ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to explore various social media marketing tools and techniques and provide tips to marketers for successful social media marketing.

Design/methodology/approach: This paper is based on secondary data collected from various columns, articles and research papers published in other journals or other sources of media.

Findings: This paper enlightened the current available social media tools and techniques adopted by marketers in their social media marketing activities.

Originality/value: This paper provides insight to anyone who is interested in researching social media and its tools and techniques, especially small business enterprises. It will be particularly helpful for marketers to implement efficient social media marketing tactics.

Paper type: Viewpoint

Keywords:--- Social media, Web 2.0, Social media tools, Social media techniques, Social media marketing, Social commerce.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media marketing programs usually center on efforts to create content that attracts attention and encourages readers to share it across their social networks. The resulting electronic word of mouth (eWoM) refers to any statement consumers share via the Internet (e.g., web sites, social networks, instant messages, news feeds) about an event, product, service, brand or company. When the underlying message spreads from user to user and presumably resonates because it appears to come from a trusted, third-party source, as opposed to the brand or company itself, this form of marketing results in earned media rather than paid media. This is why marketers need to focus and explore best optimum tools and techniques of social media for successful social media marketing activities.

In this paper, I have tried to enlighten all the social media tools and techniques available for marketers and suggested few tips for marketers to harness social media effectively and efficiently.

II. SOCIAL MEDIA

(Wikipedia, 2011)’s definition of social media is “Social media are media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue.”(Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) identified six different types of social media: Collaborative projects; Blogs and Micro-blogs; Content communities; Social networking sites; Virtual game worlds; and Virtual social worlds.

On account of major players of social media, (Stelzner, 2011) revealed that Facebook significantly leads all the other social media tools, in terms of percentage of users, followed impressively by Twitter, LinkedIn, Blogs and YouTube. Rest of the social media types/tools are insignificantly following these Top-Five i.e. 6% to 26% users.

III. SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS

Social shopping attempts to use technology to mimic the social interactions found in physical malls and stores. Social shopping tools allow people to share the act of online shopping together (synchronous shopping).

Social Media Stores enable people to buy where they connect to millions of users into a social media network.
platform. For example, retailers and brands can have a storefront in Facebook. Facebook storefront pages enable users to shop and complete purchase transactions without leaving the network.

Social Graphs allow social network users to bring their online social networks to e-commerce destinations and interact with their friends and followers directly whilst on the site. For example, when consumers sign-up retail site with their Facebook account, they can choose to grant the retailer access to their member profile data and friend lists. This social graph data opens the door to optimize social shopping on e-commerce site (Janrain, 2011). If retailers know what consumers who are connected to the brand need, want or enjoy, the chances of getting the right product in front of the right customer increases. The social graph allows retailers to find target consumers and personalized recommendations. According to a survey, three in 10 U.S. and U.K. online consumer who have signed in to a retail website using Facebook, nearly 90 percent said they would be somewhat or very likely to browse personalized recommendations from the retailer based on their Facebook profile (Diner, Kimbrelly, &Sucharita, 2011).

Group Buying allows people to use their collective buying power to buy together to get better deal, often by recruiting fellow buyers through social networks such as Facebook, and/or group-buying website such as Groupon. For example, some companies such as Dell, Intel and Adidas invite people to group together into an online social network to buy products in bulk, thereby obtaining a better price. Using group-buying site Groupon, the Gap Company was able to bring in sales of $11 million in one day (Awareness, 2012). Group buying offers incentives for people to spread the word about deals.

Social Shopping Portals enable people to shop multiple stores together using a range of different social shopping tools such as ratings and reviews, recommendations and referrals and social bookmarking (e.g. Kaboodle.com and Storeenvy.com). Research shows 32% of retailers surveyed work with these sites to drive traffic to their stores or planned implementation/enhancement in 2009 (Mulpuru, 2010).

