

Social Media Marketing Opportunities

The average American spends approximately three hours online every day. Nielsen observes that Internet users spend more time on social media sites than any other site type...

by Fiona Woolf (October 5, 2013)

Social media is characterized by collaboration and interaction. It encompasses websites and applications designed for networking, content-sharing and community input. This includes social network sites (eg, Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn), online forums, blogs, picture-sharing (eg, Pinterest) and user-generated content sites (eg, Reddit, Wikis).

Consumers are influenced by the opinions of others on social media sites, and are actively seeking online reviews, ratings and recommendations to make purchase decisions. Equally important, a growing number of consumers are willing to participate in social sharing for rewards. Here are ways you can use social media to capture the voice of customers and increase your online presence:

- **Publishing** special offers and updates for customers to share with their friends and followers via their social networks (*social sharing*)
- **Encouraging** customers to talk about your company, products and services on social media sites (*social mentions*)
- **Providing** customers with tools that make it simple to post reviews on social network sites, third party shopping sites (eg, Amazon, Yahoo), and third party review sites (eg, Yelp, Citysearch)
- **Installing** *sharing* buttons on your website that enable users to click on favorite products and noteworthy news to share with others online
- **Implementing** a *social rewards* program to reward customers for recommending and referring you to others via social media

Effectively using social media to generate positive promotion, build brand awareness and strengthen customer loyalty can be a difficult task. Four software tools that can help businesses address this marketing challenge include:

Social Toaster lets your fans find you, and is centered on promoting advocacy rather than recruiting new customers. Anyone can become an official social advocate for you by completing an online sign-up form which links the person's social network account(s) to *Social Toaster*. Branded emails are sent to advocates who can share the content (as is) with a single click across their social networks. Gamification sustains involvement, and advocates earn points for signing up and sharing content. Prizes are awarded daily, weekly and monthly.

Zuberance builds brand advocacy. It identifies your existing customers who are talking about you online and recruits them into their advocacy program. Advocates are given tools making it easy to write product reviews, which it publishes (with permission) across social network sites, third party shopping sites, and third party review sites. This draws positive attention to your business and boosts your online ratings, and *Zuberance* tracks the clicks, sales, and sharing that result from its marketing endeavors. It does not incent advocates with points or prizes, believing that being able to provide input is rewarding in and of itself.

Social Grower is designed for retailers with a card-based loyalty program. In lieu of your existing loyalty card, retailers use *Social Grower's* plastic social rewards card, which automatically links to members' social network accounts. Each time a member uses (swipes) the card, it affords the retailer the opportunity to post messages (with permission) to that member's social network page. The card also triggers automated check-ins on Foursquare. Note: the retailer still receives its data as before.

Social Rewards offers social sharing rewards programs that complement existing loyalty programs. Special deals and offers are sent to members, incentivizing members to share them across their social network(s). It tracks all online mentions of each deal, awarding members points for social mentions that lead to actual sales.

Retailers are beginning to understand the power of social media to attract new customers and maintain loyal ones. Today, it is standard for companies to *represent* themselves on social media (eg, having a Facebook page to advertise and receive quick feedback) but this does not tap into the potential of using social media to *interact* with customers. As seen in the examples above, the ability to use social media for engaging customers and generating positive online attention is what makes it an invaluable medium for retailers to be following, testing and developing new marketing strategies.

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About the author...

Fiona Woolf, a graduate of the University of Virginia, specializes in market research.

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