



Why Don't Your Customers 'Like' You?

A realistic look at using social media to promote an A/V business. *by Don Kreski*

IF YOU ARE LIKE MANY in the A/V industry, you've been trying to start a dialogue with clients and prospective clients on Facebook. It's been a year, two years of effort and you've attracted 100 "likes" or maybe 300 or 500. Yet when you look at the Coca-Cola Facebook page you see that they have 60 million. Is something wrong?

I asked that question of a friend who is the webmaster at a large Midwestern university. He suggested that to attract large numbers of fans on Facebook, you need to have a brand or an organization that people see as intimately connected with their self-image. To understand what he means, think back to when you were applying to college. Get accepted at a great university and you want to share that fact with everyone you know. You want to keep up with the latest news about campus life and the standings of their teams. Your relationship with your school can be an important part of who you are.

That seems to be true for many Coke

drinkers as well, at least to the degree that they collect Coke memorabilia, wear Coke t-shirts, and refuse to drink any soft drink but Coke. Do they want their friends to know that they 'like' Coca-Cola? Apparently.

Put aside the hype and take a realistic look at how Facebook and other social platforms can help you grow your business.

The reality is that consumer companies generally do much better on Facebook than B2B firms, and so much better that most of what you've read about Facebook simply does not apply to our industry. If my friend is right, no matter how much your customers like you, "liking" you does not define their self-image. It's time to put aside the hype and take a realistic look at how

Facebook and other social platforms can help you grow your business.

Jim Gist, chief sales and marketing officer for Las Vegas-based JBA Consulting Engineers has an impressive but limited social media program based mainly on LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.

"We find social very useful in a lot of ways," he told me, "but for us, it's not a full time job and it doesn't need to be."

For Jessica Spicer, social media specialist for AVI-SPL, it is a full-time job, but she also has realistic goals.

"We don't actively use social media to try to bring in leads or sales, but see it as a really easy way for people to get news about the company, to check us out or to keep up with what we're doing," she says. "It can be useful for customer service. It's very useful for recruiting."

"I'm very much a social media user in my personal life," she adds. "So I find it frustrating if I'm checking out a company and they don't have a social account or they're not updating it regularly. We

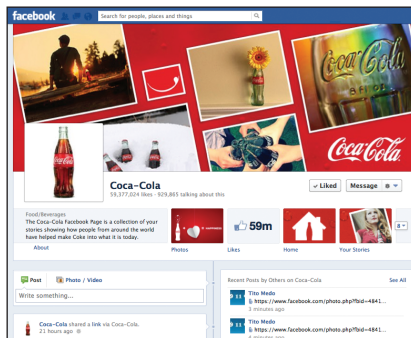
believe it's very important to maintain that presence."

It Starts with Great Content

In asking these two managers about their social media programs, I was cognizant of the fact that the time they say they spend on social media does not include all of the time they, and others at their companies, spend creating the content they use there.

Most social media managers — Coca Cola's included — very tightly integrate their programs with the rest of their marketing, and they extensively reuse stories, ads, case histories, videos, promotions and merchandising created originally for something else.

For example, looking at the AVI-SPL timeline from the last week of January, I found a very professionally produced video of their work at the new Revel casino in Atlantic City, a preview of their new Concept Catalog brochure, a graphic showing all of their office locations, and photos



B2B firms should learn from Coca-Cola's social media success, but not try to take the same approach.

from the ISE trade show in Amsterdam.

It disturbs me that some social media gurus advise us, if we don't already have great marketing content, to just throw something together, as if a video shot with no script and a hand-held camera would impress anyone with our ability to build \$100,000 systems. Quality content is especially important for a B2B firm, where potential customers

want to be reassured that their vendors are stable, well-funded and professionally managed.

No, there's nothing amateur about the social media programs at AVI-SPL or JBA. Social is only a small part of the marketing programs of these firms, and in itself it might not justify what they spend creating great content. But they do create great content and use it on social as well as a variety of other media.

"The way I structure our communications strategy," says Gist, "is based on what I call a shoulder-tapping mentality. Different customers have different interests, and they will respond to different media. You need a consistent message, but you have to deliver it in a variety of ways or you won't break through the white noise."

We'll explore the various social platforms in upcoming articles. **CI**

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