

Influence Your Community by Engaging Them

Your community controls your brand, not you — human engagement is your best course

WITH YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA GOALS SET, MEASURE your progress to ensure you are on the correct path. To continue with our travel analogy, after being on your journey for awhile, check your map, gauge your progress, consider a different route, a better route, or perhaps even test an intriguing path that appeals to you.

What most matters are the people you meet along the way — you must engage them and influence them to believe in you, to travel with you, to support you. In other words, you want to influence



this audience to embrace your brand, embrace your products and services, and ultimately become your customers.

Traditional corporate communication is dead. You cannot do this with traditional corporate speak, the whitewashed prose and polished text that you have traditionally been written for your web site, marketing materials, press releases, and other corporate communiqué. You must engage your audience, entertain them, invite them in, and ask them to participate. It's then, and only then, that you gain a community that supports and promotes your brand, with its resulting positive effect on sales, profitability, market share, and valuation.

You no longer control your brand. You must fully realize that you are no longer in charge of your brand. Where once you controlled the message, now you can only influence the message. Think about that for a moment. You do not control your brand. Anybody, and every body, has the ability, literally at their fingertips through

the myriad of social media — Twitter, blogs, YouTube, email, texting, forums — to publish their thoughts and opinions of your brand. And there is nothing — absolutely nothing — you can do to stop it.

You must engage and influence. The only thing you can do, and this is the crux of your social media efforts, is to influence the behavior and opinions of your community (and by extension, their communities) to be positive about your brand. Your social media efforts must be personable, real, truthful, appealing, entertaining, but more importantly—human (which is the main reason why our blog is entitled *Toward Humanity*).

This kind of engagement represents a complete shift in your communication strategy. This is persuasion of a different yet similar sort: to influence your audience to speak for you. It is a core component of your brand. It builds your community who in turn, build a positive and stellar impression of your brand.

That is why you set social media goals, so that you can test your efforts against these goals, evaluate how the journey is progressing, determine whether to stay the course or change routes, even alter your ultimate destination if that is necessary: essentially, to adjust, be agile, and be flexible. In this way, you come full circle in your social media journey.

One of the truest tests of how well you are influencing the greater community is by seeing what they are saying about you, either proactively or reactively. And then, how you are responding to it. Let's look at two examples.

How not to respond: Domino's. You've probably seen it by now—after all, millions have in the course of a couple of days—the YouTube video (now removed) of two Domino's employees demonstrating how they "creatively" and unsanitarily assemble a simple submarine sandwich. After watching their video, you wouldn't want to eat their creation.

Yet while the acts of these two employees were clearly disgusting, their

video was engaging: they talked to the camera and connected with their audience as only eye-to-eye contact can. As a result, Domino's suffered a huge backlash of angry and disengaged customers. Their sales precipitously dropped.

After deservedly firing the two employees, Domino's posted a YouTube video from President Patrick Doyle. He blathered corporate speak for two minutes, looking off-screen while reading from a prompter, never once looking at the camera. His voice fluctuated and was emphatic at points, yet this response was bland, flat, and clearly not engaging. His response would have been more effective if only he looked directly into the camera, spoke from memory, curbed the corporate speak, and talked to us as humans.

The better response: Motrin. In an advertisement (print and video) aimed at increasing sales, Motrin directly intimated how physically painful it is for new moms to carry their newborn in a sling. Mothers everywhere were outraged with Motrin for making this connection, incensed that this joyful union between mother and baby was reduced to simple pain. Over the next two days, moms responded with thousands of tweets (using the #MotrinMoms hashtag) and numerous YouTube videos, including one clever parody, calling for a boycott on Motrin products.

Motrin's response: They stopped running the video ads, wrote an immediate apology, followed in four days with another apology. They owned up to their mistake, said they were sorry for offending moms, and stated they learned their lesson and that they were listening. A human, engaging response. The furor ended three days after it began. 🍌

—RICH MAGGIANI

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