

Social media strategy of sainsbury



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This essay contains a brief introduction which will contextualise and define and the term “ social media marketing strategy”. It will then analyse the UK supermarket chain Sainsbury’s social media marketing strategy with particular attention paid to their strengths and weaknesses. The conclusion will provide a concise set of recommendations for improvement which will be underpinned by academic theory.

Introduction

Use of the internet has shifted since its begging where individuals created and published content, to what is currently known as web 2. 0, whereby content is continuously changed and updated by other users, essentially creating collaborative content (O’reilly, 2007). Web 2. 0 can be seen as holding the ideological and technological enabler of social media (Kaplan and Heliean, 2010). Social media is defined as “ Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (Oxford Dictionary, 2015). As such a social media marketing strategy can be understood to be how a firm tries to use social media for

promotion with the aim of achieving their business objectives. Most firms use social media to communicate with external third parties, commonly adopting a multipronged strategy operating across numerous social platforms (Piskorski, 2011). The other key way in which firms use social media is for internal communication known as enterprise social media (ESM). Leonardi, Huysman, and Steinfield (2013) define ESM as “ Web-based platforms that allow workers to (1) communicate messages with specific co-workers or broadcast messages to everyone in the organization; (2) explicitly indicate or implicitly reveal particular co-workers as communication partners; (3) post, edit, and sort text and files linked to themselves or others; and (4) view the messages, connections, text, and files communicated, posted, edited and sorted by anyone else in the organization at any time of their choosing.”. In line with Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) the four types of social media this essay focuses on are, collaborative projects, content communities, blogs and social networking sites.

Sainsbury's is one of the leading retailers in the UK with a current market share of 16.8%, and has diversified into services namely the finance and energy solutions sectors (Marketline advantage, 2015). Currently listed on Sainsbury's social media page they have 4 twitter accounts, a Facebook page, a YouTube channel and a Flickr profile (Sainsburys, 2015a), they also have created their own content community online called TrolleyTalk (Trolley Talk. 2015) which facilitates discussion among stakeholders on any issue regarding supermarket trade, as well as an ESM platform Yammer (Brooks, 2015).

Currently Sainsbury's external social media strategy incorporates three main elements, Customer service, Crisis control and sales. Sales appears to be the most prevalent across all platforms with their main twitter account, Facebook page and YouTube channel primarily attempting to stimulate sales through promoting recipes and competitions. The profile for Sainsbury's main twitter account reads " delicious recipes, food inspiration, competitions and customer service. Got a question? Our team is here to help!" (Twitter, 2015a). The secondary aim appears to be raising brand awareness by promoting their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activity, brand values and press releases, seen on their twitter account @sainsburysnews (Twitter, 2015b). While their ESM objectives appear to be improving internal connectivity, sharing ideas and celebrating success (Brooks, 2015). An analysis of the strengths of this social media strategy will follow.

Strengths of Sainsbury's social media marketing strategy

Klout – a social media tool which is used to measure brand influence, has found Sainsbury's to have the most influence on social media of any UK retailer (Briggs, 2014). This suggests that the way in which Sainsbury's are using social media is extremely successful (Boyd, 2014) and the following section looks at three of the determining key factors of this.

Firstly Sainsbury's have partnered with a social media crisis management specialist Conversocial (Joeseeph, 2013) in order to rapidly identify consumer issues on social media. This software is extremely useful to provide overviews during wide-scale crisis such as the " horsegate scandal" – when horse meat was found in products in UK supermarkets including Sainsbury's (BBC, 2013), but also for providing excellent customer service to dissatisfied

customers. Due to the dynamic and public nature of social media dissatisfied customers now have the tools to be heard by millions and seriously damage a brand's reputation (Gillian, 2007), but this also presents an opportunity for a firm to publically showcase their excellent customer service and improve their brand. Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar (1998) found that customer service which left a dissatisfied customer feeling satisfied actually improved a brand image further than if they had been satisfied with the original service they received. Conversocials software allows Sainsbury's to pull all social media activity regarding them into one stream, theoretically giving the ability to respond to any comment within 45 minutes. This not only gives them the ability to respond to large issues (such as the horsegate scandal) but also listen to individual customers' issues and respond to them efficiently in the public domain, not only improving their brand with that individual customer, but with the wider audience. An example of a customer response by Sainsbury's which went viral was a humorous response to a letter from a 3 year old girl regarding the name of one of their products. The exchange received more than 14,000 shares on social media sites, and resulted in Sainsbury's renaming their product due to popular demand (Sheriff, 2013), resultantly receiving positive nationwide brand exposure due to coverage by the BBC (BBC 2013).

Secondly Sainsbury's have not merely adopted usage of existing social media channels, but have been proactive about creating two of their own – TrolleyTalk and Yammer. TrolleyTalk allows Sainsbury's the opportunity to not only dictate the marketing message they wish to portray, but also to shape the conversation happening between consumers (Mangold and Faulds,

2009), allowing Sainsbury's to positively influence consumer brand perception. On their website Sainsbury's claim this platform gives them the opportunity to reach approximately 4, 000 people per week and gain rich insight on issues which concern customers and take immediate and effective action. The example they give is that during the recent UK supermarket price war on milk, consumers were becoming increasingly concerned with the negative effect on dairy farmers. Resultant of identifying this issue on the platform TrolleyTalk, Sainsbury's took the initiative to advertise that they pay their dairy farmers a higher rate than their competitors (Sainsbury's, 2015b). A study by Millward Brown digital cited in Sarner et al, (2011) found that brands which have online communities drove up to 12 times the traffic and made double the amount of online sales conversion than brands which solely used existing social channels.

