

Beyond Chatting with your Toothpaste: Ten Exemplary Social Media Approaches

A White Paper

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March 28, 2011

If you spend much time on Twitter, you'll hear a standard line about social media. Various experts/salespeople will breathlessly intone about how social media is a way of "entering into a conversation with your customers."

I've always had a very basic problem with this: I really don't *want* to have a conversation with my car, my groceries, my shirt, or the people that make those things. I barely have time to have time to converse with my actual friends.

But just because I don't believe in the social-media-as-conversation-model, doesn't mean I don't see the potential in these new media.

Below are ten social media approaches that suggest what Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Flickr can do. (LinkedIn is invaluable, but I haven't discovered any campaigns of the sort featured below.)

1. Provoke Spontaneous Declarations of Love

A Facebook friend with a wide network and a great deal of credibility spontaneously posted her delight that Connie's Creamy Cone in St Paul was open for the season.

This is the holy grail of social media.

But the post clarifies what this vision of social media success requires and that is love. Connie's Creamy Cone is a legendary ice cream stand in the Como neighborhood of Saint Paul. It makes a great product—dip cones in wacky flavors, Polish sausage. It anchors a neighborhood. It evokes a whole bunch of memories of summer nights with friends and family. And it's an underdog. It's not even a Ma and Pa shop. It's just Ma.

Earning love from your customers requires you to build a culture, not a campaign.

This is social media as bonus points for bringing a truly admirable thing into the world.

Products can become hugely successful if they are first to market, proprietary, blessed with a superior value proposition, reliable, cost-effective, too bothersome to quit, masters of the network effect, or better than the available options (especially if they are good at squashing those options.)

But that's a long way from being loved.

Does your company inspire love? Does it resonate with your customers' deepest values and fondest memories?

Connie's Creamy Cone has spent years earning that spontaneous Facebook post.

One moral: try to earn that kind of love. But understand: that requires building a culture, not a campaign. Another moral: act as if you haven't earned that love yet and try another approach, such as the ones below.

2. Build A Pre-Media/Micro-Media Empire

Spend much time on facebook and especially twitter and you'll discover that much of social media consists of links to other media. You can view yourself as a publisher and aggregator. [StarTribune Books](#) is really good at this—previewing their content, sometimes sharing articles from other sources, and flagging upcoming Twin Cities readings.

Core Media: Twitter + Facebook

3. Host An OnGoing Conference

The Atlanta PR professional [Kellye Crane](#) hosts a weekly chat with her peers about the challenges facing solo public relations consultants using the hash tag #solopr. You couldn't do this anywhere else but twitter.

Core media: Twitter + Blog

4. Implement A Low-Impact Loyalty Program

The "like us on facebook" messages on commercials are implementing this strategy. Some people will spontaneously like you, because they are, say, families of employees or vendors who appreciate the business you gave them. Others can be enticed to join your group or follow your tweets via the promise of good offers. [Punch Pizza](#) in the Twin Cities does this masterfully, using twitter to push out charming pdf coupons.—often in response to sudden developments like snowstorms.

Core Media: Facebook + Twitter

5. Enable A Stunt That's Just Crazy Enough To Work

Blu Dot furniture attached gps diodes to several pieces of their furniture, placed them on the street in New York, asked whoever found them to contact them, and posted the results, in real time on twitter and in a [surprisingly touching documentary](#) on their web site. It also gave blu dot employees the chance to say, "We have visual" into a walkie talkie. It was, to quote our favorite Miley Cyrus imitator, pretty cool.

Core Media: Twitter + Web Site

6. Combine A Drive Up Window with a TV Production House

Old Spice did a tremendously popular twitter campaign which featured the “I’m On A Horse” guy. “According to digitalbuzzblog.com: “Over 3 days, a team of creatives, digital strategists, developers and producers filmed 180 odd videos around the clock, creating videos and responding directly to fans and celebrities in near real time to create what is now known as the best social campaign ever to have been created. . . . On day 1 the campaign received almost 6 million views (that’s more than Obama’s victory speech.”

Core media: TV+ Twitter + Facebook + You Tube

7. Deploy A Customer Satisfaction Geiger Counter

As a consumer, I hate companies who use social media to do customer service. I tend to like companies who don’t require much customer service in the first place. If I have a problem with your product, I don’t want to go through twitter. I want a real person on the phone or in person. But you can use twitter to see what, f anything, customers might be saying about you.

Core Media: Twitter

8. Create a B2B Thunderdome

To introduce John Deere skid steerers, HSR Gyro staged “a series of head-to-head battles featuring the top machines and operators in the smallframe skid steer business.” Over 1,000 people attended the first event, which was also broadcast on YouTube and supported with print. Read more [here](#).

Core Media: You Tube

9. Collect Your Business’s Equivalent of a Poop Face

Ogilvy Brazil asked Huggies customers to [share photos of their babies’ “poop faces”](#) on Flickr and then incorporated them into the absolutely charming “Anytime, anywhere” print campaign.

Core Media: Flickr + Print

10. Ask 5,000 People What They’re Reading Without Riding 5,000 Busses

Through the [#fridayreads](#) twitter hashtag and facebook page the literary journalist The Book Maven asks people what they’re actually reading on any given Friday. And we tell her.

Core Media: Twitter and Facebook

As is the case with many innovations, there’s a quasi-revolutionary, you’re- with-us-or-against-us dynamic to social media. But it’s just one more strategy, which you can

sample, selectively adopt, customize, and combine with other media like any other strategy.

Social media will not replace other media, and those who suggest it will render print and television obsolete are, at best, a little too caught up in its promise and, at worse, hucksters.

Social media is too skewed to be research. Because cheerleaders and troublemakers self-select, it gives you the bell curve without the bell. It is insufficiently crafted in its content or controlled in its placement to replace advertising. It isn't true conversation. Conversation is face to face, sustained over time, and includes tone of voice, pauses, gestures, shrugs and smiles, follow up, digressions.

Social media is one more strategy, which you can sample, selectively adopt, customize, and combine with other media like any other strategy.

But when you want to amplify events or energize word of mouth—when you want something interactive, reactive, realtime, scalable, spontaneous, personalized, or targeted—social media can help you do amazing things.