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Social Media Marketing in Russia

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Abstract

The article focuses on using social media for business promotion. The authors analyze and compare the SMM experience in the western countries and Russia, give examples of failed promotion. A short review of Russian social networks is given including their peculiar features, which are important to consider when planning a SMM campaign. The main problems and perspectives of Russian SMM are described in conclusion of the article. In order to present the situation and specific of use of social networks in marketing communication in Russia and abroad the following methods were employed: analysis of the scientific literature, inquiry, observation, and data analysis. This article will be useful for small and medium-sized businesses who are promoting in social media as well as for those, who only plan to.

Keywords: Social media, social networks, marketing, SMM.

1. Introduction

Social networking is a phenomenon that has been changing our life with no hope of a return. In today's world it is difficult to find a person who would not use at least one social network. According to Wikipedia, a social network is a social structure made up of a set of social actors (such as individuals or organizations) and a set of the dyadic ties between these actors. Generally, a social network is referred to as an internet community of users who share interests, activities, backgrounds or real-life connections. In other words, social networks are built using the same principles as in the real world, but they ignore the factor of the geographical location of the members [9]. A social network is a unique service that can help you not only stay in touch with your friends and colleagues wherever they might be, but also provide you with plenty of information of different kind – from scientific stuff up to entertaining content presented in different formats: text files, images, audio and video files. The fact that social networks have become not only popular but important in social life is evident, since even the politicians like President Barack Obama or Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev are participants of Facebook and Twitter. Before going further on the functions of social networks, it is necessary to show how they work. As mentioned above, Internet users are combined into a social network on the basis of a web resource. The social network interface provides a registration form and an opportunity to upload any kind of content and keep blogs, which are free to comment by other participants of

the social network. The largest social networks have also Instant Messaging Service which allows members communicate in real time [8]. There is also the so-called “invisible technical side” of a social network – servers that can be located even on different continents. To have a social network work quickly, this equipment have to be properly set up and connected together [9]. Though, social networks can be divided into a variety of types depending on the content: people search, music lovers, news gathering, video, photo and so on, we suppose it is not quite correct, because the concept of “social network” implies the presence of all.

2. Social Networks in Russia

According to Adobe Social [6], the 3 top social networks in the world are Facebook, Youtube and Qzone. The number 1 social network is Facebook founded on February 4, 2004, by Mark Zuckerberg. The primary idea of creating this social network was to connect people who are studying or studied together in the same institution. Over time, Facebook has grown to unbelievable proportions including new functions and capabilities, continuous improvement, user-friendly interface and much more. As of September 2013, Facebook had over one billion active users from all over the world, including 34 million users in Russia. Though Facebook has official versions in many countries, each country has also its own most popular social networking site(s) which is (are) usually a clone of the number 1 social network. There are the 2 best social networks in Russia: Vkontakte (vkontakte.ru), as of March, 2013 – over 100 million active users, and Odnoklassniki (odnoklassniki.ru), as of January 2013 – 70 million active users. [4] If Odnoklassniki is mainly popular among senior citizens (35+), Vkontakte has a young audience (before 35). Admittedly, the popularity and power of social networks has influenced all spheres of life including commerce. Due to the involvement of the great mass of people, who can be found at one place and reached in real time, social networks gave a start to a new marketing direction – Social Media Marketing. Social networks have now turned into social media which allow companies to build long-term relationships with their customers, win customers' loyalty, manage the company's reputation, increase sales, and solve many other business problems. Promotion in social networks has many advantages. Among them there are:

- a cheap way of promotion,
- covering a huge audience,
- a fast feedback,
- obtaining relevant and useful information [2].

Using social media for business promotion has two basic models which were developed in the West —SMM (Social Media Marketing) and SMO (Social Media Optimization). SMM is a promotion of a website or the services of a company through social media marketing, that is, through communication with the target audience through social resources. This method allows a company to draw customers to the site directly, rather than through search engines. SMM covers not only social networks, but such platforms as blogs, forums, online communities, different media resources, provided on the Internet. The second model – SMO involves internal technical work to improve the efficiency of interaction of the company's website with social networks. The SMO key steps cover the content of the resource, and some elements of the interface, which usually allow a company to integrate its website with one or more social networks [4].

