

Comrade Discovery Doc



Social Media Program Review, Produced With Marketing Voices

When we first spoke with Marketing Voices' Jennifer Jones, we agreed that there was an opportunity to explore factors surrounding the creation and execution of social media programs. Certainly there has been a lot of discussion regarding the external aspect of this marketing vehicle, but we wanted to start a conversation that delved into the internal considerations and factors of social media and the effect they have on agencies and brands.

How We Went Looking

Intended as a conversation, we set out to communicate with 25 major brands and eight advertising agencies that are involved in social media programs. Not a huge sample, but this size also allowed us to focus on recognizable B-To-C and B-To-B brands, as well as communicate directly to the disciplines and departments most involved in each case.

Our discovery was based on three questions we posed to each of these contacts. Here are the questions and some of the insight we captured:

1) *How does social media fit into your marketing plan and budget?*

- For every high-profile campaign (e.g. Elf Yourself), there are hundreds of smaller social media programs that have seen varying degrees of success and failure.
- Interestingly, 60% of the big brands reported that they were slowing the launch of social media programs in 2008 so that they could become more strategic about launching these programs in 2009.
- Despite our intuition that there would be a consistency in terms of budget allocations for these programs (percentage of total marketing or media spend), the responses were anything but consistent, as ranged all over the map.
- However, we did see a strong correlation between social media program success (as described by the interviewee and according to our own analysis) and the level of financial and organizational commitment.

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RADIO BLOCK

2) How is social media affecting your organizational structure, roles, responsibilities, and your relationship with your clients or agencies?

- We found great variety in internal models. Most seemed to be related to established structures organized around the Internet, and several described difficulty of adopting new approaches, particularly in identifying, securing and organizing the additional resources required for social media programs, e.g., online community moderators, seeding specialists, etc.
- The industry the company belonged to appeared to be the biggest factor affecting internal structures. In our dialogs, 90% of retail and traditional consumer brands still place responsibility for social media programs with their brand manager.
- Technology focused, and B-To-B companies reported many different models being utilized. Some resided with the PR department, while others might be the responsibility of the online marketing group.
- Companies fully committed to social media programs have created departments dedicated to them, and have assigned multiple levels of management and resources to ensure marketing integration and program success.
- In some cases social media has changed engagement points for agencies, with PR directors (not brand managers) seeking interactive specialty shops for programs. Other examples suggested clients look to the digital / online or brand experience specialty agencies for guidance on how best to approach social media versus tapping their traditional agencies.

3) What barriers and challenges are related to social media?

- Application and understanding of organizational, brand control, legalities, and procurement issues that are unique to social media practice.
- The correlation between internal structure (budget, staff, key competencies) and the effectiveness of a social media program.
- The need for many clients we spoke with to use outside program or community moderators to ensure liability, indecency or other risks are effectively mitigated and managed. There appeared to be a lot of nuance around contractual terms and conditions that needed to be revised based on the specific issues social media programs present to both client and agency.
- Responsibility for the technology integration and managed hosting requirements also came up. Well over 75% stated they rely on outside third-party vendors instead of their internal IT organization to meet social media program technical, hosting and ongoing moderation requirements.



Recommendations

- We found that brand control is just as important as customer relevance. Therefore executive leadership must be engaged to define how much brand control they're willing to release.
- Make social media its own budget line item and measure it according to realistic ROI expectations.
- Because of the complexity, and wide-sweeping nature of social media, it is critically important to place leaders in charge who are comfortable working through legal, privacy, corporate, and technology issues in addition to managing the brand. Then, to provide these leaders with sufficient internal or external people and resources.
- Update brand books and style guides to include brand control expectations as they relate to social media, and use brand to guide decisions on the moderation or management of these programs.
- Before executing a social media program, spend time in forums and networks where your customers communicate. Listen to what they have to say not just about your brand, but also about their lives. Base your program on having your brand add value by adding a service to this experience for customers and prospects. Don't expect them to talk about your brand for brand's sake.
- Get senior legal people involved early in the planning process and educate them about your plans and ideas. This will allow them more time to research privacy, liability and ethical issues as well revise any contracts, terms and conditions, or statements of work.

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