The final key strength of Sainsbury's social media marketing is the high level of cross platform cohesiveness in the message they deliver. Their YouTube, Facebook and Twitter accounts all primarily generate food and recipe based content, and appear to be used for customer service. This cohesiveness avoids any confusion which can be caused by conflicting messages across different platforms (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

Weaknesses of Sainsbury's social media strategy

Bull (2012) argues the case for brand journalism, and states that all communication by a firm must be consistent with their core values. While Sainsbury's social media marketing strategy has a high level of cross platform congruency, it does not fully match up with their overall business strategy written on their website – “ Our strategy: We know our customers

better than anyone else. We will be there whenever and wherever they need us, offering great products and services at fair prices. Our colleagues make the difference, our values make us different.” (Sainsbury’s, 2015c). While TrolleyTalk arguably provides them with a great opportunity to get to know their customers better, and Conversocial allows Sainsbury’s to efficiently engage with customers who require attention, Sainsbury’s social media has very little emphasis on promoting the values which they claim differentiate them. Sainsbury’s main twitter account very rarely – if at all mentions the distinguishing corporate values upon which their strategy is based. They have a twitter account @sainsburysnews (twitter, 2015b) which provides updates on these sorts of issues, and despite having 10 times less followers, the posts on this account have a similar level of engagement to that of the main account @sainsburys. This points towards this content being far more engaging for consumers than what is currently being promoted on the main page.

Sainsbury’s have four twitter accounts, which on average tweet 4 times per day each. Rowles (2014) suggests that the optimum amount of times for a brand to tweet is four per day, in order to prevent clogging up users feeds. While each individual Sainsbury’s account adheres to this basic principle, if a customer has subscribed to more than one of the accounts they will receive far more, up to four times the recommended amount of contact, which could prove invasive for consumers and make them unsubscribe from one or more accounts, regardless of whether they found the content engaging. If Sainsbury’s were to reduce the number of accounts they have on each platform it is possible Sainsbury’s would receive a higher level of social

media engagement as well as reaching a larger audience (Singh, Veron-Jackson and Cullinane, 2008). This would give higher visibility to content regarding Sainsbury's core values and the recent partnership with Argos digital which is being integrated into selected stores, maximising the impact of their competitive advantage on both fronts.

While Sainsbury's has recently adopted the use of an ESM platform called Yammer, it only has 10, 000 users (Brooks, 2015). Sainsbury's currently has 160, 500 employees (Marketline Advantage, 2015) which highlights the small extent to which ESM is being used by Sainsbury's. ESM can improve internal communications between the workforce and be used to promote the brand internally, and be used as a tool to manage the psychological contract (Mazzei, 2010) and as such this represents a missed opportunity. This weakness ties in with the final one which will be discussed, which is the lack of visibility by the CEO on social media.

Currently the CEO of Sainsbury's Mike Coupe has a distinct lack of personal visibility on social media. Dutta (2010) found there to be three main benefits of a firm's CEO having a notable social media presence. Firstly social media both internal and external, aids an executive in engaging with important contacts. It allows them to strengthen relationships or personify the company's support for a cause which adds credibility. Secondly the CEO can use social media to engage employees internally, enabling the CEO to increase his personal support through high internal visibility, which leads onto the third benefit which is learning. By having a higher profile within the company and being open to learn a CEO can gain feedback on any large scale changes from the workforce, which can lead to strategic changes

having lower levels of opposition making them easier to implement and in turn reduce staff turnover, an opportunity Coupe is currently not exploiting.

Recommendations for improvement

The following recommendations are resultant of the above analysis.

1. It is recommended Sainsbury's merge their @sainsburys and @sainsburysnews twitter accounts, providing half of the original content from each. This will allow them to promote their brand values to a much wider audience, and reduce the chance of excessive contact becoming invasive. In line with Rowles (2014) it is recommended they continue to tweet 4 times per day, only if they have content which they believe is worthwhile and will be of interest to their audience.
2. It is recommended that Sainsbury's advance efforts to increase participation on the internal social media platform Yama. A SWOT analysis conducted by Marketline Advantage (2015) found that the major threat to Sainsbury's is the rising labour costs in the UK. As a result it is recommended that internal marketing and branding can be used in order to improve the psychological contract and resultantly raise employee retention (Mazzei, 2010). This will help to address the threat caused by rising labour costs by reducing recruitment and training costs associated with taking on new staff.
3. It is recommended that the CEO of Sainsbury's Mike Coupe starts to become an active user on both internal and external social media platforms. Internally high CEO visibility and approachability will go some way to improving the perception Sainsbury's workforce has of its employer and will help to reduce staff turnover. It is recommended

Coupe uses external social media to promote Sainsbury's core brand values. If done strategically he can be used to personify the ethical values held by the company and strengthen the support the British public have of these values. This will not only make their campaigns further reaching, but it will also improve their credibility (Dutta, 2010).

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