

SOCIAL MEDIA IN MARKETING AND PR

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Abstract: Social media as a new communication channel has managed to radicalize the way companies communicate with consumers and other stakeholders. Companies that are not on time engaged in social media weaken its ability for competitive struggle. In this paper we present possibilities of different types of social media in relation to marketing and public relations. Also, the paper will give specific recommendations for the use of social media in marketing and public relations.

Keywords: Marketing, Public Relations, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

Historically, companies have been communicated to the public by placing certain predefined message, in order to generate planned response. Even if in the process of creating messages research was done regularly, the role of the public remained largely passive. During the 60s academic circles made some changes. These changes were intensified through the 90s thanks to the commercialization of the Internet. The changes were related to the possibility of faster information, constant availability of information, access from anywhere using not only desktops, but laptops and mobile devices and lower cost of placing information. But, in the early 21st century radical changes occurred in the use of available web technologies, because of the inflexibility of the earlier models. In past, Internet pages were able to change only by those with specific knowledge in web coding, and users were mostly readers with the minimal ability to change anything. Technologies, such as XML, AJAX, and RSS facilitated development of a wide range of new applications. Using these applications users are now able to create content on the Internet, to interact with each other, and with companies. This new era of the Internet in which it became more “human” is popularly referred to as Web 2.0. Term Web 2.0 was coined in 2004 at the

conference on these new Web technologies. One of the Web 2.0 definitions says that it is a new platform which should take effects and the collective intelligence of the network as a basis for building applications that will attract users (O’Reilly). Nowadays, as the nature of the Internet has become interactive, habits have changed, and the way we consume it (Ryan & Calvin, 2009). The conversation has become a common form of participation, regardless of geographical, temporal and cultural boundaries. In order to hear the voice of consumers companies had to change their habits on the Internet and begin to participate in that conversation. However, many companies were making a mistake by engaging in a conversation without the knowledge of social media and new principles that govern the social media. In order to achieve success in conversation, they must first listen to the environment, and to build presence on the social media.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Many associate social media with well-known sites such as Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Twitter, are intended for general interactions. But today there is a trend and already hundreds of social media sites that focus on smaller groups with specific interests

(Frick, 2010). Due to its diverse nature social media is not easy to define. One simple definition is that social media is a collection of Web pages and applications that were developed to allow users to interact with their friends (Brown, 2010). Social media can be defined as online tools and platforms that people use each other to exchange views, ideas, experiences and perspectives (Lincoln, 2009). Social media is the unifying term for software and services based on the Web that allows users to socialize online, exchange, discuss, communicate and participate in all forms of social interaction (Ryan & Calvin, 2009). The interaction can include text, audio, video and other media, individually or in combination. In addition, social media allows content generation, sharing of existing facilities, reviews and evaluation, discussion on issues of concern, sharing experience and expertise – i.e. all that can be shared and distributed via digital channels. A number of sites now include elements of social media to engage audiences, and some sites build their business model around social media, user participation and user generated content.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media sites are based on different models, but with the same premises of interaction, creation, exchange and sharing of content, content evaluation and discussion. Content is dynamic and can be linked to site, individual article, blog or blog post, photo, audio or video material, question or a comment of another user, i.e. with anything that can be distributed in digital form. Most social media sites can be identified within one category, but they are more often a combination of several social components. However some basic characteristics are used for their classification in categories. Categorization differs from author to author and may include sometimes a large number of categories. Savko presented a comprehensive list that contains 15 categories of social media (Safko, 2010):

- Social Networking
- Publishing
- Photo sharing
- Audio
- Video
- Microblogging
- Livecasting

- Virtual worlds
- Gaming
- Productivity applications
- Aggregators
- RSS
- Search
- Mobile
- Interpersonal

Focus of Lincoln classification is on the most important applications. 10 key tools of social media are (Lincoln, 2009):

- Blogging
- Microblogging
- RSS
- Widgets
- Social Networks
- Chat rooms
- Message Boards
- Podcasts
- Video sharing
- Photo sharing

