

Making sense of social media

An overview of the CCM '09 conferen

After Anthony Williams' excellent presentation on Wednesday night, I heard several people mention it was, "Like drinking from a fire hose." So I thought it might be helpful to offer some context for CCM members who are wrestling with what social media is and how it might fit into their communication strategies.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING MADNESS



From control to influence

The current transition is similar to what happens to parents when their children become adults. There is a role change that affects conversations. Here are some simple things that will help CCM members make the transition.

1. Sign up for an account on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Flickr. Get familiar with the main social media formats.
2. Influence starts with listening. Find out what people are saying about your brand on www.technorati.com or www.blogpulse.com. Then join the conversation. Don't be defensive. If people are complaining, try to be helpful.
3. By listening first, you'll see what is being said about your brand and be able to identify ways to insert yourself into the conversations. Think through what kind of influence you want to achieve, and how you might engage in order to achieve it.
4. Don't try to manage the online communication, just respond to it. Keep in mind that online conversation will be messy and often capricious.
5. Develop a strong brand purpose and use it as a filter for your responses. This will define your brand's conversational voice and will increase brand influence.

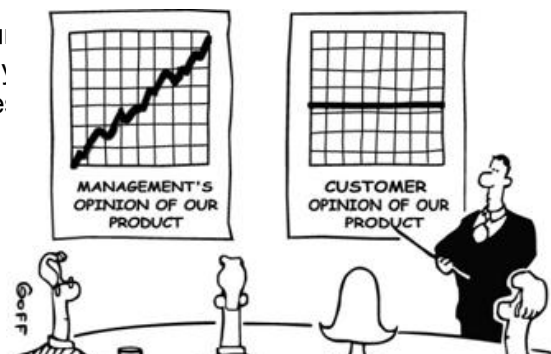
There is a free ebook called *The Essential Guide to Social Media*. If you'd like to download a copy you can Google it or email me at john@greymattergroup.com and I'll send it to you.

Internal and external strategies

Walmart has 2.2 million employees worldwide and over 140 million customers a week. Their internal social media focus is on ideation (tapping into the creative ideas of their associates) and "MyWalmart" (to give information about the company and solicit feedback). For their external audiences, their four objectives are (1) increasing loyalty by moving from a transactional to an engaged relationship, (2) gaining understanding about customer pain points, (3) reducing communication costs, (4) and reinforcing their brand pillars. You can hear the strategies and social media programs of other large companies like yours at blogcouncil.org.

Who can you trust?

Research indicates that the number one trusted source for information is now 'people like me.' Unfortunately, due to recent scandals, CEO's and corporate spokespeople are some of the least trusted. Shel Hotz, in his pre-



conference social media workshop, demonstrated how information dissemination is moving away from centralized sources (like your website, your newsletters, etc.) to the edge (blogs, tweets, youtube videos about your company). The challenge of both Corpcom and Marcom executives is to get content to the edge that communicates company messages in a credible, compelling way. This decentralization of communication isn't all bad. It enables brand 'fans' to help us spread the good word about our brands. Shel gave the example of mommy blogs – mothers who post their thoughts about different products and services – who now have larger audiences than many media properties for their audience segment.

Mass collaboration

Anthony Williams, author of *Wikinomics*, made a compelling case for the opportunities brands have to tap into ideas and intellectual resources outside their companies. He cited the Japanese proverb, "None of us are as smart as all of us." Companies like P&G are increasing product innovation by involving external R&D contributions through corporate wikis (web sites that allow users to add and update content on the site using their own Web browser). This can also be a great tool for assembling crucial documents – like annual reports.

Mobile mania

There are 3.1 billion mobile phone users. Experts project that the audience will be 4 billion by 2010. These devices have become mobile computing platforms. Anthony said that all of the world's knowledge could currently be stored in a computer half the size of the conference room he was presenting in. But soon it will all fit on a mobile device. He also demonstrated how QR (quick response) bar codes are being used to connect mobile users with camera phones to information and websites. We need to get ahead of this curve.

"The world is our communications department"

Anthony encouraged us to think of our audiences in a new way. They are no longer just recipients of our communication. Now they can be co-creators and distributors of content that will build our brands. The corporate communication department is just 'one node' (network junction or connecting point) of many for customers to get information about our brand. Our challenge is to effectively influence the conversation so that it reflects our brand positively and accurately.

Meritocracies = the best ideas win

The top-down model of communication has been inverted. Anthony gave several cases where the opinions of the constituents changed corporate decisions. If you'd like to read a good book on the subject, I recommend *What Would Google Do*, by Jeff Jarvis. This shift has major implications for the C-suite. Companies that will succeed in this new environment will build a 'culture of collaboration.'

Enterprise nervous system

Social media tools can become the sensory and control apparatus for a corporate communication department. Anthony recommended that companies consider

developing an internal service like www.linkedin.com. Employee profiles and posts would provide a valuable 'talent marketplace' that would enable department heads to assemble the best possible teams. Peers could also tap into the collective wisdom of other employees. And it could also provide a forum for collecting and disseminating innovation. He mentioned the example of Best Buy store managers who were able to drive positive corporate change through social media.

Change management

Social media offers both amazing opportunities and daunting challenges. There are blogs that help communications professionals understand the opportunities, develop strategies, obtain buy-in from company leaders, coordinate implementation, manage legal and HR issues, and work with government and industry regulations (see <http://gaspedal.com/blogwell>). We're all in this together. And, thanks to CCM, we're able to provide additional value to our companies by both leading and leveraging change for the benefit of our brands. I hope you find this summary helpful. If you'd like to discuss it, you can email me at john@greymattergroup.com or discuss it on twitter (johnasawyer).