

A SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE FOR FLORAL RETAILERS AND WHOLESALERS

Case Study: Calloway's Nursery

Calloway's Nursery, Inc. is an independent Texas-based garden center founded by local nurserymen, Jim Estill, John Cosby and John Peters. Calloway's operates 17 stores in the Dallas/Fort Worth market and two stores in the Houston market. More than half of the company's employees are Texas Certified Nursery Professionals.

The company opened its first garden center in the spring of 1987 in Richardson, Texas, and by the end of that spring the company expanded with three additional stores in the Dallas area. Calloway's continued to grow rapidly expanding into the Fort Worth market and entering the Houston market through an acquisition. In 1999, Calloway's acquired Houston-based Cornelius Nursery.

Calloway's prides itself on offering advice to gardeners of all levels from Texas Certified Nursery Professionals, educational store environments by facilitating weekly gardening clinics, displays and instructions to aid gardeners with design and color development in their yards and a diverse product selection of plant varieties.

*We strive to
help make
gardening fun
and easy for
all gardeners.*

Calloway's participates in traditional marketing avenues including newspaper, television, and radio, but also integrates social media into their overall marketing program quite effectively. Kimberly Bird, VP of Retail Marketing, describes Calloway's social media strategy as one that follows a hub and spoke approach with the company's website being the hub and all other social media tools being the spokes. These spokes include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, social bookmarking, targeted emails, and business listings. According to Bird, the "spokes" are constantly changing so it is important to continually be improving and refining the website hub.

Bird attributes Calloway's social media success to the buy-in and trust of top management into what is being implemented. A solid interdependent team carries out the social media integration with the knowledge that they have the full support of the other departments of the firm. The entire management team meets each week to discuss the media calendar in order to ensure that all departments are aware of upcoming marketing events and the various social media tactics that are being integrated into their more traditional advertising venues. This

integration goes all the way back to media purchasing as well, with Calloway's using their media purchasing as leverage to obtain various social media benefits as part of the package.

While large firms may have the resources to throw a lot of money at social media marketing efforts and experience some economies of scale, nimbleness and responsiveness are advantages for smaller businesses and they are often able to have a deeper relationship with customers because of it. Calloway's management is not really all that concerned with their relative market share in their respective trade areas, but instead emphasize mind share (top-of-mind recognition) as a more appropriate strategic goal for their marketing efforts. As Calloway's has grown to 19 store locations, they have found it difficult to maintain the same level of personalized service to their customers, but their use of social media has fostered a perception of a continued high level of personalized attention. An example of this is the selection of in-store clinics being based on the social media feedback from existing customers. Another interesting facet of Calloway's social media outreach has been its' effectiveness in reaching all demographic segments of their consumer base, including those who tend to be price-conscious.

Cultivating knowledge of and developing a relationship with their customer base is the primary focus of Calloway's social marketing. These efforts have also combined the best of their traditional marketing tools and social media. For example, recruiting volunteers for their Garden Ambassador program involves targeted emails and their Facebook page to aid in the identification and selection of customers who volunteer their time to come to the store to greet other customers coming into the store and signing them up for the Calloway's Nursery Garden Club (see <http://www.calloways.com/gardenclub>). Such customer involvement is not uncommon; the first time social media was used to recruit for a consumer panel, over 3,000 customers wanted to participate.



With the website being the hub of the social media strategy, the Garden Club section offers Calloway's customers the opportunity to read Garden Club newsletters, participate in Texas garden contests, exchange gardening-related ideas, plant needs and recipes with other gardeners, and read blog articles from Calloway's Nursery experts. Some activities, such as their annual perennial swap, combine the best of both worlds in that customers go online and indicate the extra plants they have to swap and what kinds of plants they would like to receive and then they meet face-to-face to exchange plants. In doing so, they make new friends, exchange advice, and have another exposure point with Calloway's Nursery, of course.

Measuring the effectiveness of social media marketing can be challenging and Calloway's utilizes all of the existing analytics provided by Google, Facebook, and others to gauge their success. While the number of "likes" isn't the most important metric, competitive types (such as herself, Byrd says) can't help but notice where they stand versus the competition, But more importantly, it's about the new conversations that are generated and how many folks are talking about you that is important, Byrd acknowledges.

One of the underlying advantages of social media is that it is quick and content can be repurposed easily. No social media campaign is successful without quality content, no matter if it is a 1-page news release or a 140-character tweet. Delivering content through multiple vehicles also increases the likelihood of customers seeing the information and extends the reach of traditional advertising.

For example, when Calloway's does a TV segment, their Facebook page is updated before and after, twitter feeds are sent out pre and post, the news section of the website is updated, news releases (if applicable) are distributed through their online distribution services, a blog post is generated, the web address is social bookmarked, and YouTube segments may even be generated to capture the teachable moments – thus the integrative nature of Calloway's social and traditional advertising and marketing media strategy.

Calloway's also spends the extra time to make sure the company is listed on all of the major social business listing services (Google Local, Yelp, Yahoo, Bing, etc.). Why are social business listings so critical? Bird contends that they can deliver a large number of visitors ranging from hundreds to thousands of visitors



every month, depending on your location and how well your business listing is optimized. It's well worth your time, Bird says, and they have a person who spends about 8 hours each week managing these listings. Even if your brand is only local in scope in terms of customer focus, it's still a good thing to set up a social business listing. Another advantage of these services is that most of them offer analytical reports regarding who sees and is seeking information about your company.

Birds' advice to company's just starting to implement social media into their marketing is to make sure your "hub" is in place, then start with a couple of "spokes" and branch out from there. It can be overwhelming to try to implement all social media types at once. Even though much of the tools of social media are free, be sure to allocate sufficient resources in terms of time in order to be successful. For those wanting more information, she recommends MarketingProfs.com as a valuable resource.



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