The Power of Social Media: Connecting with the Customer

Brooke Borgias
Under the Direction of John F. Tanner Jr. Ph.D.
Executive Director, Baylor Business Collaboratory
Abstract

UPS used the power of social media to connect with the right audience in attempt to increase brand visibility and, specifically, increase awareness of its whitepaper with comScore on online retail shopping behavior. The white paper can be found here:  

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About the Author

Brooke Borgias is a senior double marketing and social entrepreneurship major at Baylor University, where she has interned as a marketing communications specialist for the past two years. She graduates in December, 2013 and plans to work in marketing communications or on social entrepreneurship ventures. She can be reached at brooke_borgias@baylor.edu.

About the Baylor Business Collaboratory

A “collaboratory” is a mash-up of collaborative laboratory – an arrangement through which businesses and Baylor business faculty work together developing solutions to market challenges through innovative research. The Baylor Business Collaboratory partners include Cabela’s, HEB, BancVue, and affiliates such as data warehousing leader Teradata. Key research questions sponsored and developed in conjunction with industry executives, analysts and others include to date:

• How to grow revenue and transactions without discounting.
• Identifying which marketing actions, channels and programs really drive revenue, customer satisfaction, and loyalty.
• Gathering, analyzing, interpreting, and applying “Big Data” to business problems.

For additional information, please contact Jeff_Tanner@baylor.edu.
The Power of Social Media

Social media is changing the business landscape. Tweets, posts and LinkedIn connections are replacing the way companies reach customers. Understanding and leveraging social media to connect with and build relationships with customers will be richly beneficial for companies who get it right. One study revealed that 77 percent of survey respondents said they were more likely to buy from a company whose CEO uses social media. Companies simply cannot afford to not use social media. Hubspot’s annual marketing report discovered that social media generates almost twice as many leads as do traditional trade shows, telemarketing, direct mail or pay per click. Yet, leveraging social media to its greatest advantage might be harder than it sounds.

With social media platforms becoming the best place to connect and engage with potential customers, companies that can master engagement with the right people can build closer customer relationships. The immediacy factor of social media makes the process of connecting, to interacting, to transforming into the customer even faster than traditional marketing channels, creating an opportunity for organizations that can master social media interaction to be a step ahead of the competition.

UPS using Social Media

UPS, the world’s largest package delivery company and a leading global provider of specialized transportation and logistics services, demonstrated the power of social media to engage with customers in order to solve a problem. The company, partnering with comScore, published a whitepaper discussing online buying habits. The research was interesting and the presentation was done well, but the whitepaper was not generating significant downloads or awareness. UPS decided to partner with a social media engagement firm to use social media in attempt to increase downloads and awareness.

The UPS Story

When UPS first decided to use social media as a tool to increase awareness and dissemination of the white paper, the goal was to engage a relevant base that would eventually download the comScore whitepaper and share it with others. A relevant base would be a segment of interested influencers on the Twitter platform that would find the paper useful and influence their followers to look at it. The above screenshot is of Doug, a real twitter account. Analysis of accounts and group bundles indicated that Doug could potentially be interested in what the whitepaper discussed based on his own interests (accounts he follows). He had a high influencer score and engaged in and followed topics similar to the whitepaper’s content: marketing, shopping and technology. An influencer score is a ranking of 1-100 on how influential someone’s voice is.
on the twitter platform. UPS was then able to automate engagement with Doug in attempt to spread the whitepaper to Doug and his followers, who most likely shared the same interests. By targeting one closely matched individual, UPS could reach many more.

Research and analysis of relevant accounts also uncovered Brian Moran. Brian Moran has over 152,000 followers. Once UPS engaged with him through Twitter, he shared the whitepaper with all his followers. UPS set a drip marketing campaign and saw great enthusiasm and response from him and his followers. The adjacent examples are screen shots of the tweets sent by Moran and UPS.

Moran continued to tweet about the paper increasing the visibility of it and the UPS brand. The after effects of Moran’s tweets were far-reaching as click through to the whitepaper increased. The identification process of discovering Moran was so exact that when he received the comScore whitepaper link, he immediately pushed it to his followers because it matched his interests so well. In return, many of his followers expressed the same interest and enthusiasm. UPS was able to use social media to discover and connect with people that would be interested in the paper and then leverage them to reach an even greater number of interested people achieving a wide reach without tedious individual account search and engagement.

**Campaign Results**

The outcomes of the UPS whitepaper social media campaign were phenomenal. Over 2,500 new followers were added after the campaign began. The average influence score of new followers was 48.76. Reach of engaging a new relevant audience increased to 1.4 million in just one month through the campaign. Ninety four total clicks to the whitepaper were generated, 67 percent of them driven through social media. One of the most exciting results was whitepaper downloads through social media increased to 40 percent in 2013. In 2012, just one year earlier, the same whitepaper was only being downloaded through social media at a rate of 4 percent. The goal of the campaign was to increase downloads for the whitepaper; UPS achieved it.
Social Media Engagement Automation

Social media engagement automation attempts to make connecting with customers on social media platforms more manageable and effective. With so many accounts and platforms in existence, targeting the right individuals and then connecting and engaging with them can be overwhelming and tedious. UPS recognized the challenges of such a task but also acknowledged the potential benefits. Social media models revolve around influencing influencers. When firms or individuals influence influencers, the message is spread quickly and exponentially across more channels. UPS leveraged the influence influencers model when it targeted Brian Moran to reach a greater audience.

Social Media Automation

Social media automation software enables companies to engage with prospects and consumers to stimulate desired actions to create influencing power. One company, Insightpool, a social media engagement automation firm, uses an interest graph analysis along with proprietary algorithms to find connections that have promising potential for clients. The Interest Graph Analysis is a predictive analysis of who a brand should connect with, what topics the brand should engage in and when impressions should be received.

