

SMALL BUSINESS

BIG ENGAGEMENT

FROM THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL IMPACT COMMUNICATION

trends & best practices in
using social media to tell the
small business CSR story

Like • Comment • Share

Social media has emerged as an ideal platform for sharing a corporate responsibility story with stakeholders. It's authentic. It's continuous. It's targeted. It's interactive. But companies big and small have yet to fully embrace social tools and integrate them into their CSR communications mix. In a recent study of 287 leaders in corporate sustainability, only 41 percent use social media to share CSR accomplishments and impact, and even fewer (23%) have dedicated social media channels for sustainability or CSR.ⁱ

Among companies who “get it,” though, some interesting trends are emerging.

- Video use in communicating about CSR initiatives jumped from 35% in 2009 to 60%.
- 54% of companies encourage interactivity by including educational tools on their sustainability websites.
- 22% look to crowdsourcing for ideas, by including ways for consumers to suggest ideas on their websites.
- Corporate CSR/sustainability blogs are now the norm; two-thirds use this channel.
- 42% embed sharing options into their online CSR reports.ⁱⁱ

Clearly, opportunities for companies to inform, engage and activate stakeholders around their CSR initiatives and issue areas continue to increase as understanding and usage of social channels becomes more sophisticated. At the large company level, resources and staff time can be funneled into figuring out the best way proceed.

But what about small businesses? We know that CSR can look a lot different in small businesses. According to a 2009 survey by the Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship, small businesses define corporate citizenship primarily as operating with ethical business practices (91% of those surveyed), and valuing employees and treating them well (81%)—in other words, more internally focused. Things like employee volunteerism, protecting the environment, and responding to community/interest groups regarding issues they care about—all fairly commonplace in the large company CSR vernacular—fall much lower on the list.ⁱⁱⁱ

Underlying these focus areas are distinct motivations. For small businesses, the main drivers of corporate citizenship are that it fits with company traditions and values (67% of small businesses surveyed), and that it improves reputation or image (66%). Significantly fewer small businesses report that it's a part of overall business strategy (51%, vs. 71% of large corporations).^{iv} That's not to say that they don't recognize the value in corporate responsibility or community involvement as strategies in building stronger relationships with clients, employees or the community—their approach is more of an “it's just the way we've always done

60%

The percentage of companies using video in communicating about CSR initiatives, up from 35% in 2009.

42%

The percentage embedding sharing options into their online CSR reports

54%

The percentage of companies encouraging interactivity by including educational tools on their sustainability websites.

1 in 5

The number of companies using crowd-sourcing for ideas by including ways for consumers to suggest ideas on their websites.

2/3

The number of companies using corporate CSR or sustainability blogs

http://www.sustainablebrands.com/research/sustainability_current_trends_confluence_social_media

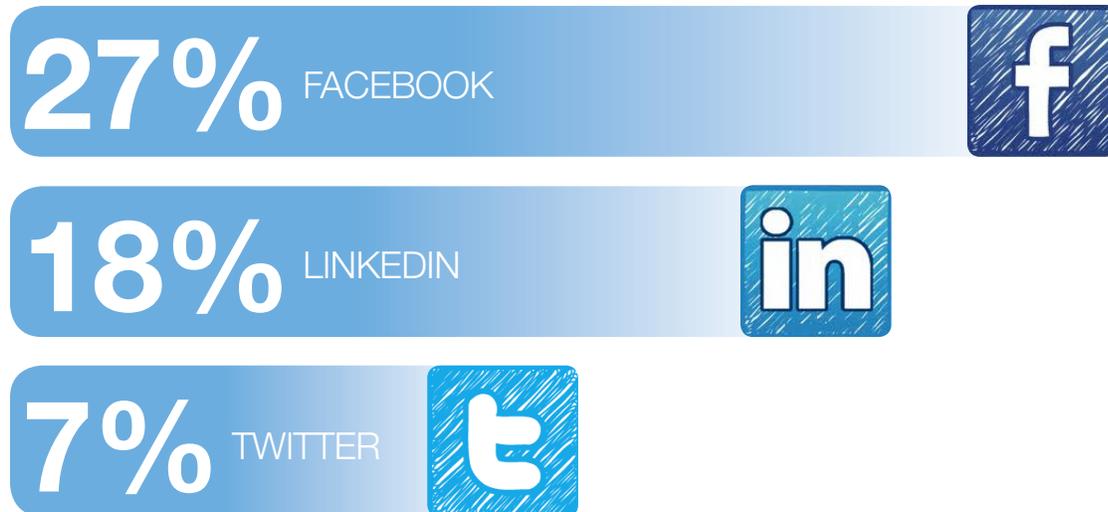
business.” And these differences in motivation and implementation translate to differences in how CSR is communicated among small businesses.

