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Five Questions About Managing Social Media that You Should Ask Your Agency

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Introduction

Choosing the right marketing or branding agency for your company is a complicated task. Your agency will have your brand in its hands—tinkering with it, stretching it, and molding it. You need the result to be something new and unexpected, but still on-strategy and successful. You can select the most reputable firm, but reputation can be expensive. You can choose the newest firm, but will they have enough experience? Tech-heavy digital design agencies may not know enough about traditional media. Traditional agencies might not be as familiar with digital media—and you need an agency familiar with digital and social media because that's where you'll find the new opportunities.

So how do you decide on an agency? To trust your agency, you need to ask questions and listen to what they say—and *don't* say—when they answer. This white paper provides you with five questions you should ask agencies to help you separate the real candidates from the poseurs.

- What is your definition of a successful campaign?
- If you had unlimited resources and budget, which social marketing outlets would you concentrate on for my business?
- As my agency, are there people you can influence to get more traction for my brand?
- What do you see changing most in the next two quarters?
- How will you measure my success?

What Is Your Definition of a Successful Campaign?

No matter how many awards the television commercial wins—nor how many tweets or Facebook fans it generates—if you measure success in sales and you aren't moving more body wash and deodorant than before, then your agency's success may be at the expense of your business failure. Make sure your agency believes in and respects your idea of success. You are the customer, after all.

To Be Successful, Digital and Traditional Need Each Other

"Your digital work," says Rick Mathieson, author of *The On-Demand Brand: 10 Rules for Digital Marketing Success in an Anytime, Everywhere World*, in an interview with MarketingCharts, "should reinforce and build upon everything else your brand is doing in every other medium. When it's not, sometimes that's your fault, sometimes it's the agency's. If it's your fault, fix it. If it's the agency's fault, start looking [for a new one]."[1]



Figure 1. Each brand must develop its own social key performance indicators (KPIs).

Because all media may eventually become digital, every traditional agency must become inclusive of digital media. And being inclusive means more than simply pointing clients to one corner of the agency office.

[1] Rick Mathieson, *The On-Demand Brand: 10 Rules for Digital Marketing Success in an Anytime, Everywhere World*, AMACOM Publishing, 2010. ondemandbrand.com/

"You know you need to find a new digital agency when they say, 'We're experts in everything digital,' and then point to a single person as their specialist in mobile, social, and electronic customer relationship management [eCRM]," says Bryon Morrison, president of The Marketing Arm's digital group, in "4 Reasons to Fire Your Digital Ad Agency."[2]

If You Had Unlimited Resources and Budget, Which Social Marketing Outlets Would You Concentrate on for My Business?

This is a trick question. As Ashok Lalla of Clickz.Asia says in his blog post titled 10 Questions for Marketers Before They Brief Their Digital Agency, "Social marketing strategy needs to derive directly from the digital strategy, which in turn should roll down from the overall marketing strategy. That is the best way of ensuring a cohesive consumer strategy."[3]

So when you ask your agency what social marketing outlets they would concentrate on, they probably shouldn't answer with anything specific, unless they can demonstrate a firm grasp of your company and what your overall marketing strategy is in the first place.

Your Agency Should Know Your Overall Strategy

If they are a prospective agency and they have a good answer about your overall strategy, then they've done their homework. Lalla says keep this in mind: You wouldn't have a *New York Times* strategy, so why would you have a Twitter strategy? By definition, the strategy comes before the outlet, and no agency should point to an outlet first.

[2] "4 Reasons to Fire Your Digital Ad Agency," MarketingCharts, Watershed Publishing, April 29, 2010. marketingcharts.com/direct/4-reasons-to-fire-your-digital-ad-agency-12755/

[3] Ashok Lalla, 10 Questions for Marketers Before They Brief Their Digital Agency, Clickz.asia, January 20, 2011. clickz.asia/2385/10-questions-marketers-should-answer-before-they-brief-their-digital-agency

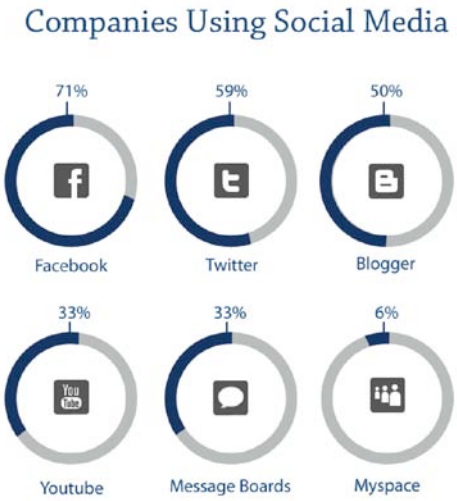


Figure 2. 2011 data shows companies mostly use Facebook, Twitter, and blogs for social media marketing.[4]

As My Agency, Are There People You Can Influence to Get More Traction for My Brand?

