

2010: The year social media comes of age for businesses

By Sam Brace, special for Inside Tucson Business

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Facebook, Twitter, Hootsuite, Tweetdeck, LinkedIn. Where are these social media platforms taking us? Will there come a day when information is beamed directly into the cortex of our desired audience? While that seems unlikely, so did the concept of a social networking site like Facebook 10 years ago.

Today, businesses can instantaneously update customers through social media. Ten years ago many of us were still using dial-up Internet service or sending faxes to communicate.

Less talking, more doing

This is shaping up to be the year more organizations will pass the "thinking about" stage and start using social media to build awareness, relationships and sales. Campaigns implemented last year will provide solid foundations to build upon.

KRC Research, based in Washington, D.C., found that 88 percent of 200 executives of nonprofits it surveyed experimented with social media in 2009, and 85 percent plan to actively use it in their organizations this year. MarketingSherpa, a research firm specializing in tracking marketing efforts, reports that most industries are increasing their budgets for social media marketing in 2010.

Behind these increases is a booming population of new users of social media. Statistics show that 66 percent of global Internet users have visited social networks and that more have used these sites than traditional e-mail. Facebook grew to more than 300 million users in 2009. Twitter grew by 1,382 percent in February 2009. These sites are where people are gathering and there's little to indicate they will leave for greener pastures in 2010.

Less waste, more targets

Existing social network pastures should prove to be very green through geotagging. This technology enables users to add location data to photographs, videos and websites, which could be valuable to marketers.

Restaurants could make a person's phone buzz as they walk by, informing them of daily specials. Businesses can reach people by their exact GPS coordinate.

These are just some ways social media will target customers with greater efficiency. Platforms such as Facebook already let communications professionals send messages through advertisements that reach users interests.

Less convention,

Because of its potential, more social media advertising campaigns will be executed in 2010. PepsiCo recently took the plunge, deciding to back out of a long-standing relationship to run commercials for its beverage brands during the Feb. 7 telecast of the Super Bowl.

Instead, the company is shifting its resources to online advertising. PepsiCo official said they did this because research demonstrated customers are more responsive to online sponsorships with a professional football focus.

Although more than 100 million viewers will see Super Bowl TV spots, Pepsi's move is one that marketers are making to reach a public with ever-changing behaviors.

More precision

Consumers' actions and behaviors can be analyzed in ways never thought possible through traditional methods. In the past, the gauge was limited to such things as a newspaper's circulation.



Now, even small-town newspapers can reach millions, and inexpensive software can show where those readers live and work, how long they stayed on the website, and how many times they interacted with the content. The same applies to analytic software for social media.

So how are marketers measuring social media investments? Third-party Twitter applications, such as Hootsuite and Tweetdeck, are free and can show how many people clicked on content in tweets. Facebook has a free program on its business pages called Insight that can determine similar values. Other sources are available, too.

This will prove to be an exciting year for social media and the professionals who strategically use these sites to build brand awareness and relationships. The new developments in the medium are sure to come. Adapting to the times and looking forward is virtually certain to be the most effective trend for any perceptive professional.

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