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Social network marketing is so much like high school fads

Has anyone in your organization suggested that you “get into social media” yet?

Social media used to mean putting up a page at MySpace. That soon got labeled as a tween-age place as the big kids moved into Facebook — originally for college students. Creating your own little world was popular for a minute and a half on Second Life. Corporate blogging came next. Now it’s microblogging, a la Twitter.

Over the past few years, the world of marketing has reminded me more and more of junior high school. The fads. The fashions. The cool thing to do. The dweebish thing that marked you forever.

The problem with fads — then and now — is the huge risk of backlash. What does it mean for your brand if you advertise on Friendster when all the cool kids have moved on?

When everyone was saying user-generated content (i.e., having nonprofessionals create commercials for you) would change the world, no one looked 15 minutes into the future to realize that people actually prefer professionally developed content. For example, when my sister-in-law asks me to look at the children’s book she hopes to get published, I know I’d rather poke myself in the eye with a sharp stick than read it. Remember the torture inflicted by your uncle when he wanted to show your family the slides of his vacation with Aunt Ethel and the cousins? That’s user-generated content.

MARKETING WISE



Spyro
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The benefit of user-generated content is that the users who get involved in creating an ad for you remember your brand. It is not mass marketing.

Social media create their own issues. I once registered on LinkedIn because it seemed like something I should do. I have never invited anyone to link to me. I think I’m linked to only three people. After

the sixth invitation arrived, I decided to no longer respond. So I now have more than 20 invitations waiting for me. Which wouldn’t be an issue, except everything you do on LinkedIn gets sent to your links, and then their links. So if I finally do decide to write a recommendation for someone, it will end up all over my “network” — and 20 or so people will be left wondering why I didn’t even accept them as a link.

It’s invasive. And marketers, I’m afraid, are making it worse.

Marketers can now learn an awful lot about someone, based on the profiles they create for themselves, the friends they have and the websites they search for.

When you tell Facebook the year you graduated from college, your age is made public. Then the ads you see when you look up your friends’ profiles start telling you that you could stand to lose a few pounds, you probably need a little Botox and, by the way, is your prostate getting in the way of a good night’s sleep?

Now you can really start counting on backlash. Those little ads in the back of magazines with bold headlines aimed

at BALD MEN worked hard in their day — and no one minded because either they needed the product and were happy to see the ad, or they didn’t need the product and ignored the ad. No one took any of it personally.

But, with the internet, everyone knows better. They think, “Hey! Facebook thinks I’m bald!” — just because the execution is so clumsy. Facebook knows you, so the ads on Facebook can call you by name. You have to take that personally.

I think targeting like this will be an incredibly great tool — when it’s in the hands of professionals. And there are tremendous benefits to getting on board with certain Web 2.0 ideas right now. For example, many business-to-business marketers are finding highly qualified leads — and doing it cheaply — using webinars and white-paper offers. And many consumer marketers are able to learn much more about their target audience’s wants and needs by setting up forums and having conversations with them on the internet.

But most social network marketing just isn’t there yet. So when you’re asked why you (or your company) aren’t on Tumblr or Utterz or Plaxo or Pownce or Seismic or even Dogster, for Pete’s sake, go ahead and tweet back to them that you’re waiting for the shakeout.

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