



The bird is the word of mouth

Local businesses look to Twitter for advertising

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When Remy's on Monroe opened in August of last year, the bar's owners didn't feel that traditional advertising alone would be the best way to promote their live jazz performances. They preferred that word spread organically from their clientele, although with a little help from technology.

"Twitter is the modern way to do word-of-mouth advertising," said Alex Juarez, a social media consultant hired by Remy's.

Twitter is often referred to as micro-blogging. Users (called tweeters) can post comments (called tweets), but are limited to 140 characters. Launched in 2006 and operated by a privately-funded start-up in San Francisco, it was designed primarily to give people the ability to instantly update their friends on what they were doing.

As Twitter began gaining in popularity — today it's ranked as the third most-used social network with an estimated 55 million monthly visits — businesses began to take notice of this vast market of potential customers. And consultants such as Juarez started developing strategies to help businesses reach them.

Juarez and his partner, Tara Gill, started Bee Linked to pass on their knowledge of social media to clients. Through mutual friends of Remy's management, they were brought on to provide the bar an online presence and draw attention to their new operation.

"We usually post tweets on the weekends about the (upcoming) shows," Juarez said.

Unlike traditional marketing vehicles, Twitter and other social media have features that a print or radio advertisement can't replicate.

"Our followers are able to interact with Remy's. If they have never been to the bar, they can ask questions to learn more about what is offered," he said.

Generating followers is perhaps the most important aspect to using Twitter as a marketing tool. Out of the millions of tweets posted every day, users are able to control which ones they see by choosing which tweeters to follow. While the service is free to use, hiring a consultant can pay benefits when it comes to attracting the right audience.

“The reason I get paid to manage client’s Twitter accounts is because my software allows me to increase their followers much more quickly. Those followers are targeted based on their geographic location and other interests,” said Chris Sentman, who provides social media consulting and Web design through his business, Webovator.

Once a business has attracted an audience, it’s important not to bombard them with constant spam-like messages. Sentman recommends that businesses educate their followers by posting facts or providing links to articles of interest related to their field. Humor is also a useful method for attracting attention, as is following what he calls the golden rule for Twitter marketing.

“Don’t be obnoxious, annoying or pushy with your sales tactics,” Sentman said. “It’s a surefire way to get people to un-follow you.”

Experts suggest limiting the number of direct sales pitches and to post them according to a set schedule, say once a week, so people know when to expect them.

Another strategy for effective advertising strategy is to include some sort of discount or special offer when making a pitch. Some businesses will market these as Twitter specials, giving their followers the impression that they’re receiving an insider deal.

Twitter is free to use and many businesses have adopted a do-it-yourself approach to maintaining a presence. For those that elect to go that route, but find themselves not getting it, Sentman offers this advice:

“Think of Twitter as a huge worldwide celebration where you mingle with strangers, share small talk, shake hands and hand out your business card.”

If some eventually become customers, you may even get to meet them in person.

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