

Embrace Social Media: Blogging and Tweeting

Cultivate your community of customers, prospects, and advocates through blogging

TRUST HAS SHIFTED. TARGET MARKETS SHUN official messages and the corporate leaders who make them, replacing these messages with conversations among peers. Marketing materials, advertisements, and press releases increasingly find fallow audiences. Target markets, instead, covet dialogues and multi-dimensional conversations among their chosen communities.

Revising your communication strategy becomes vital — one that contributes to the conversation; one that collaborates and connects with a community you cre-



ate and cultivate. One of the best methods for engaging your community is through blogging and microblogging.

Blogging (the macro kind). If you don't already, write a blog. Post an entry at least once a week, aiming for the same day and time so that your readers get used to the expectation. Why? Two-thirds of people on the Internet have positive thoughts about companies with blogs. They trust what they read in blogs, even about your product and service because, surprisingly, they perceive blog writers as peers (not as the top-down corporate speak they've already turned off).

What to blog about. Start writing about what you sell, your product and service. Integrate customer resource management into your blog posts. For instance, blog about a particular aspect of what you offer and review the results you reap.

Remember though that a blog is not a marketing and sales platform — it is

about sharing useful information with your readers. Write stories that resonate with them. Your posts should make your readers smarter and help them succeed.

Write your blog posts employing your personal voice, a moderated conversational tone, some humanity (which is why our blog is entitled *Toward Humanity*). You are writing for your readers, not yourself or your company. Engender multi-dimensional communication — a conversation where readers can reply and comment. Respond to these comments and, above all, listen to them!

Many companies remain wary of blogs because they are concerned about receiving negative comments being added to their posts. With the ease of communication through the myriad of social media, these negative comments are going to find an audience somewhere; they are not going to be easily quelled. Negative comments on your blog, however, at least give you the opportunity to respond, deal with the issue, and set the record straight. Besides, readers feel better about the real voice of your company dealing directly with problems. As a result, your reputation — and your brand — is enhanced.

Promoting your blog and gaining readers. While it might feel great to write a blog, what is more important is for people to read it. Once you have a number of posts, promote your blog and its web address aggressively to gain community. Promote it in your printed materials and stationery, especially your business cards; on your Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter pages; submit it to StumbleUpon, refer to it when you interact on FriendFeed and when you submit to Flickr and YouTube; add it to your email signature; and (of course) talk about it when you meet people in professional settings (think conferences). Submit each blog post's unique address to social bookmarking sites (such as Digg, Delicious, and Propeller) using socialmarket.com, submitting to 160 sites through one interface.

Microblogging with Twitter... at 140 characters or less (cutely called a "tweet"). Followers are the foundation of Twitter; these people are your community. You send a tweet and your followers receive it. They can then "retweet" it to their followers, thus quickly gaining exponential exposure.

Twitter has grown about 1500% over the last year and a half (mainly in the 35–50 age group), quickly becoming a standard of communication over the Internet, cell phones, and mobile devices.

Send regular tweets to your community of followers, using the same strategy as your blog posts: information that is useful, helpful, and makes them smarter. What do you tweet about? First and foremost, don't tweet about what you are doing right now; trust me, no one cares! Instead, use Twitter to tweet about your blog posts, to engage in customer service, to converse with your customers, to promote your brand, to inform about promotions (such as couponing or discounts), to inform about breaking news or informative articles (and blog posts) of interest to your followers.

Gaining followers. You gain followers first by following. Follow your Facebook buddies, your LinkedIn connections, the people you email and those in your contacts list. Use wefollow.com to find people; try Twitter's suggestion page for ideas; use keywords on twollow.com; and search for people you meet.

Succeeding at blogging. Increase your readership and your followers — your community of customers, prospects, and advocates — by writing engaging, interesting, and worthwhile tweets and posts. It's that straightforward. ☺

— RICH MAGGIANI

Solari assists utilities with creating their integrated resource plans (IRPs) through an integrated resource, distribution, and grid planning process for incorporating renewable generation.

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