We also know that small businesses have different adoption rates of social media. Despite varying levels of skepticism among small businesses as to the effectiveness of social media (and the return on time and resources invested), usage levels are on the rise. Between 2009 and 2010, social media adoption by small businesses doubled.^v A third of small businesses planned to increase their social media spend this year, and a social media expert ranked second on the list of desirable new hires among companies.^{vi, vii}

But is all this activity in joining platforms and creating profiles paying off? Nearly half of small businesses report success in connecting with new customers via social media (compared to just 28% of larger companies).^{viii} They report upticks in customer recommendations, traffic to websites, and sales leads. Yet only a third of companies report spending more than 11 hours per week on social media activities.^{ix}

SOCIAL ADOPTION

THE MOST POPULAR CHANNELS SMALL BUSINESSES ARE USING TO ENGAGE WITH STAKEHOLDERS



SOURCE: <http://blog.crowdspring.com/2011/09/small-business-social-media-infographic/>

What we don't know, and what we set out to explore in this study, is how small businesses are using social media to tell the stories of their involvement in the community. What tools are working? What processes enable the biggest return on investment? How are they able to communicate about what they're doing in the community in a way that resonates with stakeholders? And is social media an important part of this?

To find out some answers to these questions, we conducted in-depth interviews with individuals at 12 small to medium-sized businesses in the Greater Washington, D.C., region in late 2011. Combined with audits of their websites and social media channels, as well as available data and statistics from previously available studies, we were able to identify trends in how small businesses are thinking about social media, CSR and the intersection of the two. Using some of the examples we saw among the small businesses interviewed, we also were able to develop some best practices that will guide other small businesses in incorporating social media into their CSR storytelling mixes.

As you'll see in the research, questions abound as to how to best use the available tools in a way that meets the resource and time constraints of small businesses. But we hope that we've offered perspectives, viewpoints and suggestions that will make navigating the ever-evolving realm of social media more manageable for small businesses looking to engage employees, customers, clients and partners in the meaningful and impactful work they're doing in the communities in which they operate.



1: The Growing CSR Communications Gap

2: Content Creation

3: 'Free' Tools Aren't Really Free

4: Size Matters

5: Segmenting Social and Non-Social

FIVE TRENDS

IN SMEs, CSR AND SOCIAL MEDIA

“You can ruin a good thing by promoting it too much.” – Jennifer Disharoon, Reznick Group

1 THE GROWING CSR COMMUNICATIONS GAP

AND WHAT COMPANIES ARE DOING ABOUT IT

To communicate or not to communicate? Companies large and small continue to struggle with this question when it comes to CSR. Is it bragging? Too self-serving? Or do companies have a responsibility to raise awareness and encourage others to take action?

The small businesses interviewed for this research had relatively uniform concerns and experiences when it comes to sharing their CSR stories.

“We’ve had to come to terms with the idea that it is not bragging to let people know what you’re doing,” says David Campbell, chief operating officer at Washington, D.C.-based technology consultancy Optimal Networks. “People want to know what you’re doing with their dollars. They want to congratulate you and celebrate with you when you do something noteworthy. And they want to know that you’re in a community and part of it.”

Though many small businesses (including those interviewed in this research) readily communicate with their employees about CSR, most do not yet communicate externally. A recent survey revealed that only 30 percent of small businesses actively communicate about CSR initiatives externally (vs. 59% of large businesses).^x A gap most certainly exists between the amount of CSR activity currently being undertaken by small businesses and what they’re willing to talk about.

“I think that there is way more CSR going on than people know,” says Barbara Mullenex, partner at OPX, an architectural design consultancy located in D.C. And in fact, 73 percent of small and medium-sized businesses say that companies do significantly more for their communities than is reflected in public awareness.^{xi}

So why all the reluctance?

Small businesses tend to be more skeptical of CSR communications in general; 59 percent agreed that many companies may communicate but lack a true commitment to CSR.^{xii} So perhaps they are wary of opening themselves up to similar criticism by their stakeholders?

“There is nothing that is more quickly discovered as disingenuous than false philanthropy,” says Mullenex, who is also one of the founding partners of Companies for Causes, a philanthropic coalition of local CEOs. “It’s totally cool with me to say ‘we’ve decided to give away

two percent of our profits' and do it in a very cold, crass way. You just have to be honest about it. You can't say 'this is employee-driven, values-based, this is who we are' — and then exploit it."

Fear of being seen as "exploiting" their good deeds seems to permeate much of the current communications thinking in small businesses.

"We ride a fine line between exploiting our corporate social responsibility and making sure that if we have something important to say about it that we do," says Sharon Grevious, business analyst in marketing and communications at Acuity, Inc.

Rachel Platt, human resources director at Reznick Group, an accounting, tax and business advisory firm, echoes this sentiment. "We want people to know that it's important to us; we want people to know that we're not doing it because we want them to know we're doing it."

Other small businesses may prefer to play the "strong but silent" leader card, preferring to let their actions speak for themselves.

"We're in the business to lead by example and to do the right thing," says Potomac Pizza founder and president Adam Greenberg. "We don't do it because we want everyone to pat us on the backs; we want to be a leader."

