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OPINION

Watch out for the social media juggernaut

BY BOB ROAN

What do you mean you're not on Facebook? You don't tweet? You're not blogging? You're not LinkedIn?

Not to brag, but I have 4,354,657,208 Facebook friends and more Twitter followers than I can count.

Here are four different strategies you can use to join my twittering, twattering twance.

Use the "I am forgettable" strategy if the product experience you offer your customers is an unmemorable commodity indistinguishable from that provided by thousands of other businesses.

Use the "fight for the flaky" strategy for customers who are in play because they're either idiots who don't appreciate value and/or so shallow they can't remember anything that happened more than seven tweets ago.

Either way, they don't have any lasting impression of your product, but don't worry, because that means you can stop worrying about the complexities of delivering compelling value and focus on compelling content.

This is the **first lesson** of the new world: Your products are an excuse to be involved in social media. Your real competitive edge lies not in value, but your Twitterstream and Facebook page.

Lesson two: Quantity is the new quality. Constant content is compelling content because customers are attracted to activity barrages, not substance.

Here's how to use the classic "name dropping" strategy to impress fans and twitterati:

- Sign up for free accounts on all the sites. Plaster the addresses all over your e-mail signatures, Web site, marketing materials and in-store signage.

- If you're on a tight budget you can stop here because the name dropping strategy isn't about doing anything, so you don't ever have to update your sites.

However, if you're a strategic thinker with good credit, you'll want to take this further:

- Make T-shirts, coffee cups and pens.
- Designate someone (possibly yourself) as the "social media specialist," the name with the most gravitas this week.

On Marketing

- Teach your staff to babble breathlessly. Pick one or two columns from Wired magazine to parrot each month. Constantly add new tools. Don't worry about what they do. Turn every conversation into a monologue about "backlinks," "buzz," "converting Twitter followers to Facebook fans" and "capturing the viral power."

- Have a "Social Media Release" party with at least 10 flat-screen monitors with feeds of your sites and live party status updates. Make a video and post it to YouTube. Spend the next two weeks reminding the world how cool this was.

And if you've got the big bucks, hire a consultant to make sure you slavishly follow all the hot new trends.

Lesson three: Sameness is uniqueness. If you do what everyone else is doing, but with better production values, you'll stand out.

Lesson four: "Just do it" is the new imperative. Feed "it" money and time and the sales will follow like lemmings. If someone reminds you of the saying that "to a person with a hammer, everything looks like a nail," tell them that's why you switched from bricks and mortar to software.

If you don't understand this new business paradigm, the "Neanderthal" strategy may be for you. Some signs you may be adequately confused are:

- Hysteria, low self-esteem, a poor opinion of your customers, and intoxication with status aren't good enough reasons for you to confidently jump blindly into social media,
- You're stuck in the "how does this help my business and make me money?" way of thinking,
- You don't believe in cookie cutter solutions and have found that everything worthwhile is hard and frequently boring work,
- Doing what everyone else is doing because everyone else is doing it isn't your idea of strategy, or
- You think that if your customers are going to abandon you because you don't tweet, you've got bigger problems than not tweeting.

Because the Neanderthal strategy is for people who have it all backwards, it requires that you focus on the social, not the media, and increase the quantity and quality of internal and external interactions so you can collaborate and "learn with" people instead of using social media solely for people to "learn from" you and you from them.

As a result:

- You'll construct a shared understanding with customers and other stakeholders that will be the basis of a long-term, mutually beneficial partnership,
- The amount of productive friction within your company will increase,
- You'll engage in open innovation to discover and integrate creative solutions with other companies facing issues similar to yours.

That is, if you're too yesterday to absorb the four lessons of this article.