

Red Bull's Social Media Presence Using Integrated Marketing Communications

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Introduction

A popular slogan or catchy jingle often times can be what sets a company apart from another; it can also be an extremely beneficial marketing tool when communicating with its target market. Perhaps one of the most iconic slogans in the market today is “Red Bull Gives You Wings,” a campaign started by a young Austrian entrepreneur, Dietrich Mateschitz, in the mid 1980s. Red Bull was one of the first energy drinks to be widely accepted and prominently preferred, it was unlike any other drink on the shelves. The slogan is reflected through the company’s every move such as promoting and sponsoring dangerous extreme sports events on all marketing platforms. “...Red Bull has maintained consistency in its marketing and communications strategy. In Mateschitz’s words, Red Bull has been ‘speaking in the same tone of voice’ since its launch in 1987” (Pangarkar & Agarwal). Red Bull’s IMC practices puts them on a platform that many other companies admire, strive for, and even base their practices off of.

In today’s modernistic culture, social media and smartphones are the core of entertainment with convenience at the command of our fingertips. To stay relevant in a fast pace society, companies have to have a strong social media presence or they will be lost in the midst of the clutter that consumes our timelines. Yet again, Red Bull’s social media practices are admired, strong, and powerful. One of the most influential and used social media platform is Facebook, with over 1.23 billion users as of 2013, its reach is unmatched by any other site (Protalinski). Red Bull has found success in posting videos of sponsored athletes performing in high risk activities such as bungee jumping, bmx biking, and paragliding gaining anywhere from 1,400 to 20,000 likes. These videos show the athlete living out the slogan the company has worked so hard to keep alive and relevant keeping the slogan on the top of consumer’s minds while unconsciously scrolling through Facebook.

Secondary Research on IMC

Consumers’ today are constantly forming a personal opinion about a company or brand they have an encounter with. Their perception of a company or brand is due to a combination of messages they receive or an interactive encounter they may have had. This is important for companies because customers are at the center of every organization. Companies want to ensure they are sending their customers a consistent message, doing this by adopting an Integrated Marketing Communication approach. According to Don Schultz of Northwestern University, integrated marketing communication (IMC) is defined as, “A strategic business process used to develop, execute, and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communications programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects, employees, associates, and other targeted relevant external and internal audiences. The goal is to both generate short-term financial returns and build long-term brand and shareholder value” (Belch).

Evolving from the previous idea of companies treating marketing and promotional elements as practically separate activities, this approach is designed to help a company develop or coordinate promotional tools with other marketing activities to communicate an ongoing, consistent message to their customers. By developing a centralized messaging function they ensure all aspects of the company are communicating a common theme and position within the marketplace (Belch). Companies adopt this perspective of integrated marketing communications because it helps regulate and coordinate their marketing communication programs to ensure they are sending customers a consistent message about the company or brand while also identifying the most appropriate and effective method for communicating and building relationships with customers.

Integrated marketing communication has also grown due to the overall change in the market environment, in specific regards to consumers, technology and media consumption behavior. Before this change, reaching consumers was fairly easy and could be done by running advertisements in mass media (Belch). There has been a shift from “traditional” media into more narrowly targeted forms of entertainment making it tough for a company to build a brand name. The increase in media narrowing down to a more targeted media has caused a fragmentation in media. This has increased the amount of money being spent on social media (Blech). When there were less options, there was a higher chance of more consumers seeing an ad. Now the options have increased, the advertisements have also increased and consumers are being less responsive and more skeptical about traditional advertising. So, if a company can get a consistent message through each communication outlet, consumers will be more likely to remember the advertisement or product.

Companies understand the importance of combining the different communication functions rather than leaving them to operate by themselves. This new role is to help blend a customer-focus throughout all functions in a business, ensuring all employees understand their role in satisfying customers. This is why the integrated marketing communication approach is being adopted by both large and small companies. A company can develop an integrated marketing communication strategy by examining and combining various promotional-mix elements. Then, they can balance the strengths and weaknesses with one another to propose an effective communication program (Belch).

