

Can Social Media Co-Exist with Traditional Marketing Strategies and Techniques?

A Social Media Today /LinkedIn group
discussion topic and results

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Introduction:

The question of whether social media can co-exist with traditional marketing or needs to be considered on its own is a subject that pervades many topical blog posts and industry articles. It is one that is rarely asked directly. A bit of an elephant in the room, it seemed that few were willing to expose themselves by asking such a formative question. As I watched many a professional dance around this question, I decided to open a discussion on the LinkedIn group, Social media today early in December 2009 and simply post the question. This discussion topic began as a result of my personal interest and curiosity surrounding the adoption of social media tools being used today for business development.

As a personal correlation example, in the early 1990's, the company I was working for introduced fax machines to all of the field sales people, so that orders could be processed more quickly. Training for these new machines was done via the telephone, as this was a few years before they provided us with laptop computers. Oh, those were the days! Now we were able to fax our orders, but the orders still needed to be hand written. So the paper orders didn't go away, but rather in a sense they evolved and the fax machines were integrated into our sales processes.

Based upon my experience in working with C-level Marketing executives and limited experience with social media, I set out to learn more about these new marketing tools. I was very impressed to learn how powerful social media or inbound marketing techniques were, as described in Brian Halligan & Dharmesh Shah's book Inbound Marketing and the way that social media is transforming the way people are conducting business. Bestselling author of The New Rules of Marketing & PR, David Meerman Scott stated in the forward of Inbound Marketing, *"We're liberated from the tyranny of having to interrupt people's daily lives to try to market to them. Rather than grasping for buyer's attention with expensive ad campaigns, now we can publish engaging and useful information on the Web and deliver it exactly when people are interested."*

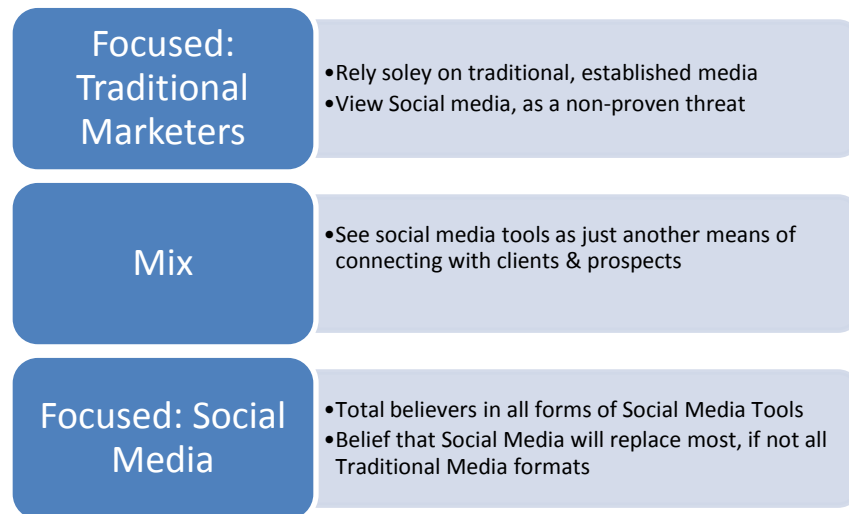
As I continue to educate myself on social media, I sensed a bias in social media advocates that social media would, in time, supplant traditional marketing media. This led me to question whether they could co-exist. Thus, in the words of my MBA research theory professor, I had discovered my "unanswered question."

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Hypothesis:

Based upon my personal experiences, my assumption is that traditional marketing and social media can co-exist. However, in posting the discussion question I anticipated that I would find a growing divide amongst marketers between the two methodologies.

As I approached the research, I suspected that the responses would most likely fall within the three categories: (a) those favoring traditional marketing, (b) those supporting an integrated approach and (c) those who believe solely in social media practices in the following manner...



Methodology:

The discussion was based upon an opened ended question designed to provide the responders freedom to provide honest feedback and opinion. In addition to the subject of traditional marketing co-existing with social media, the intent of the discussion was to glean additional perspectives and potentially some best practices. The question which, was started in Dec. 2009 continues to draw active interest and response.

This report includes the feedback from 136 respondents. The primary goal of this report is to put the responses into a form that can be used by the individual reader, as well as serve as a catalyst for future research and study. Where possible, I have segmented the data to provide some statistic basis for discussion and support of my perspective of the findings.

As seen in any type of conversation or discussion, the topic can start to “spin” in many directions that were not previously considered. This in itself is perhaps one of the greatest benefits of sharing thoughts and information within a discussion community. Because of the high response and interest in the topic, this discussion remains open to members of the Social Media Today group. As of this writing, the responses, comments & recommendations contained in this report consists of approx 200 responses.