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks are applications that continue the basic idea of the Internet. The predecessor of the Internet, ARPANET, was created in order to facilitate networking between universities. Some of the first applications Usenet, LISTSERV and BBS possessed many characteristics that have social networks. Today's social networks can be formed around common interests, attitudes, views, family life, religious beliefs, race or other similarities. Basically, social networking sites allow construction of a network of "friends" with whom users can share a multitude of digital resources. Sites have ability to search and connect with other profiles, instant communication, sharing content and files. Social networks gather hundreds of millions of people. Only Facebook has over 750 million profiles. Besides Facebook, the most popular global networks are already mentioned MySpace, LinkedIn, and Ning, Google +, orkut, hi5, bebo. Profiles can be individuals or groups, but also companies, specifically corporate brands and their brands of products. The main benefits of social networks are increased visibility and impact on reputation. Companies can communicate with individuals, whose activities can

be monitored in order to reveal more details about them and deliver content of value. Such content users will share and expand its range. If the company is constantly present, if the content is always up to date, relevant and of value to users, and if it provides feedback to users, it will affect the reputation positively. In addition, social networks are used to identify and attract individuals who are active on the network and which can act as advocates or evangelists of the company. Planning a social network presence is a risky activity. As noted above, social networks can be useful if it offers content of value to users. However, if company just wants to promote itself, it will not be rated by users as valuable, and this approach can cause adverse reactions or the tide of negative feedback in an open environment that can get out of control and create a crisis.

BLOG

Blog is one of the first forms of social media that has become popular as a medium for communication and personal presentation. The word blog is derived from two words - web and log. Blogs are collection of records shown in reverse order. Great impact blog had on the Internet population is reflected in a shift that has been made from the web that is static, and where the users are only readers, to interactive web where the users are those who publish and those who are in dialogue. Today many blogging platforms, open-source and commercial, allow users to easily create blogs, and even entire sites that are based on blogs, like WordPress.

Blogs are written on a regular basis, sometimes daily, sometimes weekly or monthly. Bloggers are not just individuals who offer opinions from a personal point of view. Blogs are often maintained by individuals from companies that write from a personal point of view (blog Mini-Microsoft maintained by anonymous Microsoft employee) or on behalf of the corporate brand (Bill Marriott chairman and chief executive of Marriott International blog), or product brand (Opel employee maintained blog about brand Meriva - www.meriva-blog.de). If bloggers are individuals from the company, it is always shown clearly who is responsible for the blog. Blogs have their regular visitors who read more or less often posts.

Posts can be commented or even carried on other blogs or other social networks. This creates a viral effect and increases the visibility of a brand, and that is very important. Blog simplicity, a belief in that is authentic, honest and of the authority provides great visibility and public involvement.

MICROBLOGGING

Microblogging is relatively new form of social media. Microblogging is a medium in the form of blogging, a sort of short text blogging. Similar to SMS on the mobile phones, goal of microblogging is to ensure fast and timely notification. Message length is limited to 140 characters. This limitation allows the possibility that message can be transmitted not only by using desktop application, but also using mobile applications and even SMS. Although similar in form as blogging, nature of microblogging use is completely different. Microblogging is used by companies primarily as an information tool. It is of great importance for the realization of the events. A leader in the microblogging field Twitter, is also a pioneer. Other popular microblogging platforms are Jaiku and Pownce. Twitter was launched in March 2006 as a result of a research project conducted by a small company Obvious from San Francisco. Initially Twitter was used for internal communication among employees. In October 2006 Twitter was launched to the public.

Value of microblogging is not only in monitoring individual posts, rather the aggregation of multiple sources from the same area and a quick overview of the state. Some of the microblogging roles are the opinion poll, by listening opinion leaders and their followers and fast communication. Microblogging is very useful in the integrated appearance when companies need to generate site traffic or raise the level of interest.

Wiki

Wikis are online collections of web pages that are open for anyone to create, edit, discuss, generally to contribute. The first wiki was the WikiWikiWeb site created by Howard Cunningham in 1994. Name Wiki originates from the Hawaiian word for quick. The best known example is Wikipedia, launched in January 2001. During the first year Wikipedia gen-

erated over 20,000 articles in 18 languages. Today Wikipedia has over 3.7 million articles on English. It has long been criticized for the accuracy and authorship of articles, remains as one of the most visited sites. What makes wiki a tool of choice is a simple community creation consisting of people who cooperate by sharing their knowledge, experience and expertise online. In this type of community articles constantly evolve during time. Their relevance is higher as the time goes by and as community grows. There are many examples where the wikis are used as internal communication portals, or as the external communication tools for brand community building.

