



Success Beyond Silos in Social Media

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Maintaining an objective posture helps ensure that customer concerns, not team politics, drive brand development

It's ironic: as marketing teams explore social media and emerging communication channels, all too often they work in silos. They're so eager to dialogue with customers through new media that they often neglect the most crucial dialogue of all: working together as a cross-disciplinary marketing team to create and sustain a powerful, resonant, and customer-centric brand.

As one part of the brand team rushes off to conquer new media and another is dispatched to manage PR, while someone else directs medical education and yet another works with the advertising agency, each develops its own messages, meanings, and metaphors. "We need a blog!" says one, while another says, "We need a community!" In the rush to be first and new, the team allows the brand to suffer strategic drift... and the customer to suffer confusion.

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As brand development advisors, we believe there's tremendous potential in social media to develop new levels of customer engagement. Yet as social media take their place alongside more traditional avenues, it's more important than ever to guard against the fragmentation of brands. It's also crucial to select the media because they work best to build a customer-brand relationship, not just because they're new and

exciting. Ad hoc utilization of multichannel branding – selecting from silos, based on what's considered 'hot' or new – promotes brand image fragmentation. And when a brand's image fragments, stakeholders are left to figure out what the brand means by themselves—a prospect that should scare any sensible marketer. The best opportunity for brands to develop trust comes when, whatever the medium, brand messages and imagery all sound, look, and feel as though they emerged from a common and consistent place.

Brand directors today, therefore, need to be "silo-busters" who can step back from the fray before selecting media channels, and develop answers to two key questions: 1) Is the brand identity strong enough to resonate with key stakeholder groups?, and 2) Have we established a set of clear guidelines and standards for the effective and seamless implementation of this brand identity across communication channels? Likewise, they often need a true strategic partner, very comfortable in a cross-functional model and unconstrained by any single discipline, to develop cogent answers to these questions.

Establishing a strong brand identity

Looking first at brand identity, the approach we've found most useful recognizes three key controllable elements within it: *archetype*, *position*, and *value proposition*. Archetypes, a concept from Jungian psychology, are universal, recognizable sets of human characteristics and behaviors that drive the stories and myths that transcend cultures and languages. They speak to roles in relationships—hero, innocent, wayfarer, philosopher, seducer, trickster, nurturer, etc—and to the quests that they undertake. Not learned, but part of our common human heritage, archetype can be a powerful strategic tool for marketing teams, because it speaks directly to deep psychic roots in audiences, resonates with them, and in doing so provides powerful motivation. When used correctly, archetype drives the tone of all communication efforts and creates compelling meaning. Among consumers, for example, Harley-Davidson® motorcycles consistently uses the archetype of the wayfarer, unshackled by day-to-day obligations and celebrating the open road, to tap into the fantasies and aspirations of its audiences. Regardless of the medium—Web or print, blog or billboard—the Harley-Davidson archetype remains consistent throughout.

Position describes the intended perception in the customer's mind of the product in the context of its competition. Effective positioning addresses product definition (what it is) and differentiation (why it's better). To be effective, positioning needs to be both credible and unique, so that customers not only believe what you say about your product, but also attribute those advantages and benefits exclusively to you. Southwest Airlines®, for example, profitably positions itself as frugal, no-frills flying that saves money and time—a difficult position for any other airline, encumbered as they are by major-city hub routes and challenging overhead, to occupy. Whether 'tweeting' on Twitter™ (as @SouthwestAir) or in any other medium, Southwest's positioning comes through loud and clear. And it clearly resonates with customers: search Twitter for "Southwest Airlines" and customer comment after comment gives tremendous credibility to Southwest's positioning.

Value proposition is about the quality of the customer's experience, a composite of the functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits of the brand. It answers three critical questions: "What does the brand do for me?", "How do I as a customer feel when I use the brand?", and "How am I viewed by others when they know I use this brand?" In our professional experience, this last question, motivated as it is by the need for self-expression, is the most critical and galvanizing for customers of all kinds, healthcare or otherwise, whether they admit it or not. Doesn't it say a lot about a physician, for example, if he does or does not use Botox® Cosmetic on his or her patients? Doesn't it evoke an immediate image of entrepreneurship, modernity, style, risk-taking, confidence, perhaps trendiness, that many other dermatologic products would not?

Thus the identity of a brand, built on its archetype, position, and value proposition, acts much as reputation does for people. It's not an option. Contrast for a moment brand identity with brand image—brand image being the 'gut feeling' stakeholders have about a brand based on their personal experience. You can control brand identity, but you can only influence brand image. So it's vital to your brand's success that you develop the strongest possible brand identity, to cement the strongest possible bonds with key stakeholder audiences.

Establishing clear guidelines and standards

Just as mature individuals behave distinctively, consistently, and authentically whether at work, at a party, or sitting in a back yard, a well-developed brand looks and feels the same in social media as it does in more traditional avenues. That doesn't happen by accident, and it's not likely to happen if silo-based thinking is allowed to take over.

The antidote? Build a standard set of guidelines that any discipline will use to ensure consistent, relevant, and instantly recognizable identity for your brand. Sometimes called a 'brand book', these guidelines help your customers get a cohesive, consistently high-quality experience of your brand no matter what communication channels they choose.

