

Join the Conversation

Brands elevate their social presence through social chatter

On Aug. 7 at 11:21 am, The Gap posted on Facebook that it had partnered with Ellen DeGeneres' new lifestyle brand ED by Ellen to share inspiring stories. That afternoon, a video showed girls painting, drumming and skateboarding. The Gap commented, "We believe that girls have the power to change the world." Six days later, 2,101 people had "liked" the post.

The Gap's post is in line with marketers' efforts to seamlessly integrate their brands into the social conversation instead of just going for the hard sell.

If brands are listening carefully, social gives them the chance to be quick and nimble, and take action when an opportunity presents itself. These moments come in all forms, from social issues to breaking news to even dust ups between rap stars.

Last month, rappers Drake and Meek Mill began feuding on Twitter. Meek had a lot to say, but what really ignited the firestorm was when Meek tweeted that Drake doesn't write his own raps.

"Stop comparing Drake to me too.... He don't write his own raps! That's why he ain't tweet my album because we found out!" Meek wrote to his 5 million+ followers, punctuated at the end with a yellow emoji gritting its teeth. The conversation went on with a number of tweets not safe for work.

Some brands jumped into the fray.

Eggland's Best tweeted: Sorry @MeekMill, looks like you have egg on your face. @Drake wins. #overeasy. Here's one from Rosetta Stone: We might not be able to translate the latest #MeekMill soundtrack, but we can help you learn languages most ppl speak.



Box trucks wrapped in barn scene graphics helped increase awareness of the products Tractor Supply carries.

There were also a number of tweets referring to the rappers "beef" with each other, including some from White Castle, Burger King and this one from Whataburger: "Meek Mill take it from us- if you gonna serve beef serve it high quality."

"So many brands that got involved and inserted themselves into the [Meek/Drake] conversation were extremely funny and relevant," says Ashley Baxter, senior manager of social media for AT&T. "They took it upon themselves to highjack the news and insert themselves into this conversation in a way that was still really relevant to their brands and to the consumers who follow them. You didn't feel like they were trying to sell you something, it was like an inside joke with one of your friends."

AT&T also uses social to extend the brand in a more personal way and reach consumers where they are already talking.

"Social media isn't about the brand, it's about the consumer," she says. "By using social as part of our strategy we're able to join some of those conversa-

tions in a way that is natural that consumers would already like to be a part of.”

Sometimes, joining the conversation is unintentional. Marriott just launched a new video series as part of its #LoveTravels social movement. The videos feature Latino influencers Diane Guerrero (“Orange Is the New Black” / “Jane the Virgin”), Diego Boneta (“Scream Queens”) and YouTube music sensations Boyce Avenue. In the videos, Guerrero and Boneta discuss their heritage, what it means for them to be Latino and American and their passion for issues around human rights and empowerment of the Latino community. Guerrero, whose family was deported to Colombia, is an advocate for immigration reform and keeping families together is an issue close to her heart.

Although the campaign was not intended to be a response to the recent hot button issues around immigration, the video content taps into those issues.

“We began planning this year’s iteration of our successful #LoveTravels campaign early in 2015 and any connection to current events is purely coincidental,” Cheryl Williams, director, global portfolio marketing at Marriott International, says. “Our campaign encourages travelers to explore what they are passionate about, and it gives them a platform to celebrate their unique perspectives and experiences.”

