

Social Networking

Learn the Rules of Engagement

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Leveraging Social Media for High-Impact Marketing

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In today's "sound-bite" environment in which professional organizations compete for client attention through a variety of communications conduits, it is increasingly important to consider and evaluate the potentially powerful benefits of new social media tools. However, to properly leverage their benefits, one must also understand that these new tools are just that — tools. Social media tools should be used with a clear objective in mind and with the consistent application of well-known but often overlooked communications principles. Furthermore, they will have the most marketing impact when used in conjunction with other social and nonsocial media communications tools.

Communicators seeking to maximize the efficacy of social media tools should consider key areas that include marketing focus, behavioral influence and contact frequency. These considerations can be applied within a communications continuum using specific social media tools to help communicators effectively close the deal with current and potential customers. Social media tools can bring new opportunity in this final phase of the marketing process commonly referred to as "the last three feet," where personal contact with the customer turns opportunity into business.

MARKETING FOCUS

Wikipedia defines "Social Media" as . . .

"media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. Social media use Internet- and Web-based technologies to transform broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many). It supports the democratization of knowledge and information, transforming people from content consumers into content producers."

From a practical point of view, social media leverage online tools and techniques to reach, inform, engage, encourage and influence clients interactively.

In order to truly optimize social media capabilities, communicators must clearly identify and understand exactly what it is they are trying to achieve and ensure that their communication efforts are focused on supporting their objectives. In the business arena, one of the best ways to frame one's focus is to view potential objectives in relation to marketing and traditional marketing categories.

According to the American Marketing Association, "Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large."

There are four key areas considered to be part of an overall marketing mix, often referred to as the “4 P’s.” These are:

• **Product (Service):**

The product aspects of marketing deal with the specifications of the actual goods or services and how these relate to the end user’s needs and wants. The scope of a product or service also generally includes supporting elements such as warranties, guarantees and support.

• **Pricing:**

This refers to the process of setting a price for a product, including discounts. The price need not be monetary; it can simply be what is exchanged for the product or services (e.g., time, energy or attention). Methods of setting prices optimally are in the domain of pricing science.

• **Promotion:**

Advertising and sales promotion include promotional education, publicity and personal selling. Branding refers to the various methods of promoting the product, brand or company.

• **Placement (Distribution):**

Placement refers to how the product gets to the customer including point-of-sale placement or retailing. This fourth “P” has sometimes been called “Place,” referring to the channel by which a product or service is sold (e.g., online vs. retail), the geographic region or industry in which it is sold and to which segment (young adults, families, business people). The environment in which the product is sold can also affect sales.

In addition, there is the overshadowing category of People. This category — typically omitted from traditional marketing category descriptions but certainly relevant in light of the relationship component of social media — plays an integral role in increasing the importance of marketing messages developed around and focused on the “4 P’s.”

To maximize the use of social media, it is necessary to develop a focused marketing message. Determining which marketing category to leverage and developing communications to support that category should increase the chance for success with social media. Delivering dynamic communication that will gain and maintain client influence is essential for optimal use of social media tools.

