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TACKLING THE SOCIAL CHALLENGE

RESEARCH EXAMINING HOW UK MARKETERS ARE MANAGING THE ONSLAUGHT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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– INTRODUCTION

Last year we conducted research to see how UK brands were tackling the onslaught of social media.

The results found that while businesses were clear about the need to be active on social channels, there was general confusion about how best to go about it.

One year on and we've returned to this theme to see how things have changed in the last 12 months. The social media juggernaut hasn't slowed with a range of new entrants coming into the mix including Google+ and Pinterest.

The fact that businesses are flocking to social channels is no surprise, but in their rush to set up Facebook pages, Twitter and Google+ accounts, how many have thought about how best to manage these communities long term? Faced with a barrage of tweets, comments and likes, how many companies are really geared up to manage social media strategies?

Social media marketing ushers in a brave new world where the old one-way marketing techniques of the past no longer apply and where content marketing and community management reign. It's not enough to simply monitor these channels; there is a need to pro-actively use them in a measureable way to show ROI.

So, again, we asked 250 UK marketing decision makers to tell us more about how they are implementing social media and how they will be looking to manage social channels and communities over the next few years. This report examines the results of our study and sets out best practice advice to help brands best manage their online communities and social media channels. We've also included guidance on how brands should execute social media or community management and assessed the results that can be achieved by efficiently implementing this.

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– 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter provides an overview of the research conducted by EPiServer into participation on social media channels and communities by brands, looking at operational aspects like who has responsibility for managing social media channels, what role does it play, how much time is invested in the activity and what benefits it has for the company.

The results have been compared to last year's findings and any key points of differentiation identified and highlighted.

The study surveyed 250 UK marketing decision makers about their experience in February 2012.

The increase of brand social media channels

Over the past twelve months, social media has established itself as an important, beneficial tool:

• Over three-quarters (77%) of marketers are running an online community, or are looking to do so within the next 12 months, compared to 73% last year

• 29% have set their social media channels up in the last 12 months

• Over a third (35%) have had been actively using social media channels for over twelve months, showing that early adopters are now well established

The role of a community manager

As communities and active participation in social media networks are a relatively new addition to the marketing remit for most brands, it's not entirely surprising that the role of a community or social media manager is something companies are starting to consider but, similar to last year, they have largely failed to appoint dedicated managers:

- 22% of companies already have a social media or community manager, which is interestingly the same as last year
- 40% do not have an individual dedicated to social media and do not expect to appoint one

The responsibly of managing social media channels isn't without its resourcing challenges. Many marketers are concerned about the strain that the day-to-day running of forums and social networks will place on them as the responsibility of participating still very much lies with the marketing department:

- 28% of social media activities are run by a marketing executive
- 14% by a PR executive
- 16% by the IT manager
- And - perhaps encouragingly - only 3% of organisations are opting for social media activities to be run by external agencies, showing that brands are learning how to engage directly with their audiences

Managing social media channels

With an array of online communities, forums and channels for brands to take advantage of, it's rare to use just one as they have varied functionality and purpose online. Facebook (65%) and Twitter (60%) are the most popular channels, but around a quarter of companies are managing more than one account on each.

Only 45% of marketers monitor their own forums, communities or blogs, and less than a quarter (23%) agree that social media is now an integrated part of their online presence.

Less than quarter (24%) of companies are able to update the various channels using one platform, and even less (6%) have a centralised dashboard to display the social media activity and results.

The importance of social media

But why is it so important for brands to take part in social media? Well, the marketers that took part in the survey revealed that they do in fact experience direct business benefits as a result of social network activity:

- Almost 30% said they have experienced increased customer loyalty
- 31% increased customer engagement
- 25% increased traffic to their website
- 21% attribute an increased sales turnover to the active use of social media

Only one business in ten participating in social media said they are able to effectively measure the benefits of social media.

Social media management in the future

The increase in the amount of time dedicated to managing social media is a clear indicator that companies are aware of the benefits:

- 52% of companies have increased the amount of time dedicated to managing social media, with 20% expecting it to increase further in the next 12 months
- Almost a fifth (17%) have indicated that they are likely to set up more social media channels in the next 12 months
- On average marketers dedicate an hour a day to social media activities

– 3. DOES SOCIAL MEDIA CONFUSION REIGN?

By Maria Wasing, VP Marketing, EPiServer

So what do these results tell us?

The great thing about running research two years running is that you can pick up on what has or hasn't changed. And the overriding sense in the last year is that, while businesses are clearly benefiting from social media more than ever, in terms of management, nothing has really changed.

According to the survey, 30% say they have experienced increased customer loyalty and, while more channels are being used than last year, more effective ways to manage social media activity still seem to be absent for most marketers.

Only a quarter (22%) have a dedicated social media or community manager – the same as last year and 40% say they do not plan to appoint someone dedicated to social in the next year. More worryingly perhaps, only 45% of marketers monitor their own forums, communities or blogs, and less than a quarter (23%) agree that social media is now an integrated part of their online presence.

