

Facebook: Not Just For Fun Anymore

By Steven Tannehill

Remember when Facebook was simply a great way to stay connected with friends and family? Perhaps you don't. Maybe you were never caught up in the "what are you doing right now?" age, and couldn't care less which comic book hero your friends are most like, or how big their farm is.

Nonetheless, Facebook can be a great way to stay connected, not just with friends, but also with current and potential customers and employees. In fact, companies large and small are taking advantage of Facebook's instant grass-roots communication to promote their brands, market events, hire talent and, at times, provide real impact on their bottom line.

Let's take a look at a few examples of how various organizations have approached this medium.

JetBlue uses "The JetBlue Experience" group on Facebook to create a conversation among flyers about the unique combination of value, service and style the airline offers. It uses this platform to announce plans for new areas of service and to receive candid feedback on its service. A forum for back-and-forth discussion such as this takes the suggestion box concept to another level, where each user can build on each other's comments and hopefully get to the heart of the issue or idea.

Accounting giant Ernst & Young has found, through its "Ernst & Young Careers" page, a unique way to connect with college graduates searching for employment. Through Facebook Ernst & Young is able to engage these potential employees in a comfortable environment, discuss the values of the company and provide direct interaction with hiring managers. The use of videos in particular offers a great inside look into a day in the life of an Ernst & Young employee.

There are a few keys to success with social media. First, it takes time and effort. Think of social media not so much as marketing, but as building relationships through conversations. Relationships take time – nurturing, building trust and answering questions – and you get out of it what you put in.

The Facebook medium encourages a lighter touch; show some personality to engage your audience in a dialogue that is important to them. Second, be a helper, not a salesperson. Generation Y and other social media users can smell a rat a mile away. Provide value first, then *you* and your brand will be valued and supported virally.

Third, do what you say you are going to do. In social media, the single voice can boom loudly either in support, or in rejection, of your claims or actions. So, always follow through in order to build trust.

Lastly, remember that Facebook and other social media outlets are great tools, but should be just one component of an integrated marketing plan.

If you're interested in learning more about building an integrated marketing plan for your business by using Facebook and other social media tools, the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) hosted by College of the Canyons can help!

The SBDC provides free one-on-one consulting engagements and low-cost trainings in several business areas including marketing, social media, business planning, finance and various other specialty areas.

Since its establishment, the SBDC has helped thousands of clients in Northern Los Angeles County build sales, grow their companies and enhance their success, by bringing together successful business advisors with small business owners and entrepreneurs.

Why not let the SBDC help you next?

Steven Tannehill is the Director of the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) hosted by College of the Canyons. For more information about the SBDC please visit www.cocsbdc.org or call (661) 362-5900. To make an appointment with an SBDC business advisor please email sbdc@canyons.edu.