

A SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE FOR FLORAL RETAILERS AND WHOLESALERS

Social Marketing

Authenticity

Get Real. Some people want to be close to some companies. It isn't because they are necessarily consumers. They may want to share to learn and the learning may not lead to a purchase. Fake or Feigned interest on the part of a company won't facilitate the relationship. Whether the relationship is in person or online, authenticity builds trust and trust can contribute to customer loyalty. Why is there a need to be genuine or real or authentic? The need is there because businesses are not around the corner anymore. If your business has been around the corner for decades, be sure to talk about your long term connection to the community. Removing people from first degree contact with the people who make the products or sell them has created skepticism. Consumer skepticism has grown to suspect that there isn't a real firm with real people working at a real business to make good stuff. Most companies in the floral industry are real people with families and community connections. Some customers crave that connection.

Some people want to get closer to some firms, and some businesses want to get closer to those people. If they aren't already customers, the business would like them to become customers. Naturally, where interested people congregate is where businesses want to be. The relationship between a group of people and a business has changed due to social media. The control or driving influence has shifted from business to individual. Businesses no longer manage customers but now facilitate collaborative experiences and customer dialogue (Baird and Parasnis, 2011). IBM conducted a study of 1000 consumers and 350 executives. The executives said that many companies will be "perceived as out of touch if they don't engage in social media." Consumers were willing to interact with business if they believe it is to their benefit, if they feel they can trust them, and if the customer decides that social media is the right channel.

Product and business reviews are quite often perceived as genuine or authentic because they come from consumers without being tainted by the company itself. How accurate the prior statement is and the assessment of the accuracy comes only from the consumer perspective. Barton (2006) published three case studies of companies all of which launched customer ratings with measurable business impact: Comp USA, Petco, and Burpee. From the consumer perspective, product reviews are perceived as more authentic in structure and tone, making them more credible. Reviews are often highly linked to creating relevance.

However, Barton noted that ratings should change frequently to show the additive and ongoing relationship between consumer and business. Older reviews were not perceived as favorable and accurate as newer reviews.

Personal versus Professional

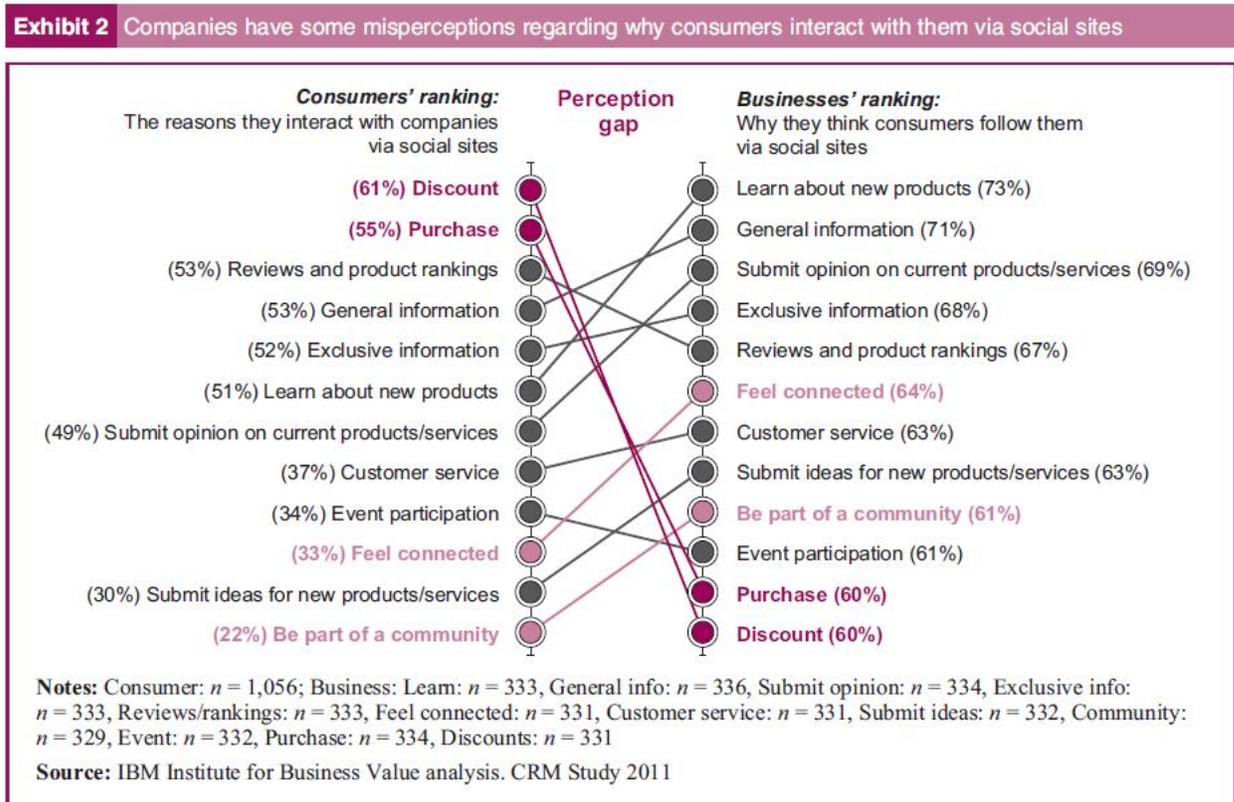
There is a theoretical basis for voluntarily reporting (exchanging) information founded in models of reciprocity and evolutionary biology: improving chances of survival and charitable gift giving. People want to share because they learn from the information and experiences others share with them. This sharing once took place face-to-face, but social media has opened an entirely new mechanism for sharing. Where once we shared only with family and friends, now we can share with strangers and “help” them with their decisions and choices.