Secondary Research on Facebook

Facebook is one of the top communication platforms used by businesses in the world. Dewey wrote an article titled “Almost as many people use Facebook as live in the entire country of China” for the Washington Post; China is the most populous country in the world and this may be why businesses are using Facebook to promote their products (Dewey). With over 1.23 billion monthly active users, Facebook has become a powerful player in the social media world.

Facebook collects excessive amounts of data that companies can use to learn more about their target audience and reach members free of cost or through direct campaigns. They have

more information about a specific target audience than any other media source. Facebook has access to demographic information all the way down to your location giving businesses the advantage of advertising directly to members of their target market who are close to them (“The Power of Facebook Advertising”). Their database information helps create advertisements specific to users based on past pages they have viewed or liked. Based on similar information Facebook can then create a lookalike audience and advertise to them (“The Power of Facebook Advertising”). If these lookalike audiences interact with these ads they will increase traffic on that site. Companies appreciate Facebook and all it has to offer because it gives them feedback about the demographics that are responding to their ads.

Current Practitioner Findings

Red Bull originally didn't use traditional media at all, it was rejected at first. They started off by using experimental efforts to get the product out to the consumers (Hembree). As the co-founder Dietrich Mateschitz stated, “We don't bring the product to the consumer, we bring the consumer to the product” (Praet). They started by giving away free cases of Red Bull to college students. The students then threw their own party, handing out Red Bull to anyone and everyone. The students turned into Red Bull's walking billboard. This direct marketing plan cost the marketers next to nothing and turned Red Bull into a staple item at bars and parties around the world.

With using this direct marketing, Red Bull's slogan became very recognizable and has proven to be a selling point for many consumers. Red Bull gives its consumers the “wings” to chase the crazy extreme sports they daydream of while stuck in the office, get motivated for a busy day, or be alongside them while cramming for an exam the next day. The slogan “Red Bull Gives You Wings” has been used for years and is now an iconic integrating marketing communication practice that others admire and look up to. Red Bull uses their success of the slogan on their social media sites as well. With a very strong presence on most platform, Facebook has proven to be the most interactive and visually appealing form.

According to The Next Web, in 2014 Facebook has an astonishing “1.23 billion monthly active users,” up from 800 million in September 2011. Facebook has an incredible ability to reach a large mass market at little cost to the company. Red Bull's page has over 46 million likes or subscribers who are very interactive with all of the company's posts. The abundance of subscribers vary, but most are young college students male and female, a target market that Red Bull does an excellent job speaking to. Millennials are often intrigued by the extreme sports competitions Red Bull presents like the Red Bull Knockout 2016, a motocross competition, which the company does a lot of promotion for on their Facebook Page. A large portion of their posts can be credited to a video sported by a short quirky caption promoting these events or their top athletes living out how Red Bull gives them wings.

An average post will gain anywhere from 1,400, 12,000, to 20,000 likes depending on the type of post it is. Red Bull advertises many videos of athletes doing various ultimate activities

promoted on Red Bull TV, all showing how these athletes are using their product and how it gives them wings. The videos are entertaining and are incredibly detailed. One could easily feel as though they are at the event and watching these athletes fly. The creativity and all of the attention the producers employ while compiling one of these videos is truly what sets them apart from other companies. Most posts will also get an average of 2,000+ shares, which in turn could be seen as free marketing for the company. Other Facebook users will then see the post and have potential to Like Red Bull's page, when they do, they engage and give relevance to the popular slogan yet again.

Often times on their page you may not see a video, image, or post of an athlete with the product in hand, but rather the athlete living out the slogan in all it does. "Red Bull concentrates on their values and beliefs as a brand – they are not selling a product but they are selling an energetic and active way of life that people want to follow and be involved in" (LinkHumans). This can be seen as unorthodox and even silly to others but has proven to be extremely successful. Just seeing a Red Bull can in a vending machine, one unconsciously thinks of the popular slogan and how the product will help them achieve whatever they have set out to do. Red Bull not only is an energy drink, but a lifestyle.

