

Downtown Boulder's Social Media Advisory Council

July 19, 2011

Topic: Community Management

Community management has three core areas:



Social Networks:

We're talking about *online community management* here--which means that to have an online community, you must have a platform upon which to connect with your customers. Here are some of the popular social networks:

Twitter.com - A micro-blogging social network; good for sharing links, engaging with customers and connecting with potential new customers

Facebook.com - Business "Facebook pages" allow you to do much of the same work as on Twitter, with a bit more intimacy. And, it's the largest social network in the world--so it's likely that your target audience is using Facebook.

Yelp.com - Users post reviews of local businesses. While it less focuses on "conversation" between a business and a client, per se, it's a great network to watch and find out how customers perceive you.

Foursquare.com - This network allows users to "check in" when they visit a store, restaurant or business--primarily to let their friends know where they are. As a business, there are novel ways to post promotions and encourage people to visit and check in to your business.

This is not an exhaustive list (*there are hundreds of social networks online!*)--but these are the most popular networks...and particularly useful, free ones for small business.

TIPS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES:

Once you've determined which social network(s) your business will use (or if you already have yours set up), here are some ways to begin to build community (these are particularly relevant to Facebook and Twitter):

- **Themed discussions** - Pick a topic for the day or week. In the outdoors industry? Ask your community their favorite campground they camped at this summer.
- **Contests** - Run a contest to give away a free product, access to a free, limited service if you're a services business. This small fiscal investment will return back to you in the form of an engaged, excited community. Because really, who doesn't like to win something every once in a while?!
- **Consistent features/events** - Create a consistent feature or event, such as a competition every Friday, or interviews every Tuesday. This will help you generate momentum--and give your community something to count on. If they have the chance to win a small product every Wednesday, for example, they'll be back--you can count on it!
- **Ask a question** - It can be as simple as "What was the best part of your weekend?" -- ANY of your customers can answer that question, and it makes them feel engaged. Or ask something specific to your industry.
- **Have fun!** - Don't be so business-minded and serious all the time. Posting a funny cartoon or a silly news headline gives your business personality.

Content:

What is content?

Everything your business and its customers "says" is content: press releases, internal communications, blog posts, the copy on your website, marketing materials, direct mail pieces, your business Facebook page or white papers. Even what your customers say *about* you (on Twitter or Yelp, for example) is "content."

The key to effective content? Telling your story.

Every business has a story. Why are your products different from your competitors? Why are your services valuable? Are you engaged in the community in a standout way? Do you have a quirky, unique product? Do you offer an incredible work environment and benefits to employees? ...really, the "story angles" are endless. What makes your business unique?

It all starts with a story...and you know that story better than anyone.

Whether it's writing your Twitter profile or creating an editorial calendar for blog posts on your site, think about the story of your business. A great way to make that story *shine* is to hire an editor or copywriter to polish your content (particularly for your website, or for articles or blog posts). Boulder is full of freelance and contract copywriters--and hiring one for a project is a worthy investment to help you tell your story--and really connect with your customers.

TIPS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES:

- Content can seem like a big beast to tackle. If your company has a blog, **set up an "editorial calendar" for the next two months.** Publish a post once or twice a week;

map out blog post ideas/titles/themes for every single post for the next two months. Put it on a calendar. This will help you get into the habit--and will help you to create great content.

- **Post a review of a new product or service you offer.** Ideally you could do a review on your business blog, but if you don't have a blog, post a mini-review of Facebook. Don't *sell* the product/service--just share why it's fresh, useful, valuable or fun. Make it informative.
- **Interviews** - Seek out interviews with customers (if they're willing) -- it can be as simple as a few questions about how they discovered your business, or what was their latest experience with your company, or a topic related to your business that your customers are interested in. Or, you can interview the founder/owner of your company...or the latest intern. Interviews give your company personality!

Engagement:

Listen. Listen times infinity.

The best business communities are the ones that listen--really listen--to their customers. If a customer asks a question about how to use a product they bought from you, don't just give them a one-line, pat answer. If you have a "how to" article or video to point them to, share it! Or if it's a complicated question, offer to communicate by email or phone. Engage!

It's not about just pushing out your latest deal, or your latest blog post, or the latest news article that features your business. If that's all you share, your community will grow weary. Be lively, use humor when appropriate, and act like a human being! Share interesting articles that relate to your industry--heck, share interesting stories about Boulder (we all know there are ALWAYS interesting stories about Boulder!). Repost or share what's going on at your fellow Downtown Boulder businesses.

