Build a lasting community around your brand

Author : Ben Shwartz

Date : July 14, 2015

Given that the internet has become a stable, ever-present tool in any information-seeker's arsenal, your company's Web presence plays a key role in the overall success of your brand. Thus, it's in every brand's best interest to create a positive online customer experience, and the right amount of interaction is one of the most dynamic and effective ways to do so. By taking an interactive route to connect with your customers, you'll provide more enhanced forms of communication while receiving more nuanced feedback from your users, thereby establishing a win-win situation for business and customers alike.

Strive for engagement

For better or for worse, the internet is a springboard from which users are constantly craving interaction and feedback. In order to drive interest and engagement, internet users need an elevated experience that provides more than just words on a page. Whether your content is supplemented by photos, videos, infographics, live chats, and the like, you'll provide your visitorwith a layered experience that actively appeals to the propensities of the modern day internet user. By providing your community with relevant written content supplemented by engaging media, your efforts will be met with gratitude from your readers in the form of increased retention and time spent on-site.

The experiential model

In terms of customer service, it's a known fact that a poor service experience will generate more talk and circulate to more listeners than a good one. It's important to approach these possible negative encounters with a stealthy damage control plan in place in order to alleviate potential word-of-mouth blows to your brand. In these instances, *transparency and assuming responsibility are key*. By smartly communicating in a direct and straightforward manner, your brand's ethos will be elevated in the minds of consumers. Apologize for any misdoings while communicating that you have genuinely considered their comments and concerns, and follow up with an actionable response. Whether you investigate further into a potentially recurring issue or offer the customer at hand a discounted service or consolation, allow your output to speak not only to this specific customer, but also to all other audience members. By taking a publicly active stance to provide for a better experience, you'll be able to put offsetting comments to rest while positioning your brand as vocal, progressive, and transparent.

Foster loyalty

In our age of digital impersonalization, it can be difficult to distinguish corporate marketing from genuine customer appreciation. By defining your target audience's needs, wants, and concerns and by tailoring your content and interaction around that, you'll be able to distinguish your brand on a personal level that will set it apart from competitors. Allow your channels of interaction (including but not limited to inbound marketing and social spheres) to take an individualized tone and style that will speak to the humanity of your users in the midst of potential technological barriers. Customers value trust and thoughtfulness in a company's culture, and these opportunities for individuation can lead your brand to the forefront on your community messages alone. Take the time and effort to show appreciation and consideration for your customers, as loyalty is a key tenet in fostering thriving and long-lasting relationships.

Community matters

In the same vein as building customer loyalty, your ultimate long term goal should be to establish an enduring community of like-minded individuals that share a common affiliation with your brand. While a community or marketing manager can indeed be the direct personal link to individual customers, his/her job should also include more widespread social outreach that will call for participation not only with the brand itself, but also between community members. [User-generated content](#) in the form of open-ended group chats, contests, and community events (online and offline alike) will contribute to the resources available on behalf of your brand to your community as a whole. In all, customers want to know that they aren't alone on the web. By crafting mediums that call for participation and engagement with others, you can offer tailored content, enrich the scope of your brand, and establish an elevated level of rapport between community members that will remain in the hearts and minds of users.

By providing your customers with a variety of methods of interaction, you'll be setting the stage for meaningful and useful engagement that will ensure that your company's messages are communicated effectively and to the best of its abilities. Be sure to keep interactive elements in mind when dealing with community outreach, as they are essential building blocks to establishing the best version of your brand that it can possibly be.