Some marketers confuse the term brand book with global style and design manuals, but an effective brand book is about much more than color, typography, and simple graphics guidelines. Useful, well-prepared brand books take their users (for example, Web specialists, sales aid creators, PR experts, convention booth designers) along the journey of discovery that led to, and supports, the brand recommendations. They share the key insights that molded the strategic thinking, and the rationale behind key choices—so that users can adapt to new situations in ways that will still be consistent with the brand's heritage and history. Competitor strategies are often discussed and dissected. Throughout the brand book, your brand's archetype, position, and value proposition take center stage, directing specific message platforms that are organized to fit each stakeholder group. Naturally, brand books also include guidelines

for the correct use of branding hallmarks, including logo, tagline, color palette, typefaces, and the core creative idea.

More often than not, the 'book' exists in digital as well as, or in place of, print media. DVDs are commonplace, as are password-protected Web sites that can also serve as repositories of design elements, photography, illustration, templates, and other reusable brand assets. Some brand books use video and music to evoke the desired mood, consistent with brand archetype and value proposition.

Taking social media very personally, some brand teams are even exploring brand wikis, enabling password-protected participants to contribute interactively to the evolution of brand guidelines, and for the core brand team to regular and manage contributions. Such interactive approaches have substantial silo-busting potential, by responding collaboratively to the input of contributors and by rewarding group effort. But be warned. In their recent book about social marketing, *Groundswell* (Harvard Business Press, 2008), Forrester Research analysts Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff counsel that managers who deploy internal social networking tools need to pay close attention, or people won't use them. "Without management's active participation, your efforts will fail", they write. "Within a company, groundswell thinking does not come naturally. Count on contributing significant executive time and sponsorship to nurture it, support it, and market it."

Who builds the brand book?

Because the brand book, wiki or otherwise, needs to span many disciplines, it needs the input of all. Yet no one discipline should drive it. Channel managers are understandably concerned about unified brand management, particularly if they sense that their silo or role may be threatened by tradeoffs made in the interest of an overarching brand strategy, or if they fear they won't reach their stated targets because of it. That tends to reinforce silo thinking and power-brokering, just as US Congressmen jockey for how much of a Federal allocation should go to their own state. The question always should be, however, "what's best for the brand?"

The team's management needs to work hard to build trust among marketing team participants. In a recent article, David Stern of EMD Serono was quoted as saying, "One of the big challenges is building a platform for communications and developing a level of trust and accountability. When things are going great, everyone gets along. But the minute the team doesn't hit its numbers, everyone starts pointing fingers at one another." Senior management needs to create a climate in which each discipline's concerns are heard, and manage accountability without indulging in blame. The people involved need to believe that their efforts and careers will be enhanced, not impeded, by cross-functional thinking instead of reflexively advocating on behalf of one's own area of responsibility. It's difficult to do that if the dominant voice on the team is strongly identified with a specific medium or channel.

A channel-neutral partner can help

Many marketers find it useful to bring in a channel-neutral brand development partner, an agency whose role isn't to execute communications projects, but rather to independently develop the strongest possible brand identity. That's the model we use for Guard Dog Brand Development. Because we only do brand development, not execution within specific media, we're able to take a media-agnostic, brand-believing stance. While it's never possible to completely separate message considerations from media considerations may sometimes, an objective posture helps ensure that customer concerns, not team politics, drives brand development.

It's also crucial to have strong support from the top down. Most biomedical brands reflect not only products but also the companies that discover and manufacture them. Each is a cog in a corporate brand machine. If top management has a vision for the company's brand that's inconsistent with the direction the marketing team is taking, the sooner corrective action is taken, the better. Top management can play a tremendous role in creating a culture that supports integrated branding—as long as the brand director takes the steps needed to bring them in.

Indeed, silo-busting brand directors have to play a complex role as the ringmaster of their brand's individual circus. They, along with their brand development agency partner, need to negotiate adroitly with superiors, peers, and subordinates, articulating to each what the best interests of the brand are, and hearing from each how their own interests can be advanced at the same time. Diplomacy, tact, and stellar communication skills are key qualifications for the job.

It's well worth the effort. When your brands are developed in this silo-busting, cross-disciplinary way, you're doing more than just ensuring that your brand is presented to audiences effectively and consistently across communications channels. You've also taken strong steps to communicate your brand's image and your vision throughout your team and your company. And you've created a durable foundation for your brand that will reflect well on you long after the team has moved on.



This article has been featured in the 3Q 2009 issue of *Next Generation Pharmaceuticals* (www.ngpharma.com)

Improving business strategy starts with improving brand development

For a brand to yield maximum benefit, its identity must be developed as a high-level strategy supporting business-wide goals—and the process needs to begin as soon as there is a molecule or medical device technology to talk about.

Guard Dog Brand Development® (GDBD) blends brand strategy with strategic brand design to create the consistent, cohesive, and relevant images that drive awareness, valuation, and growth of brands in the pharmaceutical/life sciences/device industries starting as early as Phase II.

To start improving brand development at your company, please contact Camille DeSantis at 212.529.0292 or email cdesantis@GuardDogBD.com