Rating and Review are the original social commerce tools that allow people to exchange product feedback and inform each other’s choices with independent views and experiences. From business perspective ratings and reviews platforms help retailers integrate customer feedback and community features directly into their websites. On the other hand, from consumer perspective the word from the independent users and real consumers on social media is more credible and useful for purchasing decision. In other words, there is a positive relationship between the ratings and reviews quality and the online shopping mall trust, and there is a positive relationship between the online shopping mall trust and the perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and shopping intention (Shadkam, 2012). Research shows 71% of users believe that consumers’ reviews are very useful to find and purchasing the right product (Bausch &McGiboney, 2008). In this case, 90% of online consumers trust comments from people they know and 70% of them trust reviews of unknown users (Nielsen, 2009).

Recommendations and Referrals: Whereas ratings and reviews are generally visible to all, recommendations and referrals are usually personalized social media endorsements for online goods and services designed to realize the referral value of customers and advocates.

- Social Recommendation refers to using social media to get and make recommendations on what to buy, read, eat, see and do. When consumers buy something, they tend to tell friends about it and support the brand. Consumers may often do this unconditionally, such as by clicking a “Like” button in a social network, which allows them to spread the word without spend many times. Millions of users are being influenced by their friends’ recommendations in social media when making purchasing decisions (Liang, Ho, Li, & Turban, 2011). In a study more than half of respondents said that when they see a product they are excited about, they frequently post a status update about it on Facebook. Furthermore, 55% of them stated they are more likely to purchase a product when a friend has recommended it on Facebook or other social media. And 53% of respondents said they have asked for opinions from friends on Facebook about a purchase (Diner, et al., 2011).

- Referral Programs refers to providing some material and non-material rewards by retailer due to consumer advocacy. Rewarding customers and partners for referring new customers is a powerful strategy in social commerce. Research indicates motivating happy customers to advocate with samples, rewards and discounts has proven to be an effective alternative to margin-eroding price promotions (Marsden, 2011b).

Forums and Communities: Forums are popular, useful and effective social media tools for social commerce that assist product discovery, selection and referrals by providing a moderated environment around a particular theme, task or category. Forums and communities help retailers to provide user-generated content that can engage customers and drive sale.

- Forums generally are divided into two types. “Discussion forums” that are shaped in an interactive area where people can offer each other support and solve each other's problems. And “Q&A” forums that typically have a searchable FAQ (frequently asked questions) structure. In these forums, users participate to answer common questions (for example Yahoo question-and-answer).

- Retail Blogs provide news and discussion around e-commerce events, as well as capture customer feedback and suggestions on desired improvements. The main benefit of blogs is generally in the opportunity to engage brand enthusiasts.
- **Online Consumer Communities** are linked to an e-commerce site, usually with a loyalty, advisory or social CRM (Social Customer Relationship Management) purpose. Customer communities can be hosted on social media platforms such as Facebook or on website with dedicated community software.

**Social Media Optimization:** It is designed, in the context of social commerce, to attract visitors to e-commerce destinations by promoting and publicizing these destinations and content through social media. It typically involves seeding marketing collateral to major social media platforms and linking them to e-commerce sites. Social media optimization increases e-commerce traffic volume through direct links and improvement in search engine rankings (Smith, 2011).

**Social Ads and Applications:** Advertising on social media platforms or promotional applications is a useful strategy in social commerce in order to attract more consumers among social media users.

- **Social Ads** refers to placing advertisements in social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, as well as on blogs and forums. It is another effective traffic-driver to product pages and conversation points on an e-commerce site. Social advertising works for retailers partially because of social media’s abilities. For example, in the case of Facebook, retailers can order ads based on consumers’ demographics and/or interest. This makes a great opportunity for advertising through millions potential target consumers.

- **Social Apps** are a group of online application or widgets offered by social media. They support social interaction and user contributions (technically a widget is a standalone program that can run on any Internet site, whilst an application is platform specific)

**IV. MARKETING TECHNIQUES**

- Social networks provided information
- COBRA (Consumer’s Online Brand Related Activities)
- eWOM (electronic word of mouth)

**Social networks provided information:** Social networks such as Facebook and Twitter provide advertisers with information about the likes and dislikes of their consumers. This technique is crucial, as it provides the businesses with a “target audience”. With social networks, information relevant to the user’s likes is available to businesses; who then advertise accordingly.