The Findings:

Overwhelmingly, the respondents to this discussion took the position of the need to integrate traditional marketing and social media practices. A web strategist remarked: *“I think the key to integrating social media into your “traditional” portfolio of communications vehicles is, like any other thoughtful marketing strategy, to communicate across multiple platforms strategically and in a manner consistent to your brand voice.”*

Marketing best practices has long professed the importance of a unified and integrated approach. This is especially important when managing your brand identity. In support of that practice one respondent remarked: *“Even though social media is one of the marketing channels, it is important that the message sent by all channels be congruent and fit together.”*

Throughout the multiple responses and posts on the discussion topic, taking an integrated approach was most often cited as the best or most successful approach.

This opinion was supported by comments focusing on **Customer Behavior** which, is interpreted as aligning your marketing objective and messaging with the media desired by your intended audience. Traditional marketing techniques such as direct mail and various advertising mediums are described in terms of a **“push”** method where the advertiser was pushing their brand and message to a targeted audience. Marketer’s use of traditional advertising continually strives to influence the buying behaviors of their targeted markets, as well as instill the brand identity. These marketing techniques can take many forms as visual, audio, as well as taste and smell. As an example, Intel advertisers use a now very familiar four note “jingle” to cement their brand identity and recognition into the minds of their target audience.

The on-going role and continued use of traditional media was suggested in terms of generational tones.

“the generational factor”, why we need a multi-channel approach to marketing.”

“In North America for instance, over 74% of the population is online, leaving a market of +25% of non-users (+/- 88 million people) to be served by traditional media and marketing. This segment will continue to shrink for years and is not likely to entirely disappear in the foreseeable future.”

As traditional marketing methods are defined as a pushing your message to affect consumer buying behavior, social media on the other hand is described as a **pull** method. *“The push/pull example is the perfect argument. There is quickly becoming less and less room for the hard sell. People want a relationship.”*

The pull method associated with social media changes the relationship between the buyer and seller in a very dramatic way. *“The new marketing gives the power to the consumer whereas traditional marketing gives the power to the provider”* Another respondent commented *“The consumer is controlling their marketing by defining their key influencers (aka trusted advisors) in what is important to them.”*

If traditional methods are indeed intrusive and unwelcomed one could argue that their day has come. *“March-June 2009 survey from Charities Aid Foundation, 69% of respondents want charities to*

communicate more through email and social networking sites.” If this suggests that social media is desired because it is a more consumer friendly approach, then one could take the position on traditional marketing is a “take it or leave it” situation. However, as the respondents noted: *“Different audiences will respond to different methods”* Using new social media methods just for the sake of being on the “cutting edge” doesn’t make much sense either. Here’s an amusing comment that amply addresses the point of why both forms of marketing should be considered: *“I think herein lies the rub. Who is going to “follow” Clorox on any social media platform?”*

Considering the behavioral aspect or objective of traditional marketing, the objective of the message or brand is designed to affect the audience in an emotionally profound and hopefully long-term manner.

Here’s a quick example of how I see the affects of traditional marketing vs. social media in a particular (make believe) situation. As an example, let’s use one of the simplest techniques of market branding, a store sign. Imagine riding by a local, well-known brand car dealership, seeing and recognizable their branded sign, everyday. Now imagine that the familiar “brand” sign was gone, replaced by a “Jack’s Auto’s” sign, and there were still cars in the lot. Would your impression of that dealership change? Are they now just a used car dealership?

Now, take the same scenario from a social media perspective and envision the results. People would very quickly begin “tweeting” each other about the change and more than likely begin expressing their feelings about the change. The social media savvy owner of “Jack’s Auto’s” would now have the opportunity to address people individually, understand their feelings and adjust his marketing/branding in a manner that matches his audience. Another way to look at this paradigm shift is that the customer is sending the message. Therefore the marketer needs to respond to the customers, but it doesn’t mean that he stops his efforts to promote his/her brand. This suggests that marketers can make adjustments and thereby improve the value of the message to the consumer.

