

By Matthew A. Perosi

Keep Talking: Conversations with Your Social Media Audience



The idea of a social network seemed like a fad back when MySpace and Friendster dominated the headlines. Now there are new social networks that rise and fall in popularity every year without mention in a single headline. Social networks are now part of the marketing ecology for businesses, and those who use them are growing their business.



Maintaining a two-way conversation with customers through a social network is referred to as online customer engagement, or just “engagement” for short. The challenge with new media marketing is finding the time to socially engage with customers. It was easier a few years ago when a business could focus their social efforts on a single network used by the majority of their customers, but now customers are active on different networks for different reasons all day long. Maintaining a high level of customer engagement across several networks leads to business growth, but it has turned into a full time job.



While it’s free to join and use these social networks, many of them have started to limit the ease of which businesses can reach their customers through free methods. Facebook has made it very difficult for businesses to use their network without paying for ads or paying for more people to see a post. It’s unknown if other social networks have limited the reach of free social posts, but Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest have easy advertising options for local businesses; which gives hints that those limitations might be forthcoming or subtly exist.

Retail jewelers have to weigh the cost/benefit of the high level of customer engagement on social media compared to just

paying for the ads. Typically, you’d only pay for an ad through a social network when you have something to sell, but social networks were created for two-way engaging conversations.

Customers are less likely to pay attention to you if all you’re trying to do is sell something. Therefore, while paying for an ad might seem like the easy way to gain exposure through a social network, it’s not going to provide the return you’re hoping for.



Social network engagement is very different than simply paying for an ad. In the past, it was easy to create a marketing schedule to plan out ads for Valentine’s Day, Mother’s Day, Independence Day, Halloween, and Black Friday. A typical marketing schedule provides jewelers with due dates, in between which there is time to relax before planning the next big ad.



However, there are no breaks when it comes to social media. Those everyday customer engagements continue to build loyalty because they know you are not trying to sell to them all the time.

As I write this in late 2015, there’s much speculation over the future business usefulness of newer social networks like

Snapchat, Vine, and Periscope. Many in the jewelry and fashion industry have already begun to use Periscope to broadcast live interviews, runway events, and reviews of jewelry lines. The live Periscope videos are incredibly engaging and easy to participate, while it's far more difficult for a jeweler to engage on Snapchat or Vine.



Social media conversations with customers usually start with an Interesting post. You have to post something that customers will find interesting and conversation-worthy, which usually means photos or videos. Your social success will depend heavily on the quality of your imagery. Photos of a bracelet on a white background won't be nearly as interesting as showing that same bracelet on a model. Naturally, a video would be even better.



On a personal level, it's very easy to post photos and videos online whenever we find something worth sharing with our friends. Sunsets, sunrises, cats, babies, and even pictures of this morning's breakfast are common photos seen every day. None of us plan how we will share photos; we just do it because we want to. You could take the same approach in your jewelry store by posting random product photos and videos every day.



You don't have to plan out these photos or videos too much, and you can use your smartphone to take them. It's reasonable to just use a newer smartphone. Every photo should have a description, comment, or a question that could potentially start a conversation. Simple questions like "which do you prefer?" or "what would you wear with this?" can start a conversation. Even though someone might be answering your question, don't simply let the conversation stop with that answer; instead, reply to their answer to keep the conversation going. It'll make it seem less like you are simply talking at them.



Overall, the best usage of social media is to establish regular non-selling conversations with customers.



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Matthew Perosi reports the latest Internet trends and methods that are most relevant to the jewelry industry in his 5-day per week newsletter, available through jwag.biz. Tap into the more than 1,100 free newsletters to guide you towards better usage of websites, social, and mobile. Matthew invites your feedback and questions at matt@jwag.biz or 973.413.8211. Many questions from TRJ readers have turned into great newsletter topics.



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