SOCIAL BOOKMARKING

Social Bookmarking is a favorite way of organizing, storing and managing resources on the Web 2.0. Social bookmarking sites such as Delicious, Ma.gnolia, StumbleUpon, Digg and others allow users to record bookmarks for their favorite web resource (page, audio, video or whatever) and categorize them by using the tags (which can be predefined in system or defined by the user). The procedure is similar to Favorites adding in browser. Resources can be then sorted in chronological order or by categories or by tags. In such open systems, it is possible to bookmark favorite resources as private or public. As a public it will be available to all users and the social bookmarking system and it can be categorized later even with tags from other users. The specificity of these sites is search, which is different from the results that offer classical search engines, based on human intuition.

In this way the favorite content bookmarks stored on the Internet could be accessed from anywhere at any time and from any device that has Internet access. This content is much easier to search and share. For companies, such sites are particularly important because of the possibility to increase their visibility and to provide user tags which will make it easier to search, but also affect the relevance and authority.

THE CHOICE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Companies usually prefer a combination of social media, because of their specific target audience. The decision which social media will be used depends

on several factors. The author Brown presented one of the possible forms of choosing the right social media to achieve certain goals (Brown, 2010). The choice flowchart is shown in figure 1.

FIGURE 1. SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS FLOWCHART BASED ON BROWN



Social Media Release

Social Media Release (SMR) is viewed as an addition, and somehow as a replacement for traditional press release. Simple explanation is that the social press release (SMR) is a press release that is published on the internet and done in such a way that its content is easily distributed.

FIGURE 2 SMR EXAMPLE



Although it appeared different from standards for the SMR, there are common aspects that distinguish them from traditional press releases placed on the Internet. It is important to note that the SMR cannot be sent via e-mail journalists or bloggers. SMR is something which reveals or calls to see. SMR has links to variety of social media, social networks, bookmarking, tag

search and links to other relevant content. Tags in SMR allow easier search and documents discovery. Through links to bookmarking sites, it can be easily distributed and monitor on RSS readers. SMR may include multimedia content, in the form of pictures or videos.

Brian Solis, one of the leading experts in PR 2.0, summarized the content of SMR, in the following list (Brown, 2009):

- headline;
- intro paragraph, including keywords;
- supporting facts;
- selection of quotes;
- multimedia – audio, video and images;
- RSS - company and/or product news;
- link to insert in social networks (Facebook, Bebo, MySpace, hi5 or others);
- blog this (link to blogger platforms);
- share on Twitter, Jaiku, Pownce or Tumblr;
- other bookmarks;
- other relevant links;
- links to news aggregators and communities including Digg and reddit;
- further information details and links could include an image plus vCard, or links to LinkedIn, Facebook or Twitter feeds.

SMR is still in its developmental stage, and there are those for and against such a solution. Some of the advantages are that they are fully electronic, that they can be easily detected through defined tags and links to various social networks. In relation to the time in which it was critical to send a little larger picture, it is now possible to watch online movies in HD, which is affirmative for the SMR.

SOCIAL MEDIA NEWSROOM

Social Media Newsroom (SMN) is primarily designed as a place where the Social Media Release (SMR) will be published. Of course this is not the exclusive place for SMR publishing, rather a solution that fits into the concept of Web 2.0. SMN is the evolution of digital media sites, which have already been present for years as a part of corporate web sites. Traditional media sites acted mainly as an archive of press releases, photos and videos, but the purpose of the SMNx is to encourage sharing and dialogue.

SMN contains many features of traditional media sites such as different types of content, press releases, reports and pictures. On the SMN press and other, stakeholders can find information about top management, including photos and bios. SMN may contain press release and photo archives. One of the features of SMN is corporate calendar with dates for key announcements and key events. Besides all the traditional content, SMN will include more interactive features, as well as links to specific topics, which would be sent by e-mail or distributed through an aggregator. SMN can contain a multimedia library in addition to conventional photo library. In addition, there would be a section with a choice of RSS and links to sites for social bookmarking. SMN can provide a direct conversation about information or specific statements on the company's website.

FIGURE 3 SMN EXAMPLE



CONCLUSION

Social media opened new opportunities for the marketer. In the same time it is very risky to participate without sound planning. These risks are related to the definition of social media and facts that social media is a media where users exchange views, understandings, experiences and perspectives in an open environment. In order to properly plan their campaigns, managers should first familiarize with the new media, its advantages and disadvantages and opportunities for participation. This paper can be useful for marketing and public relations managers as a basis for successful participation in social media.

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