**COBRA:** Consumer’s online brand related activities (COBRAs) is another method used by advertisers to promote their products. Activities such as uploading a picture of your “new mobile on Facebook” is an example of a COBRA. Software like AWARENESS can easily and effectively trace these activities and provide information to marketers to develop effective marketing activities.

**eWOM:** Another technique for social media marketing is electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Electronic recommendations and appraisals are a convenient manner to have a product promoted via “consumer-to-consumer interactions”. An example of eWOM would be an online hotel review; the hotel company can have two possible outcomes based on their service. A good service would result in a positive review which gets the hotel free advertising via social media, however a poor service will result in a negative consumer review which can potentially ruin the company's reputation.

**V. TIPS TO MARKETERS FOR BUILDING EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA SHOPPING/COMMERCE STRATEGY**

**Defining a clear goal**

The goals for social media integration and its role in an overall strategy will be different for every organization. Marketers should think about how social media integration plays into their overall brand strategy. Too often organizations think that the only way to measure the success of a social commerce program is to track sales completed on Facebook or tally their “like” count, but what about influence? Objectives, goals, and program metrics need to be clearly defined and could include:

- The number of total impressions
- The acquisition of new customers
- The new data points captured
- Loyalty program growth
- Website referrals
- Customer sentiment measures
- The sales generated from transactions on social media

**Execution of social shopping strategy**

Marketers should use the social shopping tools for implement new strategies. They can start to sell inside of Facebook with a storefront. Advantages include increasing customer exposure to a full range of products and frictionless commerce with the promise of higher conversion rates. Marketers also can attract target consumers to their own online store website by leveraging Facebook data from “Social Graph” and provide personalized services. Sometimes, cooperation with group buying websites (e.g. Groupon) and/or social shopping portals (e.g. Store envy) is a good shopping strategy increasing sale. A successful social shopping strategy leverages different methods opportunities.

**Integration and Synchronization**

When building a social commerce program, marketers should think like a customer does. Customers expect to be able to glide between retailer website, mobile apps, and Facebook and have a consistent experience. Integrating social commerce tightly with retailer existing tools, programs, and processes will mean greater
consistency for customers and more visibility for the organization.

**Utilizing customer ratings and reviews**

Implementation an appropriate rating and review system assists marketers to get feedback and also increase consumer trust. Much of this benefit is because consumers can engage in direct feedback on the offerings most important to them, providing instantand critical insights for a wide variety of brands, products, and retailers (Mulpuru, 2010). Marketers should decide this function can be used by only registered consumers or all.When reviews are written by users, they will be visible immediately in the site or whether they must first be approved by marketers.

**Utilizing social recommendation**

The “social” in social network can help spread the word about exclusive merchandise and brand and product preferences, and ultimately drive sales. Marketers should use the power of social media platforms to drive consumers to purchase by social recommendations and product suggestions. For example, they can encourage new visitors to like their product in Facebook and existing ones to share details about it by different incentives.

**Providing consumer communities**

Social commerce tools such as forums, blogs and social networks increase the level of consumers’ association and time of consumers on retailer data sources. This will raise potential business value. By using a forum, a business blog, or a guestbook, retailers are showing their consumers that they are open and present thus strengthening the consumer relationship (i.e. customer retention).

**Providing social Ads**

Display advertisements on social media platforms designed to drive traffic to e-commerce sites. Marketers can take advantage of existing millions users in social media for advertising. Nevertheless, this is an important issue that ads must be timely, relevant and targeted. In this case, personalized ads based on consumer location, interest and information is a powerful strategy.

**Updating tools and strategies**

As social commerce continues to evolve, things will change fast. Marketers should be prepared to engage new social commerce tools and fresh experiences. They should give new social commerce platforms and tools to monitor usage, test new strategies, create campaigns, and get to market quickly. Updated companies in social commerce can get ahead of the competition with an integrated approach, reap the benefits of first-mover advantage, and apply knowledge across your channels.

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