



Creating Brand – Focused Messages

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Communicate effectively over social media
- ✓ Deal with negative feedback and criticism
- ✓ Create a social media playbook to guide brand ambassadors
- ✓ Evaluate your brand strength and revise your strategy

Creating Brand-Focused Messages

What's In a Message?

There are four important elements of a successful social media message.

Two-Way Communication

Listening to what others are saying is the single most important aspect of engaging with social media. This will help you find out:

- What customers are interested in
- What customers are saying about your brand
- What customers are saying about your competition

Without this information, it is far more difficult to build a message that will engage your customers.

Successful messages take communication the other way, too, by encouraging your customers to do something when they read your message. This might be sharing it with others, watching a video, reading your blog, or liking your Facebook page. Your goal is not to sell to your audience (at least not right now), but to engage with them and build a relationship with them. Then, when they need your product or service, they know where to find you.

Storytelling

Nothing engages people like a story. Stories will tell people what your brand is about and how it can make their lives better.

Which of these tweets would you find more engaging?

- #Carry-All luggage is the best!
- #Carry-All luggage has the right bag for you. Check out our products at....
- Entrepreneur Sarah says she can't live without her #FlyAway briefcase bag. Find out why at...

Transparency, Honesty, and Authenticity

Make sure that your brand’s message is genuine. Social media is about human interaction. If your messages sound programmed and automated, customers will be turned off of your brand.

This will vary by brand, of course. Some industries (like finance and pharmaceutical) may have legal regulations governing their online conduct. Do what you can to make your messages feel real.

Consistency

Another key element of building trust is consistency. Your brand’s message should be consistent across social media platforms. Your approach may vary depending on the targeted demographic but your brand’s values should be the same.

To build brand integrity, keep your social media handles the same whenever possible. This will help with search engine rankings, maintain brand integrity, and build trust.

Come up with some examples of brand names. Here are some ideas:

- 1-800-Flowers.com
- Chobani
- Coach
- Home Depot
- McDonald’s
- The Travel Channel

Looking at the Message

Now, look at a few of your suggested brand names across a few different social media platforms (such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest, and LinkedIn). Identify what elements of each brand are consistent across each platform and what elements are different.

Brand One : _____

Platform	What brand elements are consistent?	What brand elements are different?

Brand Two : _____

Platform	What brand elements are consistent?	What brand elements are different?

Brand Three : _____

Platform	What brand elements are consistent?	What brand elements are different?

Dealing with Negative Feedback

Respond, Don't Delete

Negative feedback is inevitable, especially on social media. However, it can be an opportunity for your brand to show that it cares what customers think. It can also be an opportunity to solve problems before they escalate, improve your product, and build brand loyalty.

Never delete negative comments (unless they are extremely offensive and/or violate the terms of your social network). This tells customers that you don't want to hear what they have to say and that they aren't important to you. Often, deleting negative comments can snowball into a firestorm against your brand, creating more damage than the original comment.

Post Publicly, Then Take It Offline

The best way to handle negative comments is to reply to the comment publicly, and then take it offline. For example, let's say that Bob Smith posts this comment on your brand's Facebook page: "CarryAll luggage sucks!!! I just bought one of their overpriced bags and it fell apart on my first trip. Don't buy their junk!"

You could reply with something like:

- "Bob, we're so sorry to hear about your bag. If you e-mail us at support@carryall.com we'd be happy to help."
- "Sorry to hear about this Bob! We offer a lifetime guarantee on all of our products and would be more than happy to replace your bag or refund your money. Please e-mail us at support@carryall.com so that we can get your contact information."

In some industries, saying "I'm sorry" can be viewed as a possibility liability. If this is the case for your brand, find other ways to interact with customers. A message like, "Thank you for sharing your experience" should avoid liability issues but still send a responsive message to the customer. Work with your legal team to develop responsive, responsible answers to your social media audience.

Case Study: United Breaks Guitars... And Their Brand

In 2008, Canadian musician Dave Carroll was on a United Airlines flight from Chicago to Halifax. While the plane was being loaded, he and some of the other passengers witnessed the baggage handlers throwing guitars on the tarmac, but there was no response from the employees that Carroll complained to. Upon arrival in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Carroll retrieved his badly damaged guitar, but the airline was not willing to pay his claim for damages. Carroll wrote a song and created a music video, titled "United Breaks Guitars," which he released on July 6, 2010. As of this writing, the video has 13.8 million views.

Building Customer Trust

Text your knowledge

The things people or companies, do, or don't do, online can have a drastic impact on how they are perceived, and, in the case of businesses, their bottom line. Take these case studies and divide them into two areas: Builds Trust or Breaks Trust.

To thank constituents for their suggestions on reducing government waste, California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger made a casual, unscripted video and posted it online.

After actor Kevin Smith was ejected from a Southwest Airlines flight, he angrily tweeted about his experience. Southwest Airlines tweeted back promising a phone call, but made no other online response.

Many politicians, musicians, actors, and actresses hire someone to represent themselves on social media. Tweets sent from Barack Obama's account are signed "-bo" if they are written by him. Otherwise, the tweets come from his staff.

