

Social Media Management: The New Role of a Marketing Agency

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If you are an advertising agency or a marketing firm and you are still scratching your head about how you can make money in social media, here is an excellent article written by Eric Lander that will help:

If you work for an online marketing agency the following scenario is probably not uncommon. A client comes to you wanting to help shape the search results for their brand names.

They're not talking about their own domain names or web properties either. They're now worried about sites like [RipOffReport](#), [ComplaintsBoard](#) and the dozens of other consumer advocacy sites created to give consumers a voice.

You may even work with your clients, helping to improve their online reputation by pushing these negative sites out of the mix. And suddenly, your client's interest wanes.

It's an unfortunate situation on a number of levels, but increasingly common. Your client has seen their targets removed. They no longer see detrimental sites ranking prominently so their train of thought is that you and leave well enough alone and move on. But that is simply is not true.

Rather than challenge your clients in an aggressive manner that could be perceived as a sales pitch for your services, consider the following:

Clients Must be Proactive, Not Reactive

One of the most frustrating parts about the scenario above is that the client cannot see the impending threats. They don't realize that new complaints are being posted, or, that their brand could already be under attack from another angle that they just haven't seen.

The client brought you in to reactively eliminate their brand's threat. And you accomplished that immediate goal. If your client is truly committed to improving their perception in the market though, there's more to the story. Sadly, you're now facing an uphill battle – but it is one that you can win.

Your client cannot see what hasn't been written about them yet. They're unaware that a new socially driven community could pose a threat. It's up to you to translate the business impact of ignoring customers' pleas and feedback.

If your client chooses not to monitor their brand regularly, they're right back at square one. Next month, a new search result could pose a threat. A new blog may be slamming their products. Or a new discussion board thread could label them thieves.

While a simple concept, getting your clients to buy into the long term value is difficult.

Social Media is an Organic Space

The first principle that your client must understand is that social media sites are truly organic - more so in fact than any other vertical on the Internet.

Millions of new accounts are opened daily on the most popular social media networks. It's true that some of these new accounts are fake profiles used to gain free and spammy backlinks. The majority though are real people. Real people who are ready to use participate in a community setting. Real people in fact who can and will interact with your client's brand name in mind.

From [FaceBook](#) and MySpace to Twitter and Plurk, there are simply too many people and too many web sites for your client to monitor. Each of these sites has the potential to negatively impact your client's brand, or ideally, become home to a growing number of brand evangelists. It's your client's choice to make.

Social Interaction is Not Always a Chore

One Twitter account comes to mind when I think about proactive social engagement in the community driven sites.

Pandora Radio is an Internet based radio service that customizes the music played based on listener's tastes and feedback.

On Twitter, at Pandora radio is the account of Lucia, Pandora's Community Manager. She openly puts herself out there to converse about your questions or comments about Pandora, as well as to talk about any and all things music.

More importantly though, Lucia actually listens to what people are saying and proactively becomes part of relevant conversations.

One of the reasons Pandora came to mind as I write this was because I had a problem a few months ago with Pandora. Rather than contacting support, I got lazy and ranted about it on Twitter. And before my friends had a chance to add fuel to the fire, I received a message from Lucia asking to help.

Within minutes, the problem was fixed and I was singing their praises.

That's just one example you can share with your clients. There's many other companies doing the same with Twitter, as this resource documents all the brands present on that [social community](#). But don't look beyond other services as well. Companies have been successful for years on sites like MySpace and Facebook.

The Real Role of an Agency or Service Provider

The most important take away of the Pandora example is that the organization has someone inside communicating directly with the consumer.

Clients can often assume that social media management includes your taking the reigns and portraying their brand for them. While that can be an effective short term strategy, I've never seen it work well without dollars or politics eventually becoming part of conversation.

That's why I strongly advise my clients to invest resources in that communication layer. They are the ones responsible for their image, not me. It should my role as the agency or service provider to keep them aware of new opportunities and threats that could be used to influence their brand and image. Once located, their internal contacts need to know where they exist and how to respond.

Agencies providing social media management services will need to rely on of web savvy individuals. Social Media Managers, or "SMMs" are many times related to search industry. While many can claim that SMMs are out to influence the search result landscape, I like to hope that the comparison exists more because of the tools involved.

SMMs make it regular practice to scour the SERPs of major engines. They're also out there using services like trackur and enhanced engine tools like Google Alerts to receive immediate notification when new content is posted. They then evaluate that content, understand how it can be responded to – and prepare it for review by the client. But again, it's the client who needs to communicate with the consumer.

Why? How would you feel if you were contacted by someone who basically gave you a runaround or indirect answer? What if you visited a feedback site to interact with a company, only to find that an advertising or marketing firm was directly involved? It does nothing then but cause more damage to the brand.

Parting Shots for the Clients

A brand will always be viewed the way their products and services warrant. If a product is known to consumers as having its faults, you can be confident that the online communities will discuss them.

Similarly, when companies do things right – they're normally praised by their brand's evangelists and that message is carried off by others, even if they don't have a first hand account. Before allowing your client to write off the need for SMM services, ask them to also take a solid look at their business – head to toe.

If the paying public has voiced concerns before, they'll do so again online. The only trouble is that voices online tend to gather more followers with ease.

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