Ask about the agency's understanding of influence and how to use that for earned media. How connected are they? Do you see any overlap with your own connections or industry experts?

Highly influential people speaking on your behalf will make an impact on your brand, but think about the spectrum of influence. A leader in your industry might be able to give you some props for free through a blog review or video endorsement.

The digital world revolves around a network of people, so don't overlook agencies with connections to experts. And don't overlook agencies with connections to competitors, either. As Lalla says, "An agency that is constantly monitoring its competitors will make sure that they're producing the most cutting-edge marketing solutions. They have a good handle on what strategies are successful, as well as what strategies have failed."

The Best User-Generated Content Is Produced by Professionals

You may not want to believe this, but your CEO likely did not write that inspiring and insightful CEO blog post. A professional copywriter probably wrote it. So it goes for much of the internet's best content.

[4] Jenise Henrikson, "The Growth of Social Media: An Infographic," August 30, 2011. searchenginejournal.com/the-growth-of-social-media-an-infographic/32788/

Lalla points out, "The biggest hits of the internet in the much romanticized 'user-generated' space are professionally produced by the same folks who produce the best advertising. Supervised by the best directors. Scripted by the best copywriters. But made to look 'user generated' via smart creative treatment."[5]

If you think your brand is going to succeed with a video shot for free around the office and narrated by the witty guy in your marketing department, you are betting on the long odds.

Concentrate on the Digital Channels that Fit Your Strategy

Spraying substandard creative to all your digital channels and seeing "what sticks" isn't effective. In the blog post How to Hire a Digital Ad Agency, Director of Digital Marketing and Public Relations for mPRm Clay Dollarhide says, "A big mistake a lot of folks get into is they feel they need to be everywhere and on every social media platform, which means they end up spreading themselves too thin and are therefore not able to penetrate any of the social media platforms in a substantial way."[6]

Have a discussion with your digital marketing agencies to see where they think your campaign could really succeed within the social media realm and do not feel obligated to have a Facebook fan page because everyone else has one.

In short, your agency is there to make creative content. They are professionals at tone and persuasion. This is why you should be happy with them as a partner and happy to pay them for their work. After all, viral isn't something you "do." It's what happens when your agency aligns brilliant creative with relevant business goals, differentiated competitive positioning, and audience interest.

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[5] 10 Questions for Marketers Before They Brief Their Digital Agency, Ashok Lalla, Clickz.asia, January 20, 2011.
clickz.asia/2385/10-questions-marketers-should-answer-before-they-brief-their-digital-agency

[6] How to Hire a Digital Ad Agency, MarketingCharts, Watershed Publishing, April 7, 2010.
marketingcharts.com/direct/how-to-hire-a-digital-ad-agency-12518/

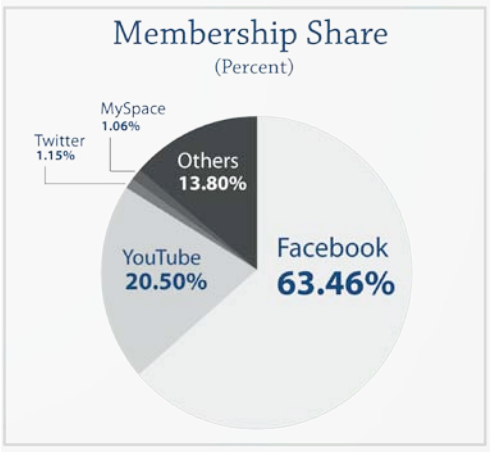


Figure 3.Target audience usage of social networks. While Facebook is clearly the most popular across the board, don't neglect the other 36.5 percent.[7]

What Do You See Changing Most in the Next Two Quarters?

Ask your agency about the future. Any good agency will have answers to this question. In retrospect, the answer will most likely be incorrect since things change quickly, but it's important to make sure your agency is at least thinking of the next big thing.

Future-focused questions will also help you gauge what risks your agency is willing to take for the sake of innovation, as well as shed light on your own company's tolerance for creative risk.

If You Build It, They Probably Won't Come

You can waste a lot of money trying to drive traffic to promotions that are more like tiny pieces of cheese on mousetraps than value offerings. Lalla says, "The new WWW isn't World Wide Web, but Wherever, Whenever, Whatever. Reach your audience where they are, when they want, in the manner they want to connect."[8]

The destination is no longer an app download or a landing page, and it is certainly not a form field. The destination is the consumers themselves. You have to get your brand to them. Trying to get them to your brand home page is a fool's errand.

