



Facebook Frenzy: Businesses Join the Social Network

by Roberto Michel, June 2011

It's astonishing, but over half of U.S. Internet users over age 18 are on Facebook, according to research firm *eMarketer*. Considering the social networking site started in 2004, it's no wonder so many businesses are reaching out with Facebook accounts.

But are businesses doing Facebook right? Well, "friends," say social media experts and area companies on Facebook, there are some hallmarks of effective use, starting with frequent posts. "Facebook can be a once-a-day activity," says Wendy Soucie, a social media strategist and principal with Wisconsin-based Wendy Soucie Consulting. "You can do it less frequently, but what happens is you don't get in other people's news feeds." (That's Facebook-speak for where "friends" typically see your posts).

Another important tactic is to plan out key posts in advance, says Soucie. There are other tips to consider. Surprisingly for business use of Facebook, another tip is to avoid bombarding people with sales pitches. "You have to post things that people care about, and want to do something with," says Soucie.

At Miles Kimball, the Oshkosh-based catalog company, building excitement around products is part of the approach. But the overall goal for Facebook accounts (each catalog brand has one) is "customer engagement," says Steve Fortson, vice president of e-commerce. Many posts don't mention products like trivia posts about geese one site ran in March. But since Miles Kimball sells lawn geese and related "goose fashions," building fun conversation about geese, is well, also good for the gander.

"Our purpose with Facebook is to try to engage customers and provide an avenue for getting a sense of what their interests are," Fortson says. "We should be able to tap into that to learn what our customers want and to offer more of what they are looking for."

Fostering "peer-to-peer" consumer conversations is a key goal for most of the brand-focused Facebook sites run by consumer goods company Kimberly-Clark, which is based in Dallas but has much of its marketing in Neenah. Ellen Watson, digital manager of emerging technologies for the company, says Facebook tactics vary by brand. Some brands, like Pull-Ups training pants for toddlers, do more with coupons. Coupon incentives can be a good name-acquisition strategy,

says Watson, “but I think it’s more important to use it as a space to foster conversation and as a way of bonding with the brand.”

At Baylake Bank, the Facebook goal boils down to listening to customer interests, says Dawn Augustson, the bank’s webmaster who handles Facebook duties with public relations specialist Michelle Meacham. The two have a year-long calendar of planned posts that they update every two weeks, making sure to include a mix of lighter items like community events with money management tips.

Since starting the Facebook page last spring, the posts that drew the most response were about the bank-sponsored Tall Ship Festival. “We try to add value to a person’s life – whether it’s a financial tip, or an update on an event,” says Augustson.

Education is a Facebook goal for Affinity Health System, the Menasha-based health care group. Some posts feature Affinity’s You Tube videos, in which doctors and patients talk about their experiences.

“We see Facebook as another opportunity to provide personalized care to our patients, and what I mean by that is we are sharing health information, events in the community and information on new medical procedures and technology,” says Jen Wagner Mauk, Affinity’s executive director of brand and marketing communications.

Businesses using Facebook agree that video and photo content draws people in. At welding equipment maker Miller Electric Manufacturing Co., visual content is core to its “Miller Electric Welders” Facebook site. Sue Feldkamp, manager of interactive services for the Appleton company, says visuals like user-generated project photos support the goal of “inspiring” welders. At first, there was some internal debate whether user-generated visuals would be too much of a departure from the studio-quality images the brand puts forward. However, adds Feldkamp, “we quickly came to the conclusion that when users are sharing content with each other, there already is an expectation that it’s acceptable for the quality to be a bit lower because it’s coming from peers. There is high credibility.”

Some companies are seeking to exert policy discipline on Facebook content and tone. Kimberly-Clark has developed social media guidelines that apply to internal Facebook posters, says Watson, and also cover what employees say about the company on personal accounts.

Finally, while Facebook doesn’t charge for accounts, doing Facebook right isn’t free, says Dr. Daradirek “Gee” Ekachai, an assistant professor who teaches social media at Marquette University. “It’s labor intensive,” she says. “To do Facebook well, you have to invest the time and the resources.”

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