

Facebook as a dominant marketing medium assignment

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Transnational corporations such as Coca Cola and Cutbacks, as well as smaller and more localized businesses, make use of Backbone to initiate interactive and personalized marketing while also taking the opportunity to learn more about their clientele. The market penetration of Backbone, currently almost 50% of US citizens, makes it a medium and a tool that cannot be ignored. This report investigates the means and techniques of using Backbone as a marketing tool, along with the benefits of doing so.

Marketing over social media is different from traditional marketing in many ways, and it is the willingness of marketers to learn these new cuisines, more than any other factor, which has enabled the success of Backbone as a marketing tool. At the same time, it is observed that the motivation for doing so is very profound. Although it has not yet been proven whether or to what degree marketing using Backbone increases sales, it is now considered essential for companies to protect and promote their image through skillful communication using Backbone.

PROBLEM This report was designed to analyze the reasons that make Backbone a dominant marketing medium. Specifically, the report seeks answers to these questions: 1 . What re three ways that helped Backbone become known today as one of the most powerful marketing tools? 2. Is it necessary for companies to market through Backbone or other social media in order to be successful? **BACKGROUND** Backbone is a social networking service. Mark Seersucker founded Backbone with the help from his Harvard college roommates Eduardo Savvier, Dustin Muscovite and Chris Hughes.

Backbone was originally limited to only Harvard students, but eventually expanded to other colleges in the Boston Area, Stanford University, and the Ivy League. It eventually became assessable to everyone and is now considered en of the most powerful social networking sites to date, beating out competition such as Namespace and Inexpiable. Today, Backbone has become very popular with statistics showing that there are more than 800 million active users and more than of them log into Backbone on any given day (Sooner 2011).

More than 900 million objects that people interact with (pages, groups, events and community pages), and the average user is connected to 80 community pages, groups and events (Sooner 2011). This demonstrates the power that Backbone has with its wide audience, and the obvious reasons why businesses would like to exploit the audience or marketing purposes.

Market Penetration The ubiquity of Backbone in terms of numbers of users and the amount of time that they spend engaging with the medium makes it, arguably, the most influential new medium for marketing and customer communication.

While approximately half of US citizens are currently users of Backbone, and 35% of those are “ viable prospects” in the 35- to 65 age group, it is, perhaps, the interactive two-way engagement of users with this medium that makes it so powerful (Sooner 2011). Unlike television and print media, Backbone becomes an integrated part of people’s lives, relied upon for immunization, entertainment and social interaction. This provides unique

opportunities for marketing, different from that disseminated over traditional media.

The marketing strategy is “ not just about the number of fans we have, but really the engagement that we are being able to drive with those fans” (Schultz 2011). The penetration of Backbone itself is higher than that of any television network or print media; of course, this does not guarantee penetration for the marketing of any specific product, as messages regarding products reach a more selected readership, based on interests, likes and friends.

However, this method of self-selection is, also, very effective in determining the optimal market for a product or service, and even with the divisions or segmentation it creates, the promise of reaching a wide audience is still great. Backbone would not have become the marketing tool it is today were it not for this high level of penetration into the market. Accessibility Secondly, Backbone is attractive to marketers of all sizes because of its accessibility. This includes both cost factors and ease of use.

In this sense, Backbone has the potential to revolutionize marketing; it is profoundly demonstrating. By comparison, using television as a marketing media was fundamentally elitist given the fact that the purchase of airtime on television is prohibitively expensive. Television was a medium that could reach almost everyone, with close to 99% of American homes having a television set, but was a one-way message, transmitted by those with the economic means to do so and nobody else. By contrast, the use of Backbone as a forum is open to everyone who has access to a computer.

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The precise mechanisms through which Backbone functions as a marketing medium involves existing features related to social networking, which can be utilized to make users aware of products and their attributes. For example, users “like” individual products, and, in the case of corporate users, this can be used for deliberate promotion. Companies such as Borders (booksellers) and Urban Outfitters have ranked products based on the ‘likes’ of other users. To compile these results, a “Shop Like Me” tab can be utilized to allow users to view a compilation of brands and products (Skunk 2011).

Moreover, on a purely technical level, disseminating marketing messages over Backbone can be accomplished with ease. Of course, there are more delicate concerns regarding the efficacy of those messages. Would-be social media marketers must transform their methods. This is why the third factor mentioned in the Introduction is fundamental. Backbone has become a dominant marketing medium for many businesses because marketers were willing (based, perhaps, on the first and second factors) to transform the way in which they advertised.

Without that willingness to make adjustments, Backbone could not have become an important marketing medium. Willingness to Use Social Media This third point is, in many ways, the most complex, and requires the most explanation and elaboration. One thing that all users of social media for marketing purposes agree upon is the fact that it is not the same as using traditional marketing media. Whereas print media and television are a one-way message disseminated by companies and aimed at the public, the use of social media is a perhaps best conceived of as a two-way conversation.

If that conversation is not constantly maintained, or if those originating the message appear to be talking at' rather than talking to' their public, the marketing enterprise will fail. The whole pattern of use therefore changes. Whereas traditional marketing campaigns consist of a well- defined and planned series of communications, marketing plans using Backbone must remain flexible. In part, such campaigns are necessarily opportunistic. A whole different type of strategic planning is necessary.

After all, as one author points out, users of Backbone do not use the site in order to be sold goods, but to socialize and participate in a conversation (Schooner 2011). For this reason, " allow[inning] consumers to steer the conversation" has been found to be the best strategy (Schultz 2011). This concept determines the tone and the rhythm or pattern of communication. Marketers who violate this rule and conduct campaigns more suited to conventional, one-way media run the risk of alienating potential customers (Sooner 2011).