Now, while I can understand that not every company will have the resources to appoint dedicated headcount, it is interesting that, despite signs of social media ROI, too many marketers are still unable to get a handle on what is being said about their brand online and very few have an integrated approach to social as part of the entire marketing mix.

The sense of this all just being a bit too much for marketers to manage is mirrored in the fact that only 24% of companies say they are able to update various different channels using one platform, and even less (6%) have a centralised dashboard to display the social media activity and results.

As the channels at our disposal as marketers increase, the sense that everything is getting out of hand is a natural one. It's where having an integrated, multi-touch and multi-channel approach to social media management will pay off in the short and longer term. That means not just having a presence on every new channel because it is the 'place to be', but because it fits the overall marketing goals and business objectives. You need to focus on the customer and ensure that the content they receive it appropriate to the channel they are using and that it meets their expectations.

The next year is certain to bring further developments when it comes to social media. The marketers that will continue to benefit from social media and establish it as a must-have part of the marketing mix will be the ones that take an overarching view and put in place the processes and people that can make this a reality.

– 4. THE ROLE OF A COMMUNITY MANAGER: FIVE TIPS FOR MANAGING SOCIAL MEDIA

By Lisa Price, Head of Social Media at twentysix

Social Media allows brands the opportunity to build relationships and communicate directly with customers. To facilitate these relationships, the role of community manager is becoming increasingly important for all types of businesses. Community managers are the social media voices of their brands, fulfilling multiple roles including social media strategists, customer service managers, content creators, product managers and evangelists.

Here are some tips on how the manage social media for a business/organisation.

1. It is important to firstly identify the metrics and goals of your social media strategy. Set clear expectations on KPIs, e.g.:

- Customer service metrics - Reduce the number of customer service support calls by monitoring common questions on Twitter and writing posts for an internal customer wiki?
- Sales metrics: Generate leads through inbound marketing tactics: blog posts, eBooks and webinars
- Engagement metrics: This includes Facebook fans, Twitter reach, Facebook post impressions, blog comments or number of organic community member discussions started in a forum.

2. Secondly: Listening is crucial—where does your target audience converse already?

With over 850 million people on Facebook and new Twitter accounts added each day, it's likely your potential community members are already on social media talking about things relevant to your brand.

When you're starting a community from scratch, you need to go where they are. Social media monitoring is how you find them. Look for key terms within free search tools or invest in a social media monitoring service.

3. Thirdly: Offer value to draw people in—create a content plan.

Diligent monitoring reveals what your community talks about, what questions they have and what topics you should blog about. You'll have plenty of ideas, but how will you carry them out?

Organise the pieces of your content plan by creating an editorial calendar—your editorial calendar will include how many times a week you'll blog, and when you publish what content and more.

Choose your blogging team and identify your key words that will help with SEO.

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4. Fourthly: Choose your content wisely.

In the world of social media, content is king and can be presented in whatever form you desire.

Types of content can be copy, widgets, videos, pictures, games and more. If you don't have content, there is nothing to talk about and no one will show up to hear you speak.

5. And finally: Engage, learn and re-evaluate:

When you have content, you can then build a community and conversations. All social media channel launches MUST be continued and not left. Constant engagement is critical to the success of an online social media campaign for your brand.

– 5. CONCLUSION

Social media is clearly having an increasingly positive impact on UK businesses and marketers seem genuinely keen to make the most of this. While it might not be feasible for every company to hire someone that is dedicated entirely to managing online communities, putting in place the right people and processes for social media will help companies get a hold on the seemingly unending onslaught that exists in our connected, digital world.

Here at EPiServer, we've recently been working on a four-stage social media maturity model. It details what brands need to think about at different stages of their social media journey and is a useful starting point for any business or marketing function that is looking to improve the way it focuses on social media.

The stages should be followed in order and they move from tactical considerations to more strategic imperatives:

Stage one – monitor

This is the most basic level that almost every business should be investing time in. Even if you do not have any social channels that you are actually using, you should still monitor what is being said about your company on social media. This can be a largely passive exercise, but it is only by listening and learning that you will be able to develop brand insights that will inform your social media strategy as well as your wider business focus.

Stage two – push

Whereas monitoring is largely passive, moving to this stage involves actually creating and distributing content. Of course, this isn't as easy as it sounds and often, when updating multiple channels at once, the challenge is making sure that what you send out is relevant and is formatted in the correct way for your audience, in each social channel. Get this right though and you will see increased traffic from social media. It is important to put analytics in place so you can see the channels that are proving most effective for your business.