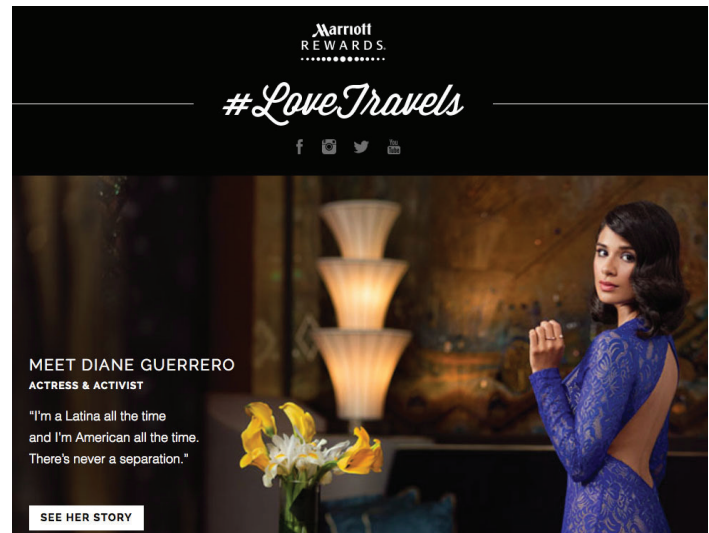
KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN

It also makes sense to look around to see who’s doing it best and that’s more and more likely to be a person rather than an individual brand in the actual quality of content.

“We’re starting to think about our approach to content generation in a different way,” says Cora Brady, vice president, strategy and client service for AMG Digital. “We’re not always looking at our in-house team. We’re looking at social influencers who are just killing it and producing great content and have formed these huge communities. We then go to them in a contractual relationship and brief them on the content we want created.”

That trend is driving an influx of social media influencer talent agencies, like Niche, recently purchased by Twitter, and Viral Nation.

“The reason they are influencers is that they are good. They’re really nailing it in an area of social content,” she says. “It’s about thinking less brand centric and respecting that there are a lot of people out there creating great content. The value is that content, but also they’re sharing out that content and we’re leveraging their community to help amplify our mes-



Marriott’s new video series is part of its #LoveTravels social movement.

sage as well.”

Marketers are open to new ideas about how to approach social and looking for support and new ways of thinking to maximize spend.

“Ideally each quarter we’re asking, ‘What’s the number one business objective? What’s the focus? Is there an event? Are we launching a new product? Then we talk about how to bring this to life and what’s the plan on social,’ Brady says. “If the brand is on every platform, we might drill down to focus the energy on one or two platforms that month to make sure the right support is in the right place so people are experiencing our content.”

In addition to picking and choosing the right social platform, getting it right on social comes down to two other basics: budget and metrics.

One of those new ways of thinking is to move beyond always “being on” to measuring what matters based on business objectives and goals that can change with every campaign. Generally, likes, shares, comments and reach are the basic metrics that go without saying, but the more marketers can tie it to business objectives the more likely they’re able to prove the effectiveness of the campaign and do it again.

“I see people just swimming in numbers trying to understand what’s working and what’s not,” Brady says. “The key is to measure only what matters and to have enough in the budget coffers to perform well on social. There is great data supporting social as a much more trusted source of information from a brand, proving connectivity with consumers, even driving sales and brand affinity.”

Budgets are shifting to digital in general and social

5 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

"Never stop testing and your advertising will never stop improving."

That quote from David Ogilvy is the key to improving your social media marketing today. Traditional media plans take months, so a current strategy will stay fresh for a large part of the year. However, in the world of social media marketing, your competitors catch up to your improvements almost immediately. There's no such thing as an ever-lasting formula, so you have to keep the new ideas flowing.

Being likeable on social media should be at the core of everything you do. Likeability depends on many factors, including current fads, news topics and technological capabilities. Here's five ways to keep your brand in favor:

1. Host Influencer Takeovers

These online stars have large followings, but many brands make the mistake of asking influencers to simply talk about their product a certain number of times. What's the use of a partnership if it doesn't go beyond the one time you send them something?

Try inviting an influencer to take over one of your brand's handles for a week. They'll direct their fans to your account, and you'll gain followers. In this way, your brand's messaging will show up in the social media feeds of new customers for a longer period of time than if they simply saw it mentioned a few times by an influencer.

