

Social engagement

We must get to grips with social media, says **Natalia McDonagh** of Cornelius

Opinions on social media (i.e. Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, LiveJournal, Google+, etc.) continue to divide industry. For every opponent who views it with fear and loathing, there seems to be a corresponding addict proclaiming that "What you say is less important than the fact that you are saying it".

Social media has certainly become a recognised method of business promotion. Companies in the B2C space have been successfully using it for a while, but the B2B market - and the chemicals industry in particular - is yet to properly follow suit. Countless studies have documented successes by B2B companies driving results in social media.

Differentiating your company, getting to the decision maker, "cutting through the noise" and generating leads are certainly primary targets for a B2B business. This is where social media can provide the cutting edge to a company's business development and marketing strategy. Some statistics claim that in five years' time Facebook could dominate the web, providing cost-effective opportunities to build relationships with customers and suppliers on an individual level, while engaging with potential employees, something which is of huge importance in the mature chemicals industry.

Back in 2011, it took us a few months of rigorous research and planning before I, as group marketing manager, felt confident to recommend to the Cornelius board that we engage in social media. However, I believe it is paramount to focus your social media strategy and have clear objectives.

Cornelius's strategy here is threefold: to communicate the cornerstones of the brand and those of our principals, our corporate social responsibility activities and new added value concepts; to engage customers, principals and industry media on developments within their industry, discussing latest product launches and providing regulatory updates; and, search engine optimisation. Social media is thus considered within the full cross-channel communication mix.

It is difficult to put a financial value on social media activity. The indicators we use are exposure, engagement and conversion. By regularly monitoring the effectiveness of various social platforms and amending the ways we communicate on the web, we achieved growing number of followers from relevant industry segments, while click-through rates to our websites saw a 27% increase in 2012 - a tangible benefit that can be traced to sales generation.

Another benefit of working this platform is increased interaction with media, reaching editors and journalists in the form of Real Simple Syndication for possible participation in an editorial. There is the question of resources to address when planning to optimise your social media presence. Regular - preferably daily - postings are required, more frequent in the case of Twitter.

Striking the balance in terms of employee access to the company's social media feeds or managing them singlehandedly is no mean feat. At Cornelius, we strongly believe in engaging the staff in marketing policy, while protection of the brand is vital for any business - the



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media is awash with stories on world-leading brands being damaged by a single ill thought-out tweet.

I personally would advocate restricting the access to corporate accounts to a few marketing professionals only. Being a director does not automatically make a good fit for managing the company Twitter account! You can then work with the staff's social media accounts, with their permission, keeping the engagement levels high and generating interesting content.

Some companies ban their employees from using Twitter, while employment tribunals increasingly see

cases for unfair dismissal after a dubious tweet. Cornelius runs regular workshops on social media and our policy handbook details guidelines on do's and don'ts when mentioning the company's name in personal accounts.

Which platforms a company should engage in is a difficult question. We have decided to limit the networks we participate in by geographical market. In the UK, we have been developing Twitter and now have five different accounts: @CorneliusGroup, plus @CorneliusInd, @CorneliusFood and @CorneliusCos for discussions on specific applications in chemical market segments.

Twitter is also popular in France - hence the @CorneliusFrance Twitter account. In Poland Facebook is the preferred choice in the B2B market, hence Cornelius Polska on Facebook. Interestingly, the first social media we engaged in was micro-blogging - Cornelius CEO Neville Prior's was launched in 2010 and continues to be a strong part of our social media strategy.

The majority of our employees globally are on LinkedIn, a fantastic tool for developing business relationships. Again, LinkedIn must be integrated with everything else the company is doing to generate results. In my view, LinkedIn currently provides somewhat limited opportunities to promote a company but our employees have found it useful on an individual level to develop relationships, open doors and identify new business.

Youtube is also a powerful medium. We have been posting videos there demonstrating the functional benefits of the products we supply and have used these videos within our coordinated promotion alongside other methods, such as e-marketing. Beyond this, I personally am not yet convinced about dedicating more resources here, but who knows - perhaps in a few months' time Youtube would form the centre of our marketing mix?

I believe social media can - and should - be used actively in our industry. SMEs in the chemicals industry can now compete with larger corporations because they can leverage social media to their advantage through effective engagement and creative content at lower costs. Being kept on your toes is a good thing for the business, surely?

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Editor's note: We will also be relaunching ourselves on Twitter shortly. Follow us on www.twitter.com/specchemonline

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