

The Socialization of MULTICHANNEL DTC MARKETING

There is a great deal of pontification and theorizing about the nature of social media marketing, but much of it's just plain wrong. Twice as wrong when it comes to DTC marketing.

Social media isn't about the number of tweets per minute or the likes per post, or even the social graph. Those are useful metrics that can be analyzed, but it's still not social.

Social is us. It's me and you and any human being that you trust. DTC brands are not human. There are people at the company who may respond through social channels, but that's still not social.

When I tell that off-color anecdote to friends, that's social. When I wear swim trunks in February to a beach theme party, that's social. And when I design an avatar to play an on-line multiplayer game, I'm being social.

Before, during, and after any of these events, I may tweet, update my Facebook status, or even check Yelp for restaurant recommendations. Brands can be part of this in some way, but not without being invited. Elbowing into a semi-public conversation to share "messaging" isn't welcome in any of my social interactions.

The problem with brands is that we use social channels to blast interruption messages. We're not participating socially, nor are we being good party guests. Instead of bringing a nice cheese fondue to the party, we've offered a coupon to buy our stuff.

Brands have limited roles in our actual social life. We just have to understand how and where we can be part of the "conversation."

In our regulated industry, we're limited in what we say, so we say very little. Once we've recited our label, we're going to repeat what's on our label (and maybe offer a coupon).

Supporting Social Advocates

So what can DTC marketers actually do in social media?

We can be useful to people. We can provide shareable assets that allow people to talk about us when they feel like it.

If I'm excited about a brand, I'll recommend it to a friend. That brand can make it easier for me by providing something shareable, includ-

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ing a video or infographic. In a world with small screens and shorter attention spans, a brand can actually facilitate a recommendation.

It's not something these brands can pay for directly, but they can make it easy for me to tell another parent that a particular drug helped one of my kids. Me, talking as a friend to one of my actual friends. That's social, and in some way, a brand can be part of that moment when I am a brand advocate.

When my friend is ready to learn more about that brand, it behooves the brand to be prepared to help.

Social Response in a Crisis

But what happens when something goes wrong? Recalls and alerts are part of the manufacturing business, and yet when something goes wrong, many brands go silent.

Rather than proactively alerting their "friends," brands robo-tweet a link. The media and bloggers define the situation and response.

If you want to be a social media marketer in the DTC space, you'd better decide how you will handle a crisis or recall. That's when your customers really, really want to hear from you.

How to Get Started

Social media marketing is always going to be a challenge. Add the responsibility we have as healthcare communicators and the legal reg-

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ulations we face, and DTC social media can feel overwhelming.

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As I teach my children, you must be a good guest to a party. Dress appropriately, mind your manners, and never arrive empty-handed. Brands and friends must adhere to traditions of etiquette and conduct as they relate to these social situations. It's up to you as a multichannel marketer to decide how to behave, even if it means you can't truly be part of a conversation amongst real friends.

And if you do get invited to a party, don't bring cheese fondue. Your next invitation may get lost in the mail. **PV**

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