansas, wildfires rage in Colorado and heavy rains flood South Carolina, the company can post messages about filing claims and the importance of having proper home owner's policies, but the messaging will include sweeping generalities.

To increase the effectiveness of social media in a situation like this, representatives of the insurance company should be posting messages saturated with local news. A local representative will know what neighborhoods were hardest hit, how long the clean up is expected to take and where people who need assistance can go for help. Social media posts can be crafted and tailored to fit a local audience, making customers feel like the company knows them and their struggles and is the best option for providing a solution.

In an employee-centric social media strategy, companies are able to reach customers through channels that are more effective while simultaneously exposing potential customers to their products and services. Employees should be empowered with brand and legal compliant messaging by their employer that they can post to their individual Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts. The messaging should be relevant—not pushy—relatable and solve a problem for current and potential customers. If this method is utilized, businesses will be able to touch more people through social media and experience greater success at creating opportunities for sales.

Ensuring that employees are posting appropriate messaging in terms of legalities and the brand identity can be an overwhelming responsibility for a company. In fact, if an employee-centric social media model is employed, a business must find a technology solution to manage it.

CRM solutions now offer features that allow companies to manage and track social media campaigns just like any other marketing endeavour. Marketing departments can build libraries of brand and legal compliant communications that sales representatives can post to their individual LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter accounts with customization to tailor the messaging to the local community. Additionally, companies are able to monitor social media across corporate and employee accounts to determine what campaigns are generating results and which need to be revised. Real-time results help companies know what is trending and what is not; learn how customers, prospects and leads engage with content; and track and grow their influence within social networks.

The vital element in any corporate social media campaign is the individual employee. Even the most researched and well-thought out marketing messaging cannot be successful if it does not reach its target audience. Through employee social media accounts, companies can reach more current and potential customers with brand communications that are narrowly tailored and tied to a personal relationship. Even though they may never meet in person, a company representative can develop strong ties with people in the local community and create a more efficient and lucrative marketing and sales channel for the organization.

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