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[7] Jenise Henrikson, "The Growth of Social Media: An Infographic," August 30, 2011. searchenginejournal.com/the-growth-of-social-media-an-infographic/32788/

[8] Ashok Lalla, 10 Questions for Marketers Before They Brief Their Digital Agency, Clickz.asia, January 20, 2011. clickz.asia/2385/10-questions-marketers-should-answer-before-they-brief-their-digital-agency

Likes Are Likely Going Away

Mark Zuckerberg detailed changes in Facebook's Open Graph protocol at the F8 Developers Conference. Open Graph's new metadata, Zuckerberg says, "puts personal and semantic meaning behind the Web—I like this band. I am attending this event."[9]

What will ultimately happen when Facebook links to apps with more and more verbs? The list of new potential Facebook verbs beyond the word *like* stretches as far as the imagination can go and will give data more nuance and granularity. Facebook soon expects to generate a billion actions per hour, mostly through arbitrary actions and objects created by mobile apps.

By doing so, Facebook is becoming a new kind of interactive social search engine, where even asking an audience to enter search terms or click a Like button will seem dated and unnecessary. Your agency should have some insight about these kinds of matters.

How Will You Measure My Success?

This question allows you to assess whether or not your agency values and understands analytical data. Are they ignorant of numbers? Or are they overly enamored with KPIs? Neither is desirable, especially when you need creative that works on a human level.

Although return on investment (ROI) must be factored into any marketing endeavor, measuring it should not outweigh the freedom to explore creative approaches that may suit your business goals, even those that are difficult to measure quantitatively.

Clicks and Impressions Offer Minimal Insight

In "4 Reasons to Fire Your Digital Ad Agency," Stephanie Rogers, senior director of contact planning at PARTNERS + simons, says that if your agency can't measure campaign performance beyond impressions and clicks, it's time to find a new agency.[10]

Rogers suggests you look beyond simple definitions, saying, "It is important to bring a rigorous process to the definition of success, the development of audience insights, content delivery, and measurement of audience engagement." In his book *The On-Demand Brand: 10 Rules for Digital Marketing Success in an*

[9] Adrienne Olds, "Why Facebook Wants Your Business to Build an App," JeffBullas.com, November 7, 2011.
jeffbullas.com/2011/11/07/why-facebook-wants-your-business-to-build-an-app

[10] "4 Reasons to Fire Your Digital Ad Agency," MarketingCharts, Watershed Publishing, April 29, 2010.
marketingcharts.com/direct/4-reasons-to-fire-your-digital-ad-agency-12755/"

Anytime, Everywhere World, Rick Mathieson adds, "You can tell the agency is not focusing on the brand when dialogue is only and exclusively about ROI and metrics."

Metrics Should Not Run the Show

Consider the nature of analytical thought. Analysis means "to separate something into its constituent elements." Raw analytics applied to metrics would be wonderful if your marketing were aimed at machines, which is precisely what clicks and traffic measure: human interaction with machines.

But you want your marketing to resonate with the human beings themselves. The measurement of success should not be pure analysis, but rather insight—"the capacity to gain an accurate and deep intuitive understanding of a person or thing."

Sadly, all the analysis in the world will not automatically yield intuition. It can't, because breaking a thing into its component parts and reassembling it will not reproduce the thing itself. The two terms, *analysis* and *intuition*, represent polar opposite ways of thinking. Your agency should make you feel comfortable with that reality and help you bring those different ways of thinking into balance.

"The big winners in social commerce know that the customer must be at the very core of the social experience. Give consumers an easy-to-use and transparent platform for sharing their recommendations, and you'll see immediate dividends. On Facebook and other social networks in particular, your fans aren't just looking for basic product and purchase info—they also want to see real feedback and real validation from their friends and trusted reviewers."

—Michael Hylton, Director of eCommerce Product Marketing, Oracle

Conclusion

Without a doubt, the newest and fastest-growing marketing opportunities are concentrated in digital and social media. While still adhering to the principles of traditional media and with a clear vision of your overall business strategy, you can successfully embrace these new consumer-centric social channels. Choose your agency wisely—choose the one that will infuse targeted social networks with your cohesive marketing plan and build your brand in this fast-changing frontier.

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Oracle Corporation
World Headquarters
500 Oracle Parkway
Redwood Shores, CA 94065
U.S.A.

Worldwide Inquiries:
Phone: +1.650.506.7000
Fax: +1.650.506.7200

oracle.com



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