

## Face up to it and get social in your library

Every library needs to market and promote their library to ensure customers know they exist. Newspaper sales, phone directories, and magazines are all losing their impact in society and it is harder to get your message across using these media formats. I am not suggesting you stop doing this form of interruption marketing, but you do need to spread your message a lot further using different media.

The first challenge is, do you spread the message? In the good old days, you had control of your marketing message, but today the reverse is true: the consumer has control of your marketing message and that will not change. The game has changed forever and a lot of libraries are being left behind.

A retail example of this occurred recently. It happened in a hardware store in Connecticut, USA at 9.00am. A customer went into the store and the cashier processed their query and took the sale without looking at the person, and carried on talking over the phone to their friend. When the transaction was finished, the customer asked "Do I get a thank you for dealing with you?" The salesperson looked up and said, "It is on the receipt; what else do you want?" I heard about this incident about three hours later in Western Australia – the wonders of the social network.

The customer is now in control and can spread the message about your library, for good and bad, around the world in a matter of seconds. The key is that you should be a part of the communications chain. You cannot own it, but you must be part of it.

### Read the book

If you are puzzled about what the social media is all about and how to use it for your business, then a good place to start is to read Paul Cheney's excellent book, *The Digital Handshake, 7 proven Strategies to grow your business using social network*.

When I present at conferences I ask how many people in the audience in their leisure time are involved in social networking; on average about 75% of people put their hands up. When I ask how many organisations are involved in social media networking, I am lucky if I get five hands go up. As customers we are talking about our experiences with libraries and retailers, but as libraries the majority of us are not getting involved in the conversation.

Look at the facts: 22% of the world's population are online, 200 million are on Facebook, and 125 million on My Space. That is before you consider the 133 million bloggers and 195 million cell phones used in the USA. When it comes to social networking, around 62% of the population are involved. What a marketing opportunity.

Research by Edelman Public Relations in 2006 introduced some interesting facts for retailers, and the same applies to libraries.

We may think we are trusted with the advice we offer our patrons, but the research shows that we are three times more likely to trust comments and advice on social media from people we believe are just like us. The result is that 67% of buying or borrowing decisions are influenced by word of mouth marketing from other people. The consumer today is looking for real advice, not marketing messages.

According to research carried out by Home Textile Today and reported on the web on February 11, 2010, Facebook is the top social media with 50% of shoppers using this website and following on average five retailers. Is your library being followed on Facebook?

### What does this mean for you?

What worked in the past will not work in the future. You need to be doing less with traditional marketing and more with social networking channels. But, where do you start? There are numerous avenues out there and you could soon get lost and give up.

I am a great believer in keeping it simple.

Facebook is being used by many businesses with great success. IKEA, in Malmo, Sweden have their manager promoting furniture on Facebook and this is working tremendously well. A chain of pubs in the UK are using Facebook to drive their business and anyone who goes to their Facebook page can download a coupon for a free ice cream as a dessert when they order a meal. It is time for libraries to get on board the trend and start marketing themselves on social media tools.

Make sure you tag your library name with Google so that if any one mentions your library you can see what they are saying and respond quickly and join in the conversation. You may be able to diffuse a difficult customer service issue or reward a patron for promoting your library.

Leading retailers are experimenting with social networking to see what works for them and what does not. Leading libraries need to do the same. The key to success is for all service providers to jump in now – to leave it could be the most damaging thing you do to your organisation in 2010.

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