To establish the correct tone, Sooner (2011) suggests the following: " Pretend you've been invited to a cocktail party with a lot of prospects in attendance. How would you act? " Alternately, marketers can consider what they would tell a friend who is interested about what is going on with the business (Sooner 2011). Informality and consideration for the audience are essential in determining information to be shared, and this cannot, rover, be wholly pre-determined, as marketers must have the flexibility to respond to other Backbone members and to broader circumstances.

For example, the owner of a landscape company can post pictures of finished projects, but can also talk about the weather and its effects on landscape projects (Sooner 2011). On the one hand, such communication seems simple and intuitive. Schooner's simple directives indicate that the skills needed to use social media such as Backbone for marketing purposes indicate that the content of the communication is something that most people would know how to generate. However, it requires a profound shift in how we think about marketing.

Marketers wishing to use Backbone as a marketing medium must strike a careful balance between successfully disseminating a coherent message while avoiding sounding overly commercial. Schultz (2011) states: "You don't want to necessarily take an insight and expose it to the point of where now the brand is capitalizing on it, because that takes away from the intrigue," she said. "You don't want to over-commercialism it. However, recognizing that 'insight' and utilizing it where appropriate is a key to generating interest.

Some marketers may find this advice contradictory. The key seems to be comprehension of what the public is feeling, and the smooth and consistent generating of new insights so that no one of them is ever belabored. Another strategy is for marketers to offer value or direct interaction. Schultz (2011) describes several campaigns generated by Adagio, a company that produces a variety of alcoholic beverages. The strategies vary according to the demographic and the stated interests of the target market.

So, for example, buyers of Guinness are offered recipes, while the marketing approach for a range of beverages with a male market involves video interactions with a “ sexy’ female bartender (Schultz 2011). This is just one of several marketing campaigns that feature a character who interacts directly with fans, responding to questions and comments, building the appearance of a real two-way conversation. At the same time, marketers are cautioned about the danger of over-personalizing communication with customers and others through Backbone.

One runs into the dangers of making “ premature assumptions” about the audience; it is essential, moreover, for authenticity to be maintained (Skunk 2010). Information or communication that is too specific may be meaningful to a small number of customers, but meaningless to most. Even worse, faulty assumptions about what the public wishes to hear may be perceived as insulting. As with any conversation, regular feedback is essential. Therefore, an important feature of the use of Backbone as a marketing tool is the frequency with which one updates, posts and responds to comments.

This is another key difference between the use of Backbone for marketing and more traditional modes of marketing, where a set of ads is developed and run for a length of time. When using social media, it is important to comment or respond very frequently, as much as several times a day, or, at least, several times per week. Readership will quickly diminish if content stays the same, and the ‘ conversation’ is not maintained by both parties. This is so important that frequent updates are thought to be even more important than the content itself. Sooner (2011) cautions “... Don’t do it if you

can't stick to it", as sporadic participation can be completely counterproductive. Within a company, therefore, it is necessary for somebody to take charge of this aspect of marketing and to check and update it very frequently. In short, therefore, despite the strong possibilities associated with using Backbone as a marketing medium, there are also numerous pitfalls. As discussed earlier, there is wide accessibility to this medium. The new 'rules' are not, perhaps, difficult to learn, and once mastered, continuously implementing them is neither costly nor onerous.

However, the profound differences between this medium and traditional marketing, and the speed at which this forum developed, has required a great degree of willingness on the part of marketers to undertake to learn and use what was originally an unfamiliar format that seemed to violate all previous assumptions. **Necessity of Using Backbone and Other Social Media for Marketing** There is agreement among marketers and experts that the use of social media such as Backbone is essential for marketing today.

In fact, there may well be dangers involved in not doing so; because the medium is such a prevalent and swift way of disseminating information through a huge population, it is essential that the creators of products have their say, so to speak, and build their relationship with the public on their own terms. Otherwise, negative publicity may spread as quickly as positive attention potentially can, as was the case with the "... Internet-fueled backlash against Dell's flammable laptops and Krypton's expensive but easily picked lock" (Barbwire 2010).

Failing to use social media masterfully is likely to be detrimental to products' or company's image. On the other hand, while it is clear that skillfully utilizing Facebook and other social media for marketing is beneficial, and that its effects are impossible to avoid, the actual results of these social marketing media campaigns are still unknown. Online interest about a product or brand does not necessarily lead customers to purchase that brand - or, at any rate, whether and to what degree it does so is currently unknown.

Doug Clark, General Manager of Audio, states that the "equation to measure [the success of such marketing]" does not currently exist (cited by Major 2011). All that can be determined is that potential customers frequent social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and may become fans' of the brand (Major 2011). Fans are not necessarily more likely to buy an Audio, but it is generally accepted that positive exposure, interest and buzz is a costly thing. CONCLUSION In conclusion, the use of Facebook as a dominant marketing medium has unique possibilities as well as pitfalls.

The ubiquity and necessity of communicating through social media has led to the creation of a new type of marketing with new and distinct rules, and the willingness of many companies to learn to communicate within this new medium indicates both the necessity of doing so and the promise of such marketing communication. What is still unknown is precisely how and to what degree marketing through Facebook is beneficial. Generating interest online does not necessarily translate into increased sales, but failing to do so is uniformly acknowledged to be detrimental.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity offered by Backbone is the chance to interact with the public and learn of their likes, dislikes, interests and requirements. As one expert puts it: If you build a brand like Coke, which has 22 million fans on Backbone, or Cutbacks with 19 million, those millions of connections are not the end. It's just the start. Those millions are the means to the end. It's a way to build relationships with those people, and then to tap into all those people's friends. It's an opportunity to do word-of-mouth marketing at scale (Lee 2011).