One aspect Red Bull puts a lot of focus on is their response rate. On Facebook the brand will generally take a few hours to respond to a user's comment. But, nevertheless address those who may have questions, or those who are simply complimenting the post. However, they do excel in this area on another popular social media platform, Twitter. Just by taking a scroll on Red Bull's Twitter page, you see that the timeline is full of responses to users. Not all responses are due to negative comments by users, but purely positive feedback to those consuming their product. This is something that sets the company apart from others. It is clear that they care about how the product, brand, and integrating marketing communication campaign is being seen by the community.

Red Bull has a very strong presence on social media and engages thousands of users every day. One of their most followed platforms is Facebook by no coincidence. The posts are interactive, appealing, and entertaining due to the fact that they live out "Red Bull Gives You Wings." With over 1 billion users on Facebook, companies must do something to set themselves apart from one another. Red Bull does a fantastic job setting themselves apart from everyone else. Such iconic and recognizable slogans don't come around often, however, Red Bull's integrated marketing communication is felt in every post on all social media platforms.

Along with social media, Red Bull utilizes traditional mass-media advertising through TV, magazine, and banner ads to communicate information, promote awareness, and continue building a brand image. The Red Bulletin is an international men's active lifestyle magazine' it features breathtaking global content of sports, music, culture, and much more. Their most recent primetime TV commercial features some of the most breathtaking action sports clips and has been seen by over two million people on Youtube. They also use out of the box ideas to push the boundaries of marketing, some call it guerilla marketing, but if executed well can push a company to new heights. An example is when they sent Felix Baumgartner to do the Red Bull

Stratos Space Jump, which has over forty-one million views on Youtube. This mission to the edge of space now has its own website called Red Bull Stratos. There you can find lots of different information about the mission and Felix himself.

Aside from Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube, they also take advantage of Instagram to let consumers share their “Red Bull Point of You” (Hembree). Just last year they started using Snapchat to let Red Bull fans have a behind the scenes look at different sporting and entertainment events. Professional sports men and women get access to Red Bull’s account and post ten second videos of what they are doing at their sporting event. The consumers get to see the fun side and serious side of what the professionals do for a living. This idea is also carried through Red Bull’s website and Red Bull TV, where you can watch on demand videos of sports, music, culture, and more. Red Bull knows how to have fun while still communicating a consistent message across all social media and sharing their product to the consumer.

Conclusion

Red Bull was a pioneer in the energy drink business thirty years ago. According to Forbes, they are now the seventy-fourth most valuable brand in the world. They have a brand value of 7.9 billion (Forbes). It is hard for a lot of companies to be on all social media platforms. Red Bull does a good job of staying up on all their platforms between Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and Youtube. Not only does Red Bull do an amazing job of using all of their platforms productively but they are implementing IMC principles by communicating the same message throughout them all. Whether they are on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Red Bull is sending the same message, the same logo, the same jingle, the same idea through all platforms and successfully using IMC.

This variation in social media platforms Red Bull uses gives them a bigger target audience for their product and having a strong social media presence is essential in the fast pace culture we live in today, and Red Bull does just that. With over 46 million likes on Facebook, Red Bull keeps their iconic slogan, “Red Bull Gives You Wings” relevant and at the top of consumer’s mind. Their integrated marketing communications have been successful over the years because each post lives out the slogan. Whether it is a video of a sponsored athlete engaging in high risk sports or an actual consumer showing how they demonstrate the extreme lifestyle that the company has worked so hard to achieve.

If social media continues to grow as it is today, Red Bull will have to keep in mind guidelines and templates for their platforms. They have to use integrating marketing communication strategies to make sure that all content that is posted has a cohesive image and message worldwide. If they continue to build upon the interactive social media presence they currently inhabit, their success will be unmatched. If social media continues to grow, Red Bull will not only give you wings, but it will continue to spread its wings and fly to bigger and better heights.

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