UPS needed to find the relevant influencers who in return could influence others to download and read the whitepaper. The interest graph analysis enabled UPS to target these influencers and engage with them.

Once the right people have been found on social media platforms through processes such as the Insightpool method, organizations can then automate the engagement part to reach many potential prospects and eliminate poor use of employees’ time conducting individual account searches. Drip marketing can also be utilized to engage with targeted consumers automatically. Drip marketing is when a company takes actions on a social media platform depending on what actions others have taken towards them. It’s similar to knowing when to retweet, favorite or respond to a tweet.

Drip marketing enabled UPS to engage in a personal way with potential whitepaper readers. First, the organization connected via the Twitter platform then, once a response came back, engaged in similar interests and topics through social media conversation and eventually suggested the whitepaper. Much of the drip marketing can be automated through software to enable the process to run smoothly and efficiently.

Sincerity at Scale

Connecting via social media platforms like Twitter is such an attractive option to companies because of the potential scale and reach. Millions of customers and target segments are at the tip of marketers fingertips in the social media world. Reaching them and then engaging in the right way is the only
problem. The social media world is so big that relevant prospects can get lost among the millions of accounts. Another problem facing marketers wishing to maximize the power of social media is connecting and engaging with a significant amount of people in a reasonable time to make it cost effective. Hunting through thousands of accounts and then individually tweeting and responding to the relevant ones could lead to whitepaper downloads as in the UPS case or lead prospecting in other organizations, but each individual success would not be time or cost effective. Engaging with multiple accounts at the same time and without sacrificing the personal feel yields the greatest levels of positive responses and efficient use of time.

The need to connect at a large scale but remain personal can be called “sincerity at scale.” “Sincerity at scale,” a term coined by Insightpool, may seem counter intuitive but software that equips companies to automate and engage with multiple accounts simultaneously attempts to achieve sincerity at scale. By reaching and interacting with the right people at the right time and automating the process, organizations are able to reach a vast number of ideal customers and remain personal within each interaction.

Connecting through Social Media

UPS identified promising accounts by using Twitter and cross analyzing the findings to engage with them at the right place and on the right platform. The first objective is to understand who to target. Software can search databases to find keywords and phrases to identify promising accounts. The list is then cross analyzed with different brands to assess the relevancy of each account. The software then generates a list from the intersection and performs an analysis of the top prospects. Lastly, drip marketing is employed to enable companies to take the right actions at the right time to engage with prospects in a personal, relevant way. Companies can achieve sincerity at scale by automating personalized messages to prospects.

The Process

The process for developing high quality leads and then connecting with them first begins with identifying the goal or objective the firm wants to achieve. Objectives can range from gaining new sign ups, growing the company footprint, increasing donations, increasing engagement and others. UPS’ objective was to drive awareness and click through to the comScore whitepaper. Once the objective of a social media campaign has been defined, success of that objective must be established. If a firm wants to grow the company footprint, what does that mean? Does success mean X number of new followers or X number of retweets? Defining what the firm actually wants to see happen from the campaign is a critical piece to being successful. UPS defined success as increasing the number of white paper downloads (did they have a number?).
After metrics have been outlined, bundles of related, high potential targets are created from finding high concentrations of those in the target audience. For example, a campaign with a football team might search @nike, @fitforlife, and @Nflfans depending on the goal. Insightpool’s search function finds different twitter accounts that are related to create the bundles. Keywords, locations or any other grouping can be applied to the generated list of bundles to segment the audience further.

The last step in the process is to decide what actions to take. Should the firm retweet, follow, favorite or take another action? Deciding how to engage with prospects is critical to begin building a relationship with the customer. Automating engagement at this point in the process allows firms to reach the number of accounts and prospects that can have a significant impact.

Finding the Right People

One of the key foundations to finding high profile targets to engage with is what the firm chooses to base decisions on. Many marketers think content is the best indicator to what a brand or person cares about. This idea group believes that analyzing what someone tweets about or what they write about will reveal what interests them. However, another school of thought asserts that looking at who a brand or person follows is actually a better indicator of interests. If someone follows tech start-ups and technology-focused accounts, he or she is most likely interested in the tech-space even if his or her account content is about marketing. Who someone follows as well as, the brands they follow are a better indicators of what that person is interested in than the actual content of their own tweets. People tweet the content they believe others are interested in or will find interesting, but follow those whose content is relevant to their own interests. Finding relevant accounts through analysis of following and interests can yield promising prospects; UPS participated in a strategy where potential relevancy was measured on who and what accounts prospects were following to engage with promising individuals.
Conclusion

The results of the UPS social media campaign are more far reaching than a success story for a whitepaper download. The UPS campaign illustrates the power of social media to connect with prospects and customers. Sales agents and departments that can harness the potential of targeting the right individuals that in turn can spread the word and increase visibility of a brand can achieve widespread quality lead generation potential. Quality leads can be generated from the same process that UPS used to find the ‘Brian Moran’ who spread UPS’ word.

Understanding how to target those interested and spring board off their followers offers major potential for companies to generate and convert leads by reaching many relevant accounts simultaneously and connecting personally to achieve sincerity at scale. Sales departments can accomplish the same sincerely at scale with quality lead generation if they can engage the right people at the right time through social media.

Generating quality leads for the sales team of any organization is a critical part to connecting with the right customers. Leveraging social media to achieve quality relationships before the salesperson enters the picture has the potential to greatly increase lead conversion. If marketing can generate higher quality leads, sales agents can better connect with and convert those leads.

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