How does one change and maintain change in customer behavior?*

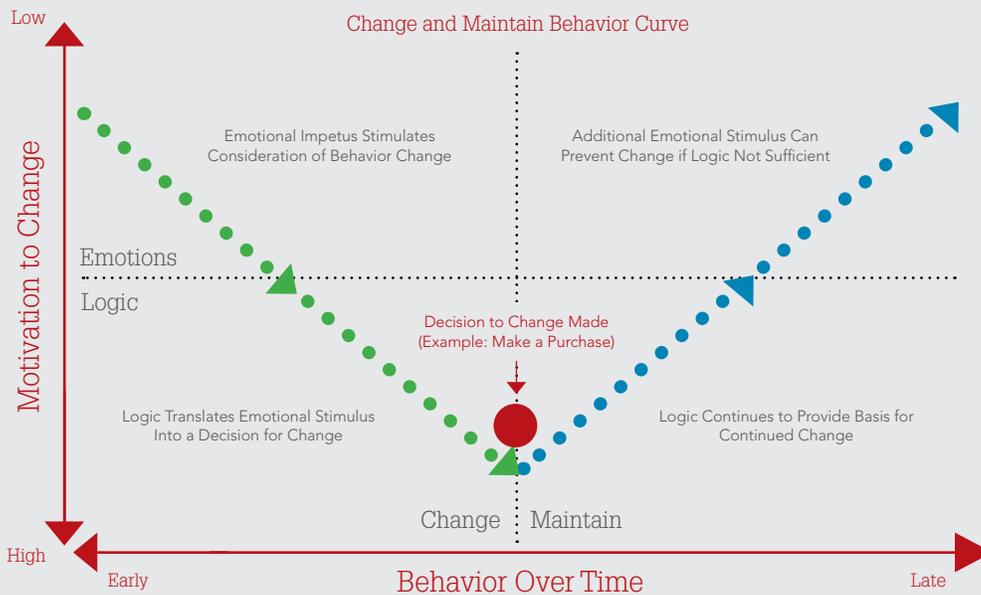


Figure 1

* W.R. Robinson, Houston, TX, 1995.

BEHAVIORAL INFLUENCE

In order to influence a customer, it is prudent to first become familiar with the components of customer behavior. There are both emotional and logical elements to client decisions — and the impact of these elements changes over time.

Figure 1 illustrates a predictable flow to customer decisions that follows this general sequence:

- **Initially a potential customer is stimulated through emotion to consider a change in behavior.**

This emotion, resulting from a high motivation to consider change, progresses toward the need to justify the considered change with logic over time.

Example of Need for Emotional Stimulus: I am using legacy software for CRM, and my firm wishes to improve its client relationship processes. A new product looks promising, and if I can implement a product that saves the firm money, my employer will be impressed.

- **At some point during the consideration of change, the customer begins to have to justify the emotional desire for change with a logical reason for considering the change.**

Example of Need for Logical Stimulus: I want to impress my employer by providing cost savings, therefore I need to recognize and work through specific return on investment examples.

- **Once both the emotional and logical stimuli for change have been presented, the individual being influenced (audience) typically makes a decision to change or maintain his or her behavior.**

Example of Behavioral Change: It seems I can help the firm save money. The new product is compelling, and the return on investment numbers support its adoption, so I am going to purchase the new product.

If, at this point, there is not a decision to change behavior, then the communicator's message (both emotional and logical stimulus components) may need to be refined.

- **Once behavior has been changed, the next major challenge is maintaining the desired customer behavior.**

This can be accomplished by continuing to send messages to the customer with logical reasons for maintaining his/her behavior along with ensuring that emotion-targeted messaging is not neglected. This combination serves to prevent competitive emotional and logical messaging from grabbing the attention of the customer and resulting in a non-desired change of behavior.

Example of Maintaining Behavioral Change: The change appears to be saving the firm money, and the return-on-investment case studies shared by the vendor seem to show that this is the best product to use to continue saving money.

In addition to focusing one's message to the appropriate marketing category and refining the communications according to the emotional and logical components of influence, the effectiveness of social media tools may also be increased by understanding how many contacts it takes to get that message through to the client.

CONTACT FREQUENCY

In his widely read book, *Guerilla Marketing*, Jay Conrad Levinson shares that, from a contact perspective, there is significant benefit in multiple contacts with potential customers and a significant increase in probability of a client being influenced when contacted five or more times.

In applying this sales-centric call success probability metric to the use of communications in general, and social media communications specifically, it seems reasonable to assert that one could maximize the use of social media tools by providing a focused message with emotional and logical elements, and then delivering that message five or more times to a customer in an unobtrusive manner. This non-intrusiveness is a key point given the rapid dissemination and response capability of most social media tools.

Once one understands the Change/Maintain Behavior Continuum (Figure 1) and the number of contacts that may be required to influence customers (Figure 2), consideration can be given to how this knowledge can be applied with a variety of communications techniques.