2. Set Deadlines Based on Competition

If you're hoping for participation in a campaign or a product launch, convey a sense of rivalry instead of a deadline. When you ask users to enter by a certain date, some participants might delay their entry thinking they have time (and then entirely forget to enter). Rather, set a competitive incentive, such as offering a prize to the first 1,000 users to retweet. Even after your brand's tweet has surpassed the number 1,000, users will keep retweeting. Why? This approach feels more pressing and encourages immediate action.

3. Align Your CTAs with Your Networks

Each network has different user behaviors, so make sure you run your campaign on the appropriate platform. For instance, if you're asking users to submit silly selfies don't run the campaign on Instagram. That's a network about

perfect selfies. Instead, ask for it on Snapchat because it's a common content type on the app. Or if you want to incorporate hashtags into your campaign, encourage activity on Instagram and Twitter, where hashtags are most used. When it comes to asking for a call-to-action, rely on what is organically popular on each network.

4. Count Video Clicks, Not Views

Thanks to the ease of recording on mobile devices, users are uploading more videos to social media networks than ever before. But just because videos are appearing across all feeds doesn't mean users are paying attention.

Facebook defines a video view as three seconds or more. If someone has simply stopped at your post in the News Feed, that's not an indication that they absorbed your message. Views provide no proof that the user understood your message, but clicks do. Track likes, shares and visits to the website or anything else that involves a click. These metrics are more indicative of which video content works, and you'll be able to assess which types of videos you should create in the future.

5. Always Plan for the Someday

I can't stress this enough—get involved in social networks early. One of the reasons brands like Taco Bell and McDonald's are successful on Snapchat is because they saw the potential early on and posted when few brands were on it. Don't let young users discourage you from starting a presence. Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat all started with a user majority under the age of 24 years old. But like most social media platforms, older age groups—those with buying power—started to join in.

Remember, social networks are ever changing, so plan for their growth and upgrades. Instagram doesn't allow you to post links directly in your post captions, but have a plan in place in case that changes. Anticipate updates in social networks today, and it will strengthen your dominance tomorrow.

What all of these methods have in common is simple—they're a step forward from tactics that were popular as recently as last year. Shift away from the popular approaches of 2014 (e.g., influencers, video views, campaign deadlines) because they're safe. Start taking chances on new approaches. And as Ogilvy said, never stop testing. —*Dave Kerpen, chairman, Likeable Media & John Kultgen, content director, Likeable Media*

is part of that. Some dollars are going to content production because there is a heavier emphasis on video in social so there is an increase in production dollars. However, the biggest shift would be on paid social media with most of the dollars going to mass-market services like Facebook.

Facebook reported a strong second quarter ending June 30, with revenue rising 39% to \$4.04 billion, from \$2.91 billion one year ago. Mobile advertising revenue represented approximately 76% of its advertising revenue for the second quarter.

"The good thing about Facebook is that it's helping brands connect with the right fans, to easily target competitors and serve ads by geo-location," Brady says. "There are lots of opportunities to be really sophisticated and people are seeing performance."

Twitter also showed strong revenue growth jumping 61% to \$502.4 million from \$312.2 million, but its user growth continues to be slow. Twitter has a much smaller audience and lags far behind Facebook in developing its advertising plan.

Other social platforms, like Instagram and Snapchat, are also trying to figure out an advertising model.

It all comes back around to understanding who is on a brand's social platforms, who is loyal and who are the right people to connect with the marketing message.

For the Tractor Supply Co., that means connecting with its Facebook and Instagram fans to let them know about its first mobile-experiential tour on the road this summer. The tour is stopping in six states across rural America at local small-town county and state fairs, as well as local Tractor Supply retail stores.

The company nixed the standard social strategy of posting a list of tour locations and dates and then geo-targeting the city the tour is stopping in prior to its arrival to generate attendance. Instead, it launched a slow, steady reveal, posting on Facebook and Instagram. It leaked out clues and hints about where the tour will stop next to get people talking and excited about the tour.

An Aug. 11 post that included an image of the brand-ed truck read: The #TSCFairTour is on the road to the



Attempting to rope Pickles the Pig was one of the highlights of the Tractor Supply Co. "Follow me to the Fair" summer tour.

next county fair! Here's a HINT: It's tradition for the James E. Strates train to stop at this fair, every year since 1924. What's your guess?

