

17th May 2011
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Brand journalism – how the marketing department of today is tomorrow's social media newsroom

Most journalists view the term “brand journalism” with scepticism, but it is nevertheless appropriate as the content that companies impart to their corporate “audience” must be entertaining, relevant and current. While most corporate “users” do not expect this type of communication to suddenly become subject to the same independent principles as many journalists might expect, they do insist on transparency.

To do this, marketing departments need to operate like newsrooms if they are to reflect the continually changing requirements of today's corporate audience. This means that even established, reputable marketing departments need to accept some things that new start-up companies have already learned, such as working in real time.

For example, the German venture capital company Rocket Internet and others like it are scouring the jobs market, seeking to hire numerous editors and content managers, thus continuing to blur the distinctions between SEO, public relations, publishing and marketing.

The reality is that, if they are to really engage with their customers and drive awareness of their brand, “modern” marketers need to create new content every day that promotes and encourages dialogue with their target audience. They must also monitor new blog entries, videos and other items using (for example) RSS feeds or Twitter. Managing this process is only possible when the work is properly organised, much the way that a newsroom is.

What's more you need to ensure that the topics chosen are directly relevant to your target audience, and must be prepared specifically for publishing on your chosen channel – be it a blog, Facebook page or Twitter; a one size fits all approach definitely doesn't work in this situation. The relevance of the topics is a deciding factor in whether information will be shared further, or evaporate without notice. Editing timetables, careful research, and a variety of thematic departments are an aide to optimal organisation.

In an article on mashable.com, Brian Clark, the chief executive of GMD Studios, compares brand journalism with political campaigns, in which messages are clearly formulated, with daily news about the “brand”, but oriented toward current events.

Brand journalism does not mean trumpeting trivial advertising slogans. An entertaining form of brand-related reporting is crucial. It is important

to remember that not everyone will react to a brand, in many cases it is better not to appear too polished. Marketers must learn more about their target audiences than just basic demographic data. Over the course of time, brand managers must be able to develop a comprehensive picture of the interests and desires of their consumers. Howard Schultz, chief executive officer of Starbucks, which has been extremely successful in social media, describes this as breaking a code, in order to give people opportunities to feel good about themselves. He also considers the experience of “discovery” to be very important for communicating content (source: Harvard Business Manager Special, Oct 2010, page 59, “Managers need to reveal weaknesses”).

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In addition to generating their own content contributions, the brands “editors” should take care to encourage community members to participate. Instead of beating their own chests too much, they need to get customers and fans into the discussion. Once the tone of the dialogue has been established, questions may be asked, provocative headlines may be composed, or requests for personal entries may be initiated.

Storytelling can be another tool for emotional brand experiences. This is a great way to breathe life into the brand, letting people speak about their own experiences with it. In our digital world, these stories may take many different forms. On top of this, marketers need to remember that they are talking to a global audience over the internet and should tell their audience what is happening with the brand globally.

Another key part of brand journalism involves collecting, organising and preparing the most important links for the target audience (content aggregation). In the perpetual flood of messages covering many topics, people are thankful to have dependable sources, so you need to show them where they can find the best information.

What marketers need to realise above anything else is that while many of the tools of the modern two-conversation may be free to set up, they take time, effort and energy to make work. While every company can now become their own publisher by investing in a Facebook page or a regular e-newsletter, these are only going to be effective if they adhere to the journalistic qualities that magazine editors have been working to for many years. But, if they do this, marketers can create stronger and more meaningful relationships with their clients.

About

Albert Pusch (born 1983) is the Head of Marketing at Omikron Data Quality GmbH since January 2011. He studied business and economics with a major in Marketing Communication, Public Relations and Banking at the University of Pforzheim and Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta Indonesia.

Still during his studies he founded socialmedia-blog.de with Daniel Hoffmann. The blog is a vital source for online marketing and social media knowhow for Agency Decision Makers and Marketing Manager with more than 10K reader every month.

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