COMMUNICATIONS CONTINUUM

Traditionally, organizations have sought to influence users through a combination of print and online materials shared directly by sales team members in face-to-face encounters. However, with the advent and acceptance of social media, organizations can now move a significant portion of conventional face-to-face encounters to an online environment — a movement that can speed the sharing and collaboration between influencers and those being influenced.

In communicating with others, one's interactions may be classified as reaching, informing, engaging, or encouraging (influencing) others. Whether these

How many contacts are required to close a deal?*

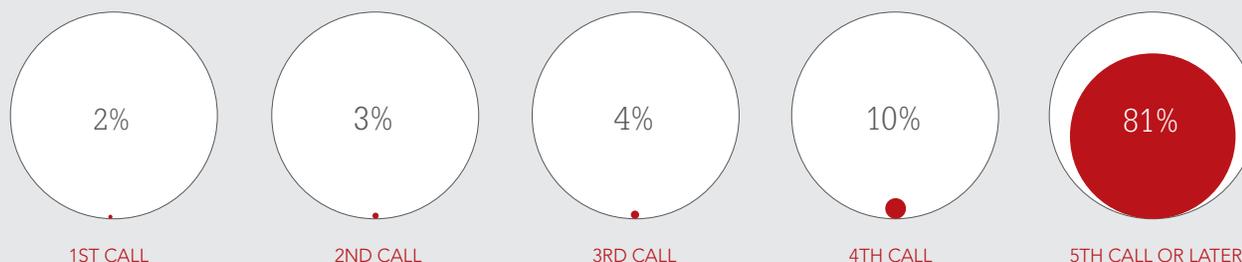


Figure 2

* Levinson, Jay Conrad. *Guerilla Marketing*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1989.

communications are online, in print, face-to-face, or consist of some combination of these communications methods, the fact remains that they all have some degree of influence on the parties involved in the communication process.

The Simple Communications Continuum (Figure 3) shows how one might employ a combination of print, online (social media tools), and face-to-face techniques in synchronization with each other to help decrease the time required to “close with the customer.”

Using all available conduits to the customer, a coordinated approach could include a combination of the following tools:

• Online Social Media Tools

- SMS
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Facebook
- Blogs
- Podcasts

• Online Traditional Tools

- E-mail Messages
- Articles
- Presentations (including webinars)
- Newsletters
- Videos
- Websites (including tools like Sidewiki for commenting on topics from non-organizational websites).

• Print Tools

- Postcards
- Letters

- Articles
- Blogs (prepared in print format)
- Newsletters
- Brochures
- Advertisements

• Face-to-Face Tools

- Telephone Calls
- Interviews Speaking Engagements

While this listing of tools is not wholly inclusive, it does provide a solid starting place to consider how to structure, organize and execute plans designed to influence clients.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CLOSING THE “LAST THREE FEET”

“The fundamental qualities for good execution of a plan are: first, intelligence; then discernment and judgment, which enable one to recognize the best method as to attain it; the singleness of purpose; and lastly, what is most essential of all, will — stubborn will.”

— Marshal Ferdinand Foch

To best translate the information provided here into practical application, one should ensure that all communications are coordinated in message, usage and follow-up. Customers value predictability in communications; it provides a comfortable context for understanding when and how future communications will occur. Likewise, customers respond well to continuity. Once a communication process (newsletter campaign, e-mail campaign) is initiated, it is important for an organization’s credibility to continue to meet the communication expectations set. How well an organization

communicates is often directly extrapolated by the client as an indication of how well that organization will provide and support a product. Execution is fundamental in establishing credibility and a key determinant of whether one's use of social media will be effective.

Once communicators understand and have developed objective-based messaging (marketing focus), have refined this messaging to provide both emotional and logical stimulus (behavioral influence) and have shared the messaging in a non-intrusive manner (contact frequency), they can begin to leverage social media tools both individually and in concert with other communications tools (communication continuum), to effectively "close the last three feet" with clients/customers. **ILTA**

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