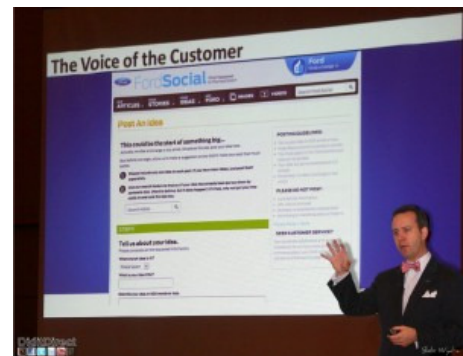




## Ford's Scott Monty Sees Social Media as Opportunity to “Humanize the Company”

January 24th, 2012, a guest post by SMB Member Doug Tangwall

Kudos to Wendy Soucie for pulling in a top-notch speaker for this month's Social Media Breakfast-Madison, Scott Monty, global head of social media for Ford Motor. I greatly enjoyed learning from this down-to-earth and personable professional.



*At Ford Social, user input improves product design.*

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### Nothing Is More Important Than Trust

Monty began his presentation by discussing trends from the Edelman Trust Barometer, a survey that measures consumer attitudes. He says, “Trust in corporations is declining. It’s sliding every year. Trust in government is down. Trust of businesses is down. Whom do people trust? Experts, analysts, people who are independent, in some instances the media, but also someone who is like them—family, friends, coworkers, someone who is part of your network. Ford believes that nothing is more important than trust, and businesses that lose it will themselves lose.”

Monty followed up his discussion of trust with “another challenge marketers face, ‘attention deficit disorder’...How do we break through? With 3,000-3,500 brand messages vying for our limited attention, Ford mixes things up and takes the time to understand.”

“When I started with Ford in 2008, before the ‘carpocalypse,’ the company was struggling at the bottom of the domestics. But I saw the potential for an upswing.” Monty cites a factor that differentiates his company, “Ford has always been associated with its founder, Henry Ford. And that face of Ford still comes through today.”

Monty shared a 1925 advertisement by Ford entitled, *Opening the Highways to All Mankind*, which also served as the title of his presentation. The copy from the nearly ninety-year-old ad expressed concepts that seemed modern, such as vertical integration, but also contained visionary ideals, such as giving back to the communities that Ford served and making the automobile affordable for those who were not rich. Monty notes that “in 1914, Henry Ford doubled the wages of his workers and cut the workday from nine hours to the eight hours we are familiar with today, making transportation possible for the very class of workers who built these cars.”

“Today our definitions have broadened, but affordability is still at the heart of our mission: affordable fuel economy, affordable technology. Ford’s SYNC technology can be purchased for as little as \$200 and fuel economy exceeds 100 miles per gallon in some of our electric hybrids.” Ford’s current chairman, Bill Ford, doesn’t even describe Ford as a car company or even as being in the transportation business. He says, “Ford is a green, global, high-tech company that is improving people’s lives.”

### **Ford’s Social Media Philosophy**

Monty warns marketers to fix products before using social media marketing. “Otherwise,” he cautions, “all people will do is talk about your lousy products or service. Fix the root of the problem first.”

Monty says the social media philosophy of Ford can be captured by paraphrasing quotes from Woody Allen and Yogi Berra. Allen says, “90% of life is just showing up,” and Monty believes it’s the same with social media. “If your business is represented in social media, there is great opportunity to differentiate from the competition.” He shared the social feedback of one customer who said, “Is there anyone else here?”

The Yogi Berra quote referenced by Monty was, “A nickel ain’t worth a dime anymore,” and in a humorous contrast to the 90% figure he had just cited, Monty added, “It’s the other half that’s hard.”

### **Elbow Grease versus Polish**

When I turned 16, my dad bought me my first car, a red Ford Galaxy 500 with nearly 100,000 miles on it. It wasn’t much to look at, but I loved that car. I didn’t have car polish, but I found with a towel and some elbow grease I could spiff up the paint job. This parallel came back to me as I discussed Ford’s strategy over dinner with Monty the night before his speech.

“How do you balance the raw, uncontrollable nature of social conversation in an industry where image is everything?” I asked. “We don’t edit anything,” he responded. “But if you let 100 people shoot a video, someone will come up with something extraordinary. We cherry-pick the best and share it.” In not changing social content, Ford is able to maintain authenticity, while savvy selection and packaging add a little polish to the presentation. Check out the badges on Ford Social and its more than 50 specialized Facebook pages to see how the company deepens connections and refines the value of its content by grouping individuals with similar interests, listening and integrating relevant articles, real customer stories and feedback into its design, tone, language, and product development processes—all in a pretty slick, but genuine, social package.

<http://socialmediabreakfastmadison.com/fords-scott-monty-sees-social-media-as-opportunity-to-humanize-the-company/>

By narrowing its focus and catering to multiple audiences, Ford has accumulated more than 6.5 million “likes.” An odometer on its main Facebook page keeps a rolling count. Monty says the Ford Mustang Facebook page is its most popular, with other favorites including “reveals,” pages about new product launches, Ford Trucks and Ford Warriors in Pink, representing Ford’s ongoing commitment to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, with donations totaling more than \$115 million. “The content desired by the Trucks audience is much different from Hybrids,” he continues. “We listen, pay attention, then jump into the conversation using their language. No one wants to hear jargon or marketing speak.”

