

FACE UP TO IT AND GET SOCIAL

*Written by
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Every retailer needs to advertise and market their business to ensure customers know they exist. Life used to be easy. All you had to do was place an advertisement in the Yellow Pages and the local newspaper and customers would flock to your door. Well it may not have been that straight forward, but it was a lot simpler than it is today.



Newspaper sales, phone directories and magazines are all losing their impact in society and as a result it is harder to get your message across using these media formats. I am not suggesting you stop doing this form of interruption marketing, but you do need to spread your message a lot further using different media.

The first challenge is do you spread the message. In the "Good Old Days" you had control of your marketing message, but today, the reverse is true, the consumer has control of your marketing message and that will not change. The marketing and advertising game has changed forever and a lot of retailers are being left behind.

An example of this occurred yesterday. It happened in a hardware store in Connecticut, USA. At 9.00am a customer went into the store and the cashier processed their query and took the sale without looking at the person and carried on talking over the phone to their friend. When the transaction was finished the customer asked "Do I get a thank you for dealing with you?", the salesperson looked up and said "it is on the receipt, what else do you want?" I heard about this incident about three hours later in Western Australia... the wonders of the social network on the computer.

The customer is now in control and can spread the message about your business, for good and bad, around the world in a matter of seconds. The key is that you should be a part of the communications chain .You cannot own it anymore, but you must be part of it.

Read the Book

If you are puzzled about what social media is all about and how to use it for your business, then a good place to start is to read Paul Cheney's excellent book, "The Digital Handshake, 7 proven Strategies to grow your business using social network". I have just finished reading it and felt it was an excellent book to get anyone started in business social network.

What puzzles me is that when I present at a conference I ask how many people in the audience in their leisure time are involved in social networking, on average about 75% of people put their hands up. When I ask how many businesses are involved in social media networking I am lucky if I get 5 hands go up. As customers we are talking about our experiences with retailers, but as retailers the majority of us are not getting involved in the conversation.

Look at the facts, over 75 million of Americans are online, 22% of the world's population are on line, 200 million

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are on Facebook and 125 million on My Space. That is before you consider the 133 million bloggers and 195 million cell phones used in the USA. When it comes to social networking around 62% of the population are involved. What a marketing opportunity.

Research by Edelman Public Relations in 2006 introduced some interesting facts for retailers.

We may think we are trusted with the advice we offer our customers, but the research shows that we are three times more likely to trust comments and advice on social media from people we believe are just like us. The result of this is that 67% of buying decisions are influenced by word of mouth marketing. The consumer today is looking for real advice, not marketing messages.

According to research carried out by Home Textile Today and reported on the web on February 11, 2010, Facebook is the top social media for retailers with 50% of shoppers using this website and following on average 5 retailers.

What Does This Mean for You?

It means that what worked in the past will not work in the future. That you need to be doing less with traditional marketing and advertising channels and more with social networking channels. But, where do you start. There are numerous avenues out there and you could soon get lost and give up

I am a great believer in keeping it simple.

Facebook is being used by many retailers with great success, IKEA, in Malmo, Sweden have their manager promoting furniture on Facebook and this is working tremendously well. A chain of pubs in the UK are using Facebook to drive their business and anyone who goes to their Facebook page can download a coupon for a free ice cream as a dessert when they order a meal.

Make sure you tag your name with Google so that if any one mentions your name you can see what they are saying and respond quickly and join in the conversation, you may be able to diffuse a nasty situation or reward a customer for promoting your business.

Leading retailers are experimenting with social networking to see what works for them and what does not. The key to success is for all retailers to jump in now, to leave it could be the most damaging thing you do to your business in 2010.

John Stanley (CSP) is one of the top 10% of speakers in the world today, an acclaimed retail consultant and WA Entrepreneur of the Year 2009. The author of several marketing, customer service and retail books including the best seller "Just About Everything a Retail Manager Needs to Know", his company is WA Small Business Champion 2009 - Educational Services.

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