Some 75 fans "liked" it and one day later Tammy Padget answered correctly: "Erie county fair..." TSC quickly responded saying "Great job Tammy!" The FairTour will be at The Erie County Fair starting today through 8/23!"

"You want people to be excited about where the tour will be going next," says Brettan Hawkins, social media manager for Tractor Supply Co. "Even if it's not stopping in your town you don't want to eliminate interest beyond anyone who isn't getting it in their city. We want to let people know this is the first year of the tour and they can respond to say, 'come to my town next year.' We're also building excitement for future tours."

Once on site, brand reps send back a steady stream of photos and other content to post on social as the tour is under way. That stream revealed an interesting insight that Hawkins and her team grabbed onto to promote upcoming stops: a pig that goes by the name Pickles.

Pickles is not a real pig, but rather a fake pig. Kids sit on a Cub Cadet riding mower and try to lasso Pickles as he "runs" up and down a ramp as one of the many interactive experiences available on the Tractor Supply footprint. Photos of kids riding Pickles began appearing on social so Hawkins capitalized on that to drive attendance and excitement at upcoming tour stops.

Facebook, with its small but growing fan base of

7 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE NEW FTC SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

- 1. Define endorser relationships clearly** No matter the platform, promotions must clearly state if the person promoting the brand or product is a result of a paid endorsement from the company in question.
- 2. Disclose, disclose and disclose a little more** Even though it may be obvious when a professional athlete or celebrity is a spokesperson for a product they should disclose that they're being paid every time they tweet/post about the product.
- 3. Take it from the top on YouTube** YouTubers—Disclosures now should be made at the beginning of the video and preferably (to the FTC) repeated a couple of times for longer-form videos..
- 4. Endorsements in video** Just like YouTube, videos on any site that include an endorsement have to make a disclaimer aside from the description of the video. Streaming video, which is typically used by video game reviewers sponsored by gaming companies, needs disclosure throughout the video.
- 5. Use clear language in contest and sweepstakes rules** Any contest entry that is accompanied by an endorsement on social media requires a disclosure.
- 6. Twitter—limited space isn't an excuse** The 140-character space Twitter allows follows the same rules for disclosure as any other social media site. 'Promotion' and 'Sponsored' use only 9 characters but if you are tight for space there are shorter options like 'Paid ad' or 'Ad:' and they are just as effective.—*Chris Lucas, vice president of marketing at Formstack.*

314,000, is the main hub for "Follow me to the Fair" conversations, photos and comments. Instagram, the company's fastest growing channel with 12,300 followers, is used to show behind-the-scenes images of the brand reps out on the road.

"There is so much going on at the fair experience," she says. "What do you focus on? It became clear this moving pig had become the star of the show and I started to see kids taking pictures with the pig."

She put out a call to name the pig over social and two of the people who participated suggested Pickles. The team created a nameplate to attach to the ramp and the two people who picked the winning name won gift cards.

People register to play giving Tractor Supply lots of consumer data to use for remarketing.

"There's been a really strong engagement," Hawkins says.

The tour hit the New York State Fair in late August. Tractor Supply, which has 1,400 U.S. stores, will also work socially with the state's social presence for unexpected promotions, like giving away a pair of concert tickets.

"It's about creating a real community that people want to be a part of and highlighting and spotlighting your fans—real customers using our products in real life," Hawkins says. "We get lots of great photos like the cowboy who wears his new pair of boots to the local rodeo or backyard chicken raisers. Our brand is really a lifestyle brand and we try to highlight that as much as possible."

Tractor Supply is measuring success of the tour through visual impressions at each stop, impressions from the moving billboard, which is traveling 3,800 miles across the country, as well as coupons directing people to local stores and pre and post surveys to understand awareness.

"It's a compilation of a lot of things," she says.



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