Promoting business through social media implies the creation of a community or a profile of a company, a person, a video channel, etc. The first and most difficult task is to get the target audience. A company can do it by itself, or hire a social media professional or a company that will do the task. When the target audience is gathered, the company can move on and upload a

content that would be interesting and useful to the readers. The content should contain information about the company, its products/services, recent events and promo offers, and many other things that would involve a customer in the communication with the company.

3. Russian social networks as media for business promotion: problems and peculiar features

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After analyzing the SMM practice of several Western companies, such as KFC, Home Depot, Toyota and some others, we have prepared a list of the recommendations of how it should not be done. Hopefully, using the international experience can help Russian companies to avoid most common sins in SMM which are the following:

- Wrong social media: a company should clearly understand who its target audience is and what social networks they use.
- Publication of too much content after a long silence: posts should not be placed without any logic, they should be constant and renewed every day.
- Poor or insulting content: a company should not post only advertising information or the information that could be considered insulting, but the content should be entertaining.
- Poor feedback: a company should not ignore comments, since communication with the customers is the main goal of SMM. Specific attention should be paid to negative comments.
- Obtrusiveness: a company should not hard-sell using its name and logo all over the place.
- Automatic communication: a company should avoid sending auto-messages, since they are considered spam and make it lose its followers.

Besides the mentioned above, there is the most important problem that prevents many Russian companies from being successful in SMM. It is a wrong idea of a social media strategy on the whole. Many Russian companies have not come yet to understand that SMM is a powerful marketing tool that works very effectively, only if carefully used. The main goal of SMM is often still misunderstood, and it leads to the misuse of the social media or ignoring it at all [6]. Before taking up SMM, one should remember that its main goal is not direct sales but effective communication with a customer which would allow a company to attract people's attention and build friendly and trust-based relationship with the target audience. However, while Russian

companies learn using SMM from international colleagues, the western business has been actively expanding to the East. In 2013 Socialbakers – the most popular provider of social media analytic tools, statistics and metrics for Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, YouTube and LinkedIn announced their move into the Russian market. The company will now provide in-depth analysis of the VK (VKontakte) platform. In view of growing potential of Russian social media for international companies, it becomes important to discover the peculiar features of the Russian social media market. After comparing the international experience with the Russian practice we have prepared a list of recommendations that would probably prevent international companies from crucial mistakes.

- It is important to differentiate between the Russian social media. While the international SMM is mostly done on Facebook, Russia has several large social networks that differ in audience. For instance, as already mentioned above, young customers can be found on Vkontakte rather than on Odnoklassniki. Knowing that is important for targeting.
- It's important to know how the Russian social networks work. Most of them focus on communication rather than on business.
- In today's Russia, a brand is not as popular as a product. Trying to sell a brand would be a mistake. Discussion about a product available is more effective [2].
- The SMM company should not be a translated interface, but a specialized company addressing the Russian target audience, i.e. a company considering the sociocultural factors that affect marketing.

4. Conclusion

According to recent studies, Russia has been developing social and digital media quicker than many other countries around the world. Due to social networks, beginners are provided with a great opportunity to start their own business without going to great expense. Year by year, social media marketing becomes more popular than traditional types of promotion, because of a variety of advantages. Since 2010 the Russian-speaking population of Facebook has grown by 37,6%, and the Russian-speaking population of Twitter has increased by 3 times. At the moment, the Russians under 24 are the most advanced users after the users from United States and China. According to the Comscore global study, in 2011 Russia was involved in social networking more actively than any other country in the world [9]. Many Russian companies have been successfully using social networks to promote their goods and services. A number of international financial experts and businessmen (as Jim Rogers, for example) believe that the United States and Europe are currently not safe for business, while Russia and Asian countries will provide significant opportunities to make big profits. Therefore, the peculiar features of SMM development in Russian becomes especially important to investigate.

Summing up, we can bring out 3 main problems of SMM in Russia:

- a company is not fully aware of why it needs SMM;
- a company cannot hire a professional staff to manage SMM effectively;
- a company cannot provide a quick feedback.

We believe that the further study of the main problems and peculiar features of SMM in Russia will contribute to a better understanding of how Russian social media work and, therefore, be useful for Russian business as well as for international companies. Since collaboration is one of the core values for building partnerships, networking and development of business relationships, so shared mutual experience in SMM would be a key component of effective business relationships between Russia and the rest of the world.

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