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But I thought you “liked” me!

Why Facebook can't take the place of traditional advertising.

I make a point of going into the field with sales people whenever I can. The main reason I like to do this is that it is a lot of fun, I love selling, but it also gives me a chance to help our reps and to listen to what our customers and prospects are saying. More and more they are telling me that they don't need to advertise because they are on Facebook. They are convinced that social media has completely eliminated the need for “traditional” media. They see Facebook as a tool to communicate one on one with their customers. They talk about their Facebook “likes” as if they are an old west gunslinger counting the notches on their gun. Many consider themselves social media marketing experts and are very happy that they no longer have to pay for advertising. Some clients will share anecdotal evidence about the effectiveness of their social media marketing program.

As a sales person it is hard to dispute the customer's personal experiences with Facebook and we certainly can't beat their price (FREE!), so what do we say in these situations. In any competitive situation, knowledge is the key to overcoming the objection. We need to acknowledge the “pros” of the competitive product, but we also have to understand their “cons” so that we can educate the customer about the relative merits of our products versus the competitor. Facebook certainly has many strengths, Facebook has 1.3 billion (This is not a typo, billion with a “b” is correct) users worldwide, 71% of American web users belong to Facebook, rising to 90% for people aged 18 to 29. It is estimated that the first thing that 48% of adults 18-34 do when they wake up each morning is check their Facebook page. We are living in a Facebook obsessed culture and the usage of the site increased 22% from 2012 to 2013. Given these numbers, every business should have some presence on Facebook. In spite of this amazing reach, there are a number of reasons why Facebook does not take the place of traditional advertising. What follows are some things that your advertisers and prospects should be aware of when considering their options.

Why do people go on Facebook? Facebook is a relationship site. It helps people stay in touch with people they know and to get in touch with like

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minded individuals that they may want to know. It is a place where people share pictures of their kids and their pets; share details of their vacation or their latest meal and express their concern for one another. Sometimes a person will offer a recommendation of a favorite business, but this is only a small percentage of the postings. It is an interpersonal site, not a place to do business like Amazon or EBay. When Facebook users are surveyed on why they enjoy or use the site, they seldom mention finding consumer information. Facebook people are looking for people, not businesses. Businesses need to consider the mindset of the Facebook user versus the reader of our papers. Online they are looking to connect with people, in the paper they are looking for shopping information.

It is all about the content! One of the things that a business buys when they advertise in your paper is you. If you are reading this, you are most likely an advertising professional. You are skilled at crafting messages that motivate consumers to make purchases with your customers. Your salary and/or commission are a big part of what the advertiser is paying for when they run in your publication. On Facebook, either they, or a designated employee, have to write the post. Large national businesses have a marketing staff dedicated to Facebook marketing. They frequently post engaging, compelling messages to sell their employer's products. Small business people cannot afford this luxury. They post something to Facebook when they find a few free moments. They do not think out the message and just post what comes to mind. A poorly crafted message will not generate business and may even create a negative image of their enterprise. Advertisers often move their marketing to Facebook to save money, but they do not take into account the time required to "feed the Facebook beast." They either need to take time away from their other activities to compose frequent well written posts or they need a professional to do it for them. Another challenge is being prepared to counter negative comments on Facebook. An impossible to please customer, or even a competitor, may post negative comments about the business on their page. Because negative comments have a disproportionate impact on readers, these complaints, warranted or unwarranted, can undo a great deal of good will and damage the business's reputation.

Facebook is a victim of its own success! As stated above, Facebook is now a fixture of daily life with millions of users, each and every one of whom has

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a lot to say. Each Facebook user's profile indicates the type of information they would like to see in their newsfeed. Facebook estimates that if they simply sent every user all the information that meets their criteria, each Facebook user would get about 15,000 messages a day. Well networked users could get ten times that many. This is why Facebook filters the messages sent to a user based on a formula using the relevance and popularity of the post. The chances of a small business's post passing through this filter is very slim. Community newspapers and their websites provide a competitive environment that favors the small business; Facebook creates an environment that favors big enterprises.

You like me, but will you buy anything from me? Small businesses jump through hoops to get potential customers to "like" them on Facebook. They offer them special offers and free products to click the magic "Like" button. They do this because they believe they are buying a friend for life. They believe that once someone "Likes" them, that they will have a way to deliver a marketing message directly to them whenever they want. Businesses see their "likes" as a captive market that they can reach absolutely free with just the click of a mouse. This is not the case. Most people click "like" to earn a short term benefit, such as a coupon or access to special pricing. They do not intend to form a long term relationship with the business. Facebook allows a user to decide which posts they want to receive. A Gallup poll found that 94% of Americans use Facebook to stay in touch with friends and family members. This is why most commercial posts are filtered. A study conducted by the Facebook analytics firm PageLever found that only 7.49% of Facebook fans actually see fan page updates. They also found that as the size of the fan base increases, the number of impressions created actually decreases. I believe this is a result of "bribing" people to subscribe who have a limited interest in the business's products. Using the PageLever's number, a business may think they are reaching 2,000 Facebook fans, when the number is actually less than 150.

They call it social, not commercial, media for a reason! A recent (June 23, 2014) Gallup poll found that only 5% of Americans said social media has a great deal of influence on what they buy, while 62% said social media had "No influence at all" on where they shopped. The number is slightly higher for people born after 1980, seven percent, but this does not justify the time it takes to mount a robust Facebook campaign. A Nielsen poll from last year found

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the majority of respondents “regard social media ads with a low level of trust relative to more traditional forms of advertising.” Nielsen found that while word of mouth recommendations benefit a business, self promotion does not. Online or in the “real” world, the best way for a business to promote itself is to deliver great customer service. This is why many national firms are backing away from social media as a central part of their marketing efforts.

“Confirmation bias.” Confirmation bias is a term used by psychologists to describe the natural human tendency to see what we want to see. Business people want to believe that Facebook can outperform paid advertising with little effort and no investment. This is a little like looking for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow or believing a politician’s promise. The old saying, “You get what you pay for!” is still in force in the 21st century. With the popularity of Facebook, we need to be prepared to discuss it with advertisers. We need to remind them that Facebook promotions are not free, that they require a serious investment of time and effort to reach a relatively small number of people. As advertising professionals, we need to remind them that when they market to their “fans,” they are “preaching to the choir,” rather than reaching out to new customers. We should never discourage advertisers from using Facebook, but we need to remind them that Facebook is only one part of a comprehensive marketing program.

This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.

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