

## How To Get The Most From Your Social Network

Written by Edward F. Nesta

Do we jump on the Social Networking Bandwagon because we do not want to miss the movement, or are we methodically looking at integrating this new avenue into our overall marketing plan?

I get excited when I hear about a new way to communicate with my customer base. There is nothing more important than opening a dialogue with a customer as they can provide the critical information that is required to move a company's product or service forward.

A customer is a very precious entity and more companies need to appreciate that along with their product or service that their customers' information is one of the most important resources that they have. A company would not haphazardly change a design or distribute a product to an unknown channel, nor would they randomly promote their service in unknown markets. Yet, companies are jumping on the Social Network Bandwagon to communicate with their customer, but many do not have a plan of action, they are just excited to tell you that they are now embracing Social Networking. Companies are spending money to be on or a part of Social Networking tools such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, and Flickr to communicate with a customer that they do not know, in a fashion that may not complement how their customer communicates. Thus, they run the risk of being disingenuous and losing touch with a very valuable resource.

Social Networks can be a very powerful ally, but like all marketing channels, just because it exists does not mean it is right for you.

So, if you are looking to jump onboard the Social Networking Bandwagon, what should you be looking for, how should you act, and what should you not do?

I have a very basic way to look at social networking that revolves around the word social, which I like to equate to interacting at a social event [party]. At a party if you want to be successful mingling with the other guests you have to listen to what other people are saying, you may try to get to know more about the people you are talking with so you have more information to keep the conversation flowing, you communicate in a sincere fashion, and lastly you do not want to dominate the conversation otherwise you may be talking to yourself by the end of the evening. In many social environments you typically run into the same people over and over again, so if you were successful in prior interactions then you will be a person they may seek out to talk with.

Another important point for the word social is that social networks are typically an informal gathering of people who may be interested in exchanging information or just socializing. This is the key component as to why social networks are successful for general consumer use, but have a hard time being accepted into the business environment. People access their social network of choice drawn in by a desire to participate in a special interest forum, to hear what someone at a unique event has to say or to view a video on a subject that they have an interest in. They are interested in actively or passively participating, but that is their choice and there is no hype or alternative motive to being a part of that social network. Thus, if you are a business, you are interjecting a business conversation either directly or indirectly into a social network, which can create a barrier for open communications, and communications is the reason you want to participate in a social network.

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So, if you jump on the Social Networking Bandwagon without a plan on how you want to use a specific social network, you may end up pushing your message to the customer and not listening to what they are saying; you will not earn their trust. If you do not earn their trust then you cannot take the next steps with regards to opening a dialogue, which would preclude you from soliciting information about your product or service.

## Important facts for a Company to consider when working the Social Network channels:

- » Be Yourself - There is nothing worse for a business to do then to create a false image on a social network and then to be found out.
- » Listen to What is Being Said, Do Not Dominate the Conversation - Remember this is a social network; people are participating by their own choice. You have to earn the right to participate; you should not drive the conversation.
- » Be Authentic, Do Not Be Transparent - These points tie into being yourself, being honest with your communications, and to be open to listen to all feedback and comments.
- » Be Selective on Which Social Networks to Participate In - If you are being yourself, if you are being authentic and not being transparent then it would be impossible to retain an active presence on every social network, but you do not need an active presence on every one. If one social network channel does not meet your expectations then draw up a plan to look at a different channel and learn from your time on the other channels.
- » Your Marketing Plan is Still the Controlling Force - You do not toss your marketing plan out the window when you engage a social network, in fact you should have factored the use of social networks into your overall marketing plan to ensure that you are working towards a common outcome with your customers. Social Networks are not a panacea; they are just another channel to communicate with your customer, so manage your expectations and your perceptions.
- » Social Networking is a Mindset - Social Networks are a tool that you use, but how you use that tool and what you get out of it will differentiate you from your competition.

As I stated, I get excited when I hear about new ways to engage a conversation with a customer, and the Social Networking tools provide some great avenues depending on how you will interact with your customers and where you may find them. When it comes to marketing in today's economy, and especially with social networks, it starts with your customer and it will always end with your customer, so make sure you know your customer.

Social Networking is another avenue within your overall marketing plan. Thus, just like you proofread every media document, review product packaging, and analysis feedback regarding services, you need to be actively involved and have a plan for using social networks that complements your overall marketing strategy.

I thank you for your continued support of Luxury Experience Company, and as always, your comments are welcome, so please send comments to: [Efnesta@L-E-Company.com](mailto:Efnesta@L-E-Company.com).

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