TIPS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES:

- **Be prepared for criticism or less-than-glowing feedback.** If you put your business "out there," there inevitably WILL be people who had a bad experience, or who are eager to see change (and, of course, there are the eternal cranky-pants people who are never happy with anything. Not much you can do about them. :)). Think ahead about how you'll handle this. (Hint: Be genuine, honest and helpful in responding to feedback. We all mess up sometimes. Admit when you're wrong, and do your best to see how you can remedy the situation.
- **Be yourself.** Approach the social web with a bit of whimsy and conversation. People don't want to interact with a robot-like Facebook page--they want to interact with a business brand personality.

Which local companies showcase engaged, effective examples of community management?

These are a few businesses doing a bang-up job building community online. Follow, “like” and pay close attention to what they’re doing--you may get some great ideas for your communities!

Downtown Boulder Inc.
Twitter: @DowntownBoulder
Facebook: /downtownboulder

GAIAM
Twitter: @Gaiam
Facebook: /gaiam

Whole Foods Market
Twitter: @WFMBoulder
Facebook: /WholeFoodsBoulder

Boulder Bookstore
Twitter: @boulderbooks
Facebook: /boulderbookstore

Pangea Organics
Facebook: /pangeaskincare
(*Pangea is on Twitter...but their Facebook page is a much stronger example!)



Creating a community management strategy

You likely have limited time and limited resources for community management.

If I could suggest anything to you--the downtown Boulder business--it would be to sit down and actually plan out a community management strategy. I know, I know: that seems overwhelming. But spending a few hours (at a minimum!) on thinking ahead about how you want to grow a community will pay off.

Do you already have your business on social networks? Cool. Do you also have a strategy in place, even if you’ve been using Twitter and Facebook for, like, ever? If yes, high five! If not, sit down and work on this.

A social strategy ideally would be developed alongside someone who has experience in community management--a freelance community manager or a local social media business. But if you're going to go it alone, here are a few things to think about:

Which social networks will you use? (Hint: It will benefit you to pick one or two to start--signing up for every social network on the planet will just bog you down and make you feel like you can't keep up. Start small.)

Who will be in charge of monitoring, listening and updating? You? A marketing person? A couple of people. Assign it to someone...else it likely won't get done. (Hint: The "too many cooks in the kitchen" principle applies here, too -- pick one or two people only.)

How often will you tweet/publish blog posts/update your status/respond to customer questions and comments? Half an hour each week day? More? Less? Commit to a consistent schedule. The quickest way to turn off your community is to be inconsistent and unreliable.

Who will you target as your ideal customer?

You can't target everyone. Look at a specific persona, and target a small group, first. Who are you trying to reach? How do they spend their time? Where do they shop? What books/magazines do they read? What food do they eat/restaurants do they go to? How do they dress? Who are their friends? What do they talk about online?

If you haven't yet set up your social networks, think about who your most committed customers are. Invite them--send them an email, ask them when they're in your store, give 'em a call. Actually invite them, personally, to check out your online community. It may be 10 to 20 people. It may be 50. But to get that initial momentum, you'll need customers who care. Remember: you want a community of people who will use you, buy from you, or seek you as an expert--you don't just want numbers.

If you already have a following, say on Twitter or Facebook, think again about who your ideal customer is. Are the people most actively tweeting or commenting the same people you *think* are your ideal customers?

WHY do you want to use Facebook, Twitter or Yelp? Seriously. Why? To increase sales? Reach new customers? Deepen relationships with existing customers? Learn more about what's going on in your industry in order to be seen as an expert? A social strategy will do you no good if you aren't clear on why you're involved in social networks in the first place.

Some questions that will help you in answering the “why?”:

- What is your big-picture vision of what you want to accomplish in this world? How do you accomplish that currently?
- Who are your colleagues/competitors? What makes you different? How are they using social networks, if at all?
- What are your particular strengths? What are people always saying about you?

Resources

General community management resources:

thecommunitymanager.com
socialfresh.com
hubspot.com

Social network measurement/monitoring tools:

google.com/alerts
twitsprout.com
socialmention.com
topsy.com
hootsuite.com

Facebook Insights (available on the right-hand side of any Facebook business page)

Questions?

Feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions about this mini-guide. And if you need referrals to copywriters or community manager-type folk, I'm happy to help point you in that direction, too.

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