In 2010, The Gap launched a new logo that was mocked throughout social media. Days later, they issued an apology on Facebook and reversed the change.

When images of a particular pant style ignited a firestorm on fashion brand Loft's Facebook page, they apologized. They also posted images of real women from their head office wearing the pants in order to regain customers' trust.

In 2012, McDonald's launched a campaign for customers to share their stories about the brand using the promoted hashtag #McDStories. The campaign quickly backfired as customers shared horror stories and complaints. McDonald's quickly shut the campaign down with no social media response, other than an e-mail statement from their social media director.

When Hurricane Sandy devastated the eastern United States, American Apparel created a social media ad offering a coupon to customers in the affected areas "in case you're bored during the storm." Customers found the ad very offensive and social media response was extremely negative. American Apparel pulled the ad from Facebook and Twitter and made no response to the social media audience.

When a Twitter user tweeted about his negative experience with British Airways' customer service, British Airways took over 12 hours to respond. They did not apologize, but rather explained that their Twitter feed was only monitored from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m.

Builds Trust	Breaks Trust

Developing a Communication Strategy

Developing Social Media Guidelines for Your Brand

Establishing guidelines for how your brand will act on social media is tricky. You want to make sure that the people representing your brand on social media have plenty of flexibility and the ability to be spontaneous. You also want to make sure that they represent your brand accurately and positively. Work with your social media team to build a set of flexible, sensible guidelines that will support your brand.

Ground Rules

The first part of your social media guidelines should set out some ground rules. This should include statements like:

- All messages should reflect our brand’s values and support our overall social media strategy.
- All messages should also support our company’s values and strategic plans.
- All messages should be well designed, without spelling or factual errors.
- Employees must not post on social media while intoxicated.

Response Timelines

Outline appropriate response timelines and methods for each platform. If more research is required, reply to the customer and give them an updated time frame.

Letting Others Speak For You

Turning Customers into Ambassadors

Your customers' stories and experiences are a valuable tool in supporting your brand. They confirm to others that your brand is real and genuine. They can also provide support when dealing with negative feedback.

Find the people on social media who are already advocating your brand and support them. This might include special VIP bonuses like:

- Coupons
- Sneak peeks
- Product samples
- Giveaways
- Exclusive contests

Case Study: The Fiskateers

During a 2006 rebranding campaign, Fiskars realized that although the crafting market was growing, there was no clear market leader. In fact, their market share was dropping. However, the online crafting community was growing and the crafting demographic was becoming younger.

Fiskars decided to help grow the online crafting community. They hired four women for 15 hours per week as Fiskars ambassadors. Their task was to build and manage a blogging community of people passionate about crafting. The women also attended trade shows and taught scrapbooking classes at local craft stores. Their goal was not to promote Fiskars, but to support crafting in whatever way possible. However, Fiskars did encourage product feedback, and in several cases the changes suggested by the online community were extremely valuable and saved the company money.

This campaign generated a huge brand following, known as Fiskateers. The Fiskateers community has grown extensively over the last decade, and now has a presence on Facebook and Pinterest in addition to their blogs, forums, and in-person events.

Building Partnerships

Another way to build brand credibility and visibility is to share the work of others using social media. Just make sure to be fully aware of what you are sharing: check into the background of the author, scan pages, and read articles before you share them with your audience. When sharing, always credit the original source. (On most social media platforms, built-in sharing functions allow you to link directly back to the original author/page.)

You can also consider allowing others to post on your blog, or having someone from your brand guest post on other blogs. Just make sure that the information being published supports your brand and its values.

Reviewing and Revising

Evaluation Tools

Your social media marketing plan should have some data monitoring tools in place, like Google AdWords, keyword alerts, or specialized software suites. Tap into these tools to see what people are saying about your brand online.

Signs of Trouble

Here are some signs that usually signify trouble in a brand's social media presence.

- There is a downward trend in visitors to your social media pages.
- Your social media presence is one-way: your audience is not replying to you or sharing your updates, and/or you aren't interacting with your audience on social media.
- There are more negative social media articles, posts, comments, mentions, etc. than positive ones.
- Your social media pages no longer reflect what your brand is about.
- Your social media presence is inconsistent.
- Your brand is missing from important social media platforms.

Choosing a Course of Action

Work with your marketing team and your social media team to get your brand's online presence back on track. Check over the key strategy elements that we discussed earlier in the course:

- Determining what you want the brand to say
- Determining what the brand is saying now
- Reviewing your audience profile, budget, target platforms and tools, resources, and overall strategy for those platforms
- Checking your target metrics against real-time data

Determine what is working, what isn't, and devise a plan to fix it. Be sure to try one thing at a time so that you can create an effective solution for your problem.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Halligan, Brian, and David Meerman Scott. Marketing Lessons from the Grateful Dead. Wiley, 2010.*
- ✓ *Kerpen, Dave. Likeable Social Media (Updated and Revised). McGraw-Hill, 2011.*
- ✓ *Vaynerchuk, Gary. The Thank You Economy. Harper Business, 2011.*