One of the ongoing questions that surfaces in many discussions is identifying the ROI in social media. While there was not a lot of commenting on this subject there were a few responses that I felt had merit and would add value to this report. A simply stated comment suggested: *“We will keep measuring and adjusting the ratio of social media vs. traditional to maximize our return. The ROI will be the deciding factor.”* Another commented: *“Businesses are way more savvy now and in 2010 I believe we will find more of them requiring real \$\$ ROI from their online campaigns, so there’ll be no more talk of ‘experiential awareness’ or ‘number of followers’ unless that is really part of the brand strategy. \$\$ will be the metric of success.”*

Conclusions:

The empirical evidence of this discussion point to the strong conclusion that social media and traditional marketing can and actually do co-exist in an integrated marketing approach. In fact, some of the respondents appeared puzzled that one would question the subject of the two co-existing. *"I don't see the question here."*

The evidence contained in this research supports my assumption that traditional marketing techniques could co-exist with social media. However, the divide I expected to find, was not discernable. Also in my original hypothesis, I believed that I would be able to easily identify those with a more traditional marketing positioning, to those who would advocate for social media channels. My expectation was that either through their title or position description, I would be able to identify which "camp" the respondents were in. In other words, I believed that there would be a clear delineation between those that believe traditional marketing can co-exist with social media and those who are more supportive solely to social media channels. It was virtually impossible to make this assumption and because respondents were not asked to identify themselves in this manner, no real judgment can be made.

One conclusion suggests that the "type" of media should depend on the buyer demographics and behaviors. An example was given questioning how effective social media would be to Senior Citizens who have relied on "traditional" media outlets such as newspapers and television. *"Ultimately, social media trends will continue to blend into the entire mix of tools available to marketers."*

After re-reading the responses I had some additional observations /perceptions. In particular I sensed an uneasiness amongst some independent marketing people felt a little threatened by social media, as something that could affect their jobs. *"The biggest mistake is abandoning the notion that you need a marketing company to be successful."* I perceived that some independent marketing/pr consultants felt the need to acknowledge social media, while also justifying the value of traditional marketing media practices.

So, what I have learned? I come away from this exercise with an increased appreciation of how social media can or should be applied to business. I view social media as an evolution of marketing tools. The phone book has not disappeared, nor have newspapers or billboards. Each of these has their place within a marketer's toolkit. Social media appears to be an evolutionary development, in many ways like the wheel which, has probably evolved from one made of stone to an untold variety of types today. So too, marketing techniques and media continually evolve.

The fundamental difference with social marketing is that the customer can make a direct impact on the marketing efforts which, arguably may be viewed as taking some of the power away from marketers as described in some of the responses. However, the real advantage, if used properly, is that social media provides the means to have a deeper and more meaningful relationship in which everyone can come out a winner.

Main Take-Aways:

- ▶ The message and type of media used needs to match the intended target audience.
- ▶ The marketing objective and strategy needs to be defined and well thought out.
- ▶ Regardless of the type of media used, measurement metrics should be used to determine effectiveness and value.

- ▶ Social media is not necessarily a replacement of traditional media channels, but rather a means in which to develop a closer relationship to your customers. Unlike traditional media, web 2.0 & social media provides for a two-way communication channel that empowers the users/customers in a manner that can directly influence how vendors promote their products/services and how they communicate their brand and messaging.

Call to Action:

- ▶ Find out if your target audience (community) is communicating through social media channels.
- ▶ Gain an understanding of the various social media methods and decide which method is right for you and your business.
- ▶ Engage in the communication; respond in a positive manner that demonstrates thought leadership.
- ▶ Continually monitor the balance of your use of traditional and social media methods to ensure that you are promoting your brand/message but the most effective means.

Demographics:

In terms of geographical location of the participants of this discussion it can be said that this has a clear global perspective. The respondents came from 25 states, including Hawaii. Internationally, sixteen countries including:

Australia Brazil Canada India Indonesia
 Israel Jordan Netherlands Norway Philippines
 Saudi Arabia South Africa Spain Sweden United Kingdom

Title/Role:

For this report, the responses were taken from 136 individual respondents. They consisted of a wide variety of titles. Because of the limited number of responses, along with the consideration that they were not only answering my question, but responding to other comments I have condensed the roles in order to provide a high-level perspective of the contributors. Based upon the titles given by the respondents the top 4 categories by % rank:

36% - C-level 26% - Independent Marketers 13% - in-house Marketers
 10% - Sales function 15%-Other

Business Development/Sales	C-Level CEO, CIO, VP	Director, Founder	Educator	Film Maker	Human Resources
Independent Consultant	Independent Marketing	Information Technology	Journalist	Mar-com (in-house)	Marketing
PR-Consultant	Publisher	Realtor		Student	Consultant

Business Type:

Company data is taken from the individuals LinkedIn profile. It was found, in some instances, that over the period of this discussion some positions had changed therefore, the company data provides a sampling of the size and type of companies contributing. What is significant is that the company types ranged from individuals to the Fortune 500. Although the sampling is small, it is interesting to see how this question resonated with businesses of all sizes and types.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to the LinkedIn - Social Media Today discussion group and all of the respondents to my question. I sincerely appreciate everyone's participation and contribution to this discussion. It is my hope that the results of this discussion, although preliminary, provide encouragement to businesses to explore and embrace the benefits of expanding your marketing toolkit with social media.

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