Hennig-Thurau et al 2004 defined e-WOM as any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers available to others online. Three aspects were defined as e-word-of-mouth or online-word-of-mouth: opinion seeking, opinion, giving, and opinion passing or forwarding. People, not exclusively consumers, can assume all three roles. They share because they feel as though they are helping friends due to (a) tie strength or potency of bond which shows the strength of the relationship; (b) homophily or sharing because others are perceived as similar or like the sharer; (c) trust or authentic information; and (d) interpersonal influences both normative and informational. Tie strength is not related to intention to give information (it is not limited to close friends). Chu, S.-C., & Kim, Y. (2011).

Edgell and Hathereington (1996, p.5) identified four sources of customer experience: consumption, citizenship, family membership, and friendship (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009). When we share the consumption relationship, it is probably because it was enjoyable. Recommending a restaurant may be the most common consumption experience shared, but this can be adapted to flowers as well. Consumers openly shared the experience of opening the box for their I-Phone or I-Pad with celebration and grandeur, even posting short videos on YouTube. Receiving flowers can be a form of consumption that might be shared by video, reinforcing the wonderful feelings a recipient has when s/he gets flowers. Citizenship is a second reason for sharing. Some people believe it is ‘the right thing to do’ as a good citizen. The reason for sharing this type of experience might be to prevent someone from having a similar and bad experience. The negative message might be reduced by turning the lesson into a positive one. For example, customers who didn’t use floral food (and later did on a subsequent purchase) might report the difference they saw in improved floral longevity when they used floral food. Family membership is a third customer experience often shared. Moving from the ‘citizen’ scale to the ‘family’ scale reduces the circle of concern to a circle of influence (to use Stephen Covey’s terminology). People want to protect their family from bad experiences more than their community and want to share the positive ones. Friendship

sharing changes the nature of the circle of influence beyond relatives to the 'family of choice' which is our friends.

But the reasons for sharing personally are not identical to the reasons for sharing on social media. The study of business executives and consumers revealed nearly opposite reasons for sharing online. Consumers were sharing for monetary gain (to receive discounts and make purchases) whereas executives believed (erroneously) that consumers were sharing to learn about new products or get some general information. The Exhibit 2 from Baird & Parasnis, 2011, is quite revealing.



The Importance of Sharing

Social customer relationship management is a misnomer because they may not all be customers. Not all customers use social media and not all community members are customers. The correct term is community communication relationship management. The authors identified the 4 Cs of Communication: connectivity (platforms like Facebook), conversations (emails, postings), content creation (stimulation of the conversation) and collaboration (like Wikipedia). The social community eschews all things commercial, wanting instead genuine or authentic information which will help them as consumers. Online sharing is governed by different norms. The company can no longer know customers as well with social media because they can keep some anonymity. (Ang, L. (2011).

Community relationship management and social media. *Journal of Database Marketing & Customer Strategy Management*, 18(1), 31-38.
doi:10.1057/dbm.2011.3)

Business should monitor word-of-mouth and brand or company image online with a “Social Media Image” score. This score is calculated by adding the number of positive and neutral comments and subtracting the number of negative comments. For example, at one point Ford had a SMI = 31 while General Motors score =5. Best practice: respond to negative comments within 24 h. Nurture advocates and opinion leaders. Amplify buzz and visibility.(Ang, L. (2011). Community relationship management and social media. *Journal of Database Marketing & Customer Strategy Management*, 18(1), 31-38.
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Building Communities

People are social creatures so it isn't surprising that people belong. We belong to many groups and have many roles. Because people are social and skeptical of corporations, they are happier being a part of a community rather than the target of marketing. While social, they are also interested in a good deal. One third of Internet users reported consumer comments on social media websites influenced their purchase, but only 11% considered advertising effective. Social media is about linking people with common interests. Cases: Best Buy used Twitter to promote current sales and new products and drove traffic to store. Sears used FB to talk with employees.(Kunz & Hackworth, 2011).

In general, social networks are beneficial and valuable for the network participants in that they promote activities and use of resources. Traditional social networks have involved humans over time; interactions are now mediated by computers. Social networking sites can build direct relationships with consumers, drive website traffic, identify new business opportunities, create communities, distribute content, and collect feedback. Perceived barriers are lack of money, time, training, unfamiliarity with technology. Sampled 1000 UK small and medium firms; 27% on multiple SN sites, 77% of them on FB.(Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011).

Businesses can create communities around a company or, more often, a brand. However, brand communities online must be perceived as open, trust worthy, relevant, and engaging. Ford invited 100 young people to live with the new Fiesta and report their experience online for six months. Using actual new car owners to report their experience was authentic (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009).

Your Social Media Hub

The firm is the hub for social media, but the company likely has a 'brick and mortar' presence in the store itself and a 'click and order' presence online. It is important to remember that the primary reason for the business is to generate profitable sales. This is true both for the physical and online presence. Social media activities need to be tied to the primary reason as well. Successful companies view social media as another online avenue which should result in a call to action for consumers and attempt to drive traffic to the website or store, resulting in a purchase.

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