Stage three – reach

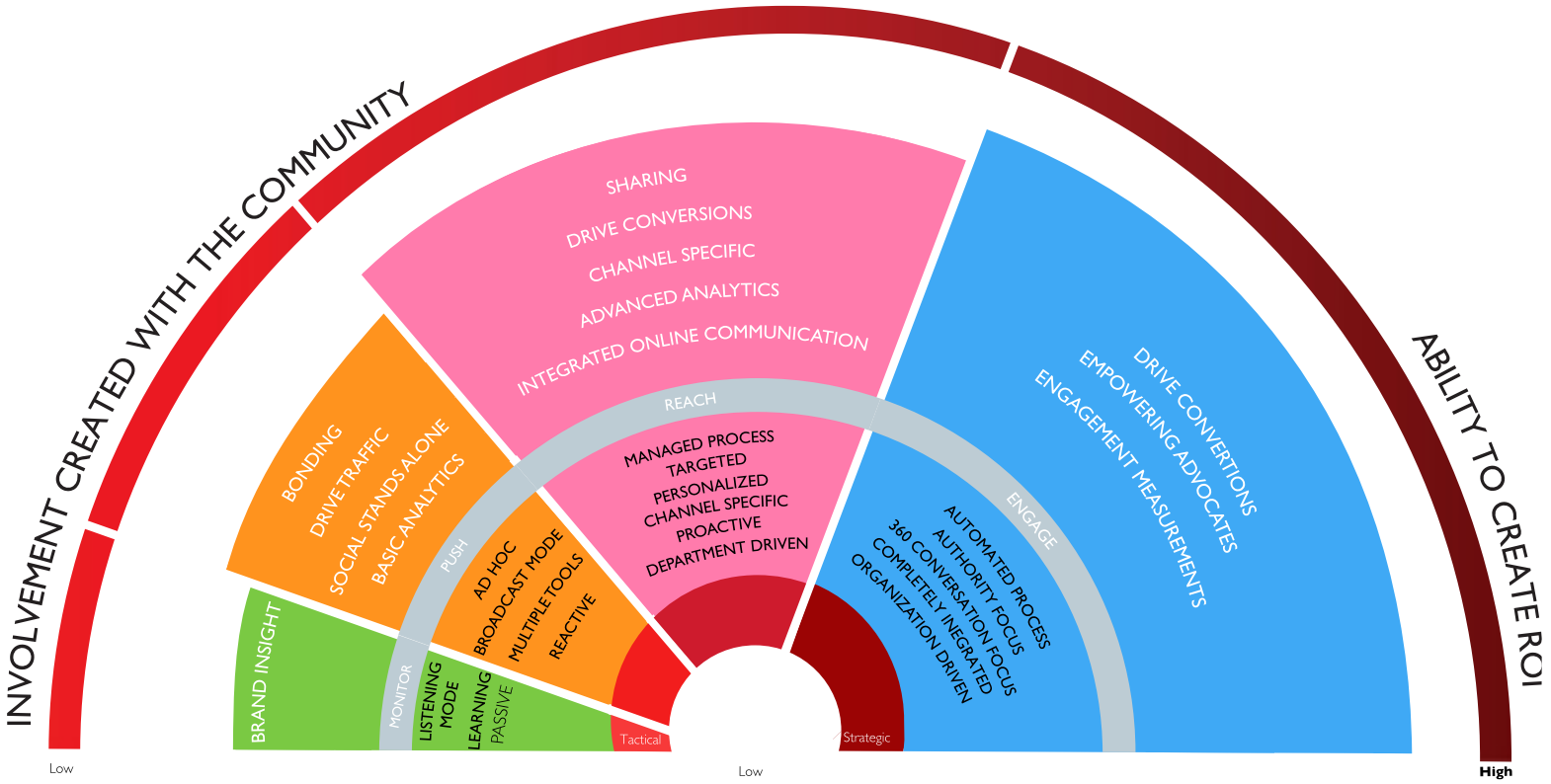
As you move through the maturity index, you will want to ensure that the content you create is more targeted and personalised to the audience you are hoping to reach on specific channels. You might need to think about how different departments in your business will use social media to reach different segments. You also might want to use advanced analytics techniques to improve the conversion rates you get from channels and link this through to your overall website strategy.

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Stage four – engage

The final, and most important, stage of any social strategy is to look at ways to really engage with your key stakeholders – this is, after all, the whole point of social media. This will depend on a much more process-driven, strategic approach. Who in your organisation is going to monitor and respond to customers. How should they do this and what are the guidelines you need to put in place. This level of maturity can only be successful when an organisation has really integrated social media across the business and has a 360-degree conversation focus.

– SOCIAL MEDIA MATURITY



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ABOUT EPISERVER

EPiServer is the leading supplier of solutions that enable true Web engagement and drive business results for end customers. 3,500 customers worldwide use EPiServer's technology platform that combines content, community, commerce, and communications with a configurable metrics dashboard. EPiServer CMS is the foundation for more than 20,000 websites and is used by more than 130,000 web editors daily. The EPiServer platform is delivered through an extensive network of over 500 partner companies in 30 countries.

EPiServer combines the stability and support of a commercial product with EPiServerWorld, a thriving developer community of more than 14,000 developers. EPiServer is a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner with an AAA-ranking by Dun & Bradstreet since 2000. The company was founded in 1994 and has offices in the United States, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, The Netherlands, South Africa, Australia and the United Kingdom. EPiServer is controlled by the IK2007 Fund. IK Investment Partners is a European private equity firm with Nordic roots, managing €5.7 billion in fund commitments.

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