Monty’s team uses social sign-ups and engagement to conduct before-and after research to measure the impact of their efforts. “Email is still quite relevant for us,” he adds.

Check out the following case studies to get an idea of the innovation and measurable success of their efforts.

### **Case Study #1: The Ford Fiesta Movement**

*Mission:* Take a car made popular in Europe and generate interest, education and intent to purchase among a young audience in the United States one year before product launch.

*Strategy:* Give 100 socially vibrant drivers representing the geographic and demographic profile a Fiesta, let them drive it for six months and share their unique experiences.

“We took a chance on this one, but it really paid off. All we required of the ‘Fiesta agents’ was to make one video per month, but the bragging rights and inventiveness of this group translated into broad awareness and interest in the new vehicle. What it was was other people telling people about Ford, not Ford telling people about Ford.” says Monty.

The following statistics document the success of the social media campaign:

- 7 million+ YouTube views
- 750,000 Flickr views
- 40 million Twitter impressions
- 132,000 “handraisers” requesting follow up from a dealer when the Fiesta was available
- 83% of generated audience never owned a Ford before
- 30% under age 25
- 58% awareness among Millennials (equivalent of cars that had been on the market 2-3 years)
- 10 times the conversion rate of registrations to purchases versus traditional media campaigns

Monty adds, “Ford is able to improve its media spend in terms of what goes into traditional advertising, and when a car actually gets to market, we’ve got that ramp-up, that exposure and that engagement already established.”

## **Case Study #2: The Ford Explorer Facebook Reveal**

*Mission:* Generate interest, education and intent to purchase for the new Ford Explorer before product launch.

*Strategy:* Use an online Facebook launch with teaser images and information and a potential sweepstakes where one person will win the new Explorer if a cumulative 30,000 “likes” are achieved prior to the Facebook launch date.

Again, Monty shares some impressive statistics:

- When actually revealed the Explorer on Facebook on one day had a greater impact than a Super Bowl ad (99 million total social media impressions)
- #1 trend on Twitter and #2 on Google on reveal day
- 500,000+ visits to Explorer website on reveal day versus average of 7,000 for 2011
- 1.5 times more likely to complete build-and-price web application
- 50,000 “likes” of Ford Explorer Reveal Facebook page

He adds, “By using teaser information and images that were not available anywhere else, we built this relationship and an expectation over a period of time. We bypassed automotive journalists and traditional business journalists in favor of going direct to consumers. With the Explorer Reveal, we began to take a fundamentally different approach, which took a little bit of convincing internally—the notion of using paid, earned and owned media, truly integrated marketing communications. We have a great PR team, great digital marketing team and great content coming in from our consumers. We began to use these channels to ‘play off of each other.’”

## **Case Study #3: Doug the Ford Fusion Orange Puppet**

*Mission:* Generate interest in the new Fusion among a young, predominately male audience that is already familiar with the earlier models of the automobile.

*Strategy:* Use critically acclaimed directors Paul Feig of *Bridesmaids* and Rob Cohen of *The Simpsons* to develop a 50-video humorous and educational spot around a loud and somewhat obnoxious spokesperson, Doug the Orange Puppet, the new vehicle that would be socially shared by the target audience.

“With about the same budget we would use for a national television ad, we were able to generate a lot of impressions among our target audience,” says Monty. “The irreverent nature of the spots caused some issues with our human resources department, but we kept the spots on the ‘edgy’ side and had strong results”:

Monty responded to a question from the audience, admitting that Doug works against Ford’s philosophy of building fans over time because the campaign eventually comes to an end, but they thought this strategy would be more effective given the audience and goals of the initiative. At the end, fans were given information on where to turn for additional information and given the hope that Doug may return at some future date.

#### **Case Study #4: Targeting Small-scale Change Among Large Influencers**

Monty appears to believe in targeting small changes among social influencers, perhaps a reason he chose to speak to our relatively small audience of 300 at the Social Media Breakfast-Madison. He cited several examples of bringing in bloggers and giving them the types of exclusive access that mainstream media receive.

In one instance, he invited mom bloggers who had expressed negative views of Ford and other domestic cars to tour the company's Chicago production facility. The result was a much greater appreciation of the safety and translated into more positive attitudes and reach.

#### **A Universal Language**

Monty says Ford is committed to being a global, integrated organization, and his team takes the same social media philosophy and outreach worldwide: "Humanize the company, connect fans and customers, and add value in ways that mean something to them."

Monty provides several examples of how Ford adds value in its social media messaging:

- Information
- Research
- Debate
- The ability to learn first/exclusive access/bragging rights to show off to friends
- Entertainment
- Participation in the development process

He says they package engaging content in a variety of ways, including:

- Video
- One-on-one interviews
- News stories
- Podcasts

"When you know your audience, how they think, how they spend, what sources 'speak' to them, you give yourself a chance to have a say. The central inputs are your abilities to listen and learn," says Monty.

He quoted first-century Roman Philosopher Cicero:

*"If you wish to persuade me, you must think my thoughts, feel my feelings, and speak my words."*

Monty adds, "Cicero didn't have an iPhone, but people are still the same. Once you grasp that, the possibilities begin to open up."

*About the author: Doug Tangwall is president of End Result Marketing, a nurture marketing and social media company based in Madison, Wisconsin, that enables businesses to gain a competitive advantage by educating and engaging customers.*