

Social Media, Marketing and Public Relations – What’s the link?

by Nancy Cawley Jean

For years, we’ve relied on the carefully crafted one-way message, distributed through the traditional advertising, marketing and media relations channels, to communicate what we wanted to tell the consumer about our brand.

We’ve spent months conducting research, polling focus groups, writing marketing plans, and developing new advertising and branding campaigns to support an overall strategy with clear priorities. That’s all well and good, but if you’re not including social media as part of that strategy, the message just doesn’t matter.

The day of the one-way message is a thing of the past. Today’s communications are all about two-way conversations. If someone doesn’t like your ad or disagrees with your message, you can be sure it will be talked about.

Ads for major campaigns have been pulled recently because of consumer backlash, often through social media outlets like Twitter. [Just ask the advertising folks for Motrin](#). One of their ads caused such a stir among moms that the mothers took their case to the Twitterverse to have their voices heard. Ultimately, the company pulled the ad in response.

As we accept that we are in a new world of communication, we need to think beyond the one-way message and accept social media as another tactic in our marketing and branding strategies. Accept that social media isn’t about your message any longer. It’s about building relationships and trust – and that’s a whole new ball game.

First, the message no longer works, and neither does the corporate voice. What does work is delving into discussions with real people. That’s what builds loyalty, and the ever-sought after brand awareness in today’s world. This is the approach that has worked well for Southwest Airlines and Ford, and many of [the most talked about brands on Twitter](#), and can work just as well for a hospital.

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We may be in the business of healthcare, but it’s also about customer service, or in hospital terms, the patient experience. If a patient, or a consumer, receives personal attention, that’s going to go a long way.

So how does social media fit into a marketing strategy? It’s a way to build awareness through real conversations with real people. That, in turn, becomes word-of-mouth advertising. And when you consider that people tend to go with the recommendations of their family and friends, it certainly can’t hurt to get them talking about your brand in the social media world. But to do that, you have to talk with them, not at them.

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