

Businesses' Social Media Strategies Keep Consumers Connected

Social media sites are no longer just a place to catch up with friends, unless some people regard their favorite restaurants and stores as friends.

Many businesses are creating social media strategies as ways to form a new kind of connection with consumers.

Monique Yeager, director of public relations at Sonny's Real Pit Bar-B-Q says the company uses a number of different social media sites as a way to connect with customers.

"Our main priority is to build relationships with consumers," Yeager says. "Traditional media doesn't build relationships with consumers. People trust other people more than advertising and what they hear on television. That's the way of the world now."

Yeager and Emre Ruhi, owner of custom T-shirt online retailer Teesey Tees, agree that businesses not using social media are at a disadvantage. "Social media is at a point where it is no longer an option. If you want to succeed and come across as an engaged and active business, you need to be participating in some form of social media," Ruhi says.

Dan Novak, an assistant professor of Leadership at South University Online, says Facebook is successful because people are able to log in to one place and get updates on many different things and people.

Creating a Buzz with Social Media Sites

For some businesses, such as trendy restaurants and new stores, social media use is all about creating a buzz. They go down all avenues to try to get new customers in the door, because often businesses will only be popular for a short time before they fade into the background.

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Novak says social media adds long-term value to businesses that already have a loyal following, and who are focusing their marketing efforts on their target market.

Having a social media strategy is important for a company like Teesey Tees because their current and future customer base is tech-savvy and spends a lot of time on social networking sites.

"If we're not there, they won't know about us and our attempts at establishing a successful brand will simply fail," Ruhi says.

Customers often comment on Sonny's Facebook page. When the company made a switch from serving sliced beef to a new sliced brisket, customers went to Sonny's Facebook page to express their disapproval.

Yeager says customers are also quick to defend the restaurant chain when people write negative comments on the company's Facebook wall, adding that they don't censor social media posts by customers unless they are profane or offensive.

Boost Business with Social Media

Both Yeager and Ruhi say their social media strategies have indirectly brought more business to their companies.

"I think it definitely brought us repeat business," Yeager says.

Ruhi says Teesey Tee's uses social media to demonstrate the kind of company they are to customers, instead of just promoting their own products.

"Teesey tries to reflect its sense of humor and energy in its social media presence, and in this way become a brand that people want to buy from," Ruhi says. "If you're a fan of a company that posts things relevant to the field it's in, while remaining interesting, you'll like the company itself. You'll remember it in the future when you want a T-shirt, or maybe recommend it to a buddy who tells you they're looking for a cool shirt."

Novak adds that businesses should remember they do not own their reputation. Therefore they need to use social media to build a reputation that is strong enough to overcome any attacks or business hardships.

Making a Social Media Strategy Personal

Novak says there is going to be a trend in the future towards businesses using personalization to market to consumers. He says customers are overloaded with information, much of which does not add value to them.

"Businesses have to target what the people want," Novak says. "Businesses need to figure out what types of social media their clients use, not just a strategy for each medium."

He says personalization will allow businesses to focus more on the information they're giving consumers and less on how to provide the information through every social media channel.