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Online strategies, responsibility are becoming marketing ‘musts’

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Familiar with terms such as Youtube, ROI and CSR?

The latest trends in getting company names into the public eye are catching on quickly, and marketing professionals say those who don't adapt may be left behind. The following are examples of marketing that experts say companies can no longer afford to ignore:

Using ‘social media’

Blogs, forums, chat rooms, Flickr, Twitter, Youtube.com, Facebook

.com and MySpace.com are emerging as powerful marketing tools.

“People who are experts on or passionate about a particular topic or interest may start their own Web site, generate a blog or post videos online,” says Cindy Marion, president of Marion, Montgomery Inc. “Over time, bloggers and social media contributors continue posting more subjects, articles, videos or sound clips related to their specific interests. This is good for conversation and for search engine optimization.”

According to a recently released Cone Business Survey, 93 percent of Americans believe companies should have a presence on social media sites, and 85 percent believe these companies should use these services to interact with consumers.

“The people have spoken but the wheel hasn't been reinvented,” Marion says. “Because although the medium may be new, proven marketing strategies remain. Consistent messaging and frequent communications are key to creating perception, influence and persuasion.

“When people want to know about something, they typically ask their friends,” she says. “Now they often search for it online. If a company has a Web site, that's a good start to gain a base knowledge of the product, but if an unvested third party touts that company's products and services, then the company's reputation gets more credit. If an online friend or trusted source touts it, all the better.”

Targeting the Hispanic market

“It seems that for years experts have been talking about the potential of the Hispanic market in the future tense and, often, in the form of a projection,” says Alex López Negrete, CEO of López Negrete Communications.

But tomorrow is here, he says.

“Evidence supporting the profitability of marketing to Hispanics at this very moment has piled up so high, and to such an overwhelming extent, as to be undeniable.”

The present, he adds, is dazzling with opportunity, since four of America’s largest cities have what the U.S. Census Bureau calls “Majority-Minority” status, a term used to describe a region in which most of the community, county or state’s population differs from the traditional majority population of non-Hispanic whites.

“By now you’ve heard that tortillas continually outsell white bread while salsa surpasses ketchup in dollar sales,” López Negrete says. The bottom line? Hispanic influence will continue to permeate mainstream society, culture, music and language.

“In short — Hispanic will become the new ‘mainstream,’” Negrete says. “If you don’t incorporate marketing to Latinos into your strategic growth plans, failure is imminent. It is robust, vital and, to marketers, absolutely essential.”

Emphasizing ROI

“Before you start a campaign, whether it’s for potential customers or employees, you need to ask yourself, ‘What is the problem I am trying to solve?’ and ‘How do people currently feel about this issue?’ ” says Ward Pennebaker, principal and founder of integrated branding and communications firm Pennebaker | Fifth Ring. “If you need to do a survey or conduct focus groups to determine current feelings on an issue to justify your efforts, do it. That way, you can build success metrics in your plan and measure when the campaign ends to see if you reached them. Showing executives that you moved the needle with a campaign is infinitely more important than showing them pretty ads.”

“In this new era of marketing, there is only one true precept: Results matter,” says Steve Latham, founder and CEO of Spur Interactive marketing agency.

An increasing use of the Web combined with its other advantages, he says, allow most marketers to achieve superior results from digital media versus traditional outlets.

“The bottom line is that status quo marketing is no longer acceptable,” Latham says. “If brands don’t evolve, they will not succeed. There are too many choices and many smart competitors.”

Corporate Social Responsibility

“Even with the market uncertainties we’re facing, companies are expected to conduct business at a much higher standard than ever before,” says Susan Pennebaker, principal at Pennebaker | Fifth Ring. “Companies are hiring people to lead sustainability initiatives that help to demonstrate that they are good corporate citizens.”

“We’re advising our clients to look for opportunities to share examples of their sustainability efforts publicly — either through a sustainability report, news releases or even by reaching out to industry experts who track and comment on sustainability initiatives. This expectation of good corporate citizenship will not change — even with a volatile market — so companies should embrace this practice now.”

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