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HOW SOCIAL MEDIA CAN BE USED TO DIALOGUE WITH THE CUSTOMER

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During this past week, our class discussed methods of obtaining the voice of the customer (VOC). This particular article talks about social media, and how it can be used to interact with customers on a personal level. This is a great method for obtaining VOC, and one that we did not consider. The author uses Microsoft and its advertising agency, Wunderman, as an example of how companies can apply social media to achieve effective customer dialogue.

In 2008, with the help of Wunderman, Microsoft launched a campaign called "Heroes Happen Here" (HHH), which was a 61-city tour event to promote three of their new server products. These events included keynote speeches, discussions about the power of the new products for businesses, and product demonstrations. Microsoft experts were even there to walk potential customers through hands-on, individualized product tests. What Microsoft soon found out, was that digital conversations with the individuals who were in the target audience for the events, were more important than the actual events themselves. By utilizing social media, Wunderman was able to increase market participation in the events, while improving dialogue between Microsoft and its sophisticated IT professional users.

Social media is a communication tool; however, so are newspapers, magazines, television, and radio. The difference is that social media is a tool used via the Internet in the form of websites that not only give you information; they let you interact with it. While traditional forms of media communication such as those listed above, are thought of as a one-way street, social media is thought of as a two-way street because it allows you to communicate too. There are many forms of social media which include social bookmarking, social news, social networking, social photo and video sharing, and wikis. While each of these serves different purposes, this article focuses on social networking and Weblogs. Social networking can be accomplished through sites such as Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, and Weblogs, just to name a few. Social networkers interact by adding friends, commenting on profiles, joining groups and having discussions. By using this type of social media, or all types for that matter, a company can learn consumer trends and desires in real time. These tools provide an opportunity for innovation in dialogue, as well as, personalization with the customer.

Microsoft implemented a web-based social media monitoring and engagement platform that let them view relevant conversations happening around their brand and products in real time. This type of system works by scanning social media networks for particular keywords. In Microsoft's case, keywords

used would have been those such as “Windows Server” and/or “developer software tools.” By using this monitoring tool, Microsoft was able to pinpoint blogs and social networks that were influential in having the highest following of IT professionals. Microsoft associates were then able to listen to what people had to say and then join in on the conversations. This not only helped Microsoft in terms of gaining participants for their event campaign, it helped them gain insight on customer needs that were not yet implemented into their products, and maybe even customer needs that were not yet even thought of. The monitoring system they used was then able to aggregate those conversations and put them into visuals that made analysis and measurement meaningful and actionable.

Although the Microsoft example is an excellent one, social media can be used in many other different ways. Companies can create their own blogs and user forums to interact with their customers. They can create webcasts, tutorials, voting polls for products and services or even articles. I could go on and on with this. If so, it would turn into a huge report. The bottom line here is that any website that invites you to interact with the site and with other visitors on the site falls into the definition of social media. While face-to-face interaction is top of the line in terms of intimacy with customers, I believe social media falls next in the list. Because the Internet allows us to reach millions instead of just a select few, companies and organizations should implement the advantages of social media into their marketing mix.

Reference

Direct Link to Source: <http://www.iveybusinessjournal.com/how-social-media-can-be-used-to-dialogue-with-the-customer>