But small businesses that are already walking the walk can significantly amplify their impact if they're also willing to talk the talk. It's a matter of shifting how they think about communications and being more strategic about the messages they share. It's less about "tooting your own horn," and more about encouraging stakeholders to engage in conversation around important issues.^{xiii} Several of the organizations researched here have already adopted this mindset.

"You have a responsibility to communicate what you're doing so that other people know it's out there and want to emulate your organization in a good way," says Nancy Goldbranson, practice administrator at the Virginia Spine Institute.

Honest Tea, a small company-turned big company when it was acquired by Coca-Cola last year, is living proof that communicating about CSR can impact even the heaviest of industry heavyweights. "When you can prove that this model works, the bigger companies take notice and if they can start also shifting toward healthier options then you've created this change in the American diet," says Kelly Cardamone, Communi-tea Relations at Honest Tea.

For a majority of small businesses interviewed, the types of things they do in the community are just a part of who they are and how they operate naturally within their values. And a communications strategy should be an extension of that — not segmented or separated into CSR and non-CSR messaging.

“Businesses should include [CSR communications] into their existing way of communicating about their business,” says Catherine Keller of the U.S. Chamber’s Business Civic Leadership Center (BCLC). “Whatever they’re doing to let people know their business is there, add the community investment as part of that. The best way to be taken seriously and to let people know that it comes from a place of values is not to segment it.”

Acuity, Inc., a management and technology consultancy in Herndon, Va. subscribes to this practice. “Our messaging in terms of corporate responsibility is just seamlessly woven into what it is we talk about, because it’s a part of who we are,” Sharon Grevious says.

TWEETS THAT RESONATE

HOW TO CRAFT MESSAGES THAT AVOID THE ‘SELF-SERVING’ TRAP



PLAY UP YOUR PARTNERS

Honest Tea regularly promotes its partners when talking about CSR initiatives on social media. Rather than posting the number of bottles of tea or amount of money donated to a particular event, former PR manager Samme Menke says that they’ll encourage people to attend the event and highlight the organization hosting it. Why? “Because they’re so much larger than us just serving our drink there.”



TRY A TAG-TEAM APPROACH

Ask partners to do the talking for you—or at least, be an equal participant in the conversation. Together, you can say “this is something we’re very proud of. This is something we’ve accomplished together. We don’t deserve all the credit, nor do we want to take all the credit,” suggests Catherine Keller of the BCLC.



CHANGE THE VOICE

Rather than share the company’s perspective on the good things you’ve done, why not share the perspectives of the people who have benefitted? “You could go interview some of the people at a local organization and have them tell the story of how great it is that you made this investment,” says Colin Moffett, senior vice president of digital strategy at Weber Shandwick. “It’s ten times more authentic and compelling when it comes from that perspective and not from yours.”

“We used to, from a PR perspective, tee up the story so that other people could tell it. Now, we have to tell the story and hope that others tell it as well. You have to tell your own story.” – Colin Moffett, Weber Shandwick



2 CONTENT CREATION

WHO NEEDS REPORTERS ANYWAY?

The explosion of owned media channels available to even the smallest of organizations today means that the stories you can share are no longer dictated by someone else’s editorial calendar or beat. Photos, videos, blog posts, status updates, polls, podcasts—content comes in many shapes and sizes, and organizations are becoming more proactive in producing their own. (The downside—the time it takes to create this compelling content—is explored in Trend 3 below.)

“We’re doing a lot in social media with the use of video and imagery,” says Erin Orr, marketing director of Virginia Spine Institute. “We’ve gotten away from press releases. We’ve made connections through social media that have allowed us to circumvent that formal process.”

ACUITY @my_acuity
Acuity, Inc.
@VanessaSmall We first met you back in June via this story: wapo.st/mNj2Tk. Can we reconnect to share more of @my_acuity’s #csr?
16 Nov via web

Creating and publishing content is both an offensive and a defensive strategy to the small businesses interviewed.

“Heaven forbid that we’re ever in an accident on the road or something like that,” says Steve Tripp, marketing manager of Chaney Enterprises, a concrete supplier in Waldorf, Md. “A reporter or member of the community would just start poring through everything that’s out there, and it’s really incumbent on us to make sure that everything that’s out there tells our story when the story needs to be told.”



IF YOU BLOG IT, THEY WILL COME

A welcome side effect of creating your own content is that reporters will come to you, rather than the other way around, according to several of the businesses interviewed.

“Some of our patients’ stories have attracted different media outlets that I personally could not have reached without those tools,” says Erin Orr. “It’s allowed us to even the playing field.”

A recent study showed that nearly half the journalists surveyed (47%) looked to Twitter to find sources; 35 percent utilized Facebook, and 42 percent researched leads on blog posts from unfamiliar bloggers.^{xiv} Clearly, you never know who may be reading your content—and how or when that content might be used or cited.

Just ask Aronson Consulting. Aronson's Chief Administrative Officer Stephen White says he hasn't received a call from a reporter in 12 months—yet the company has appeared in everything from CNN, to the Huffington Post, to the Washington Business Journal. “They're getting all that information because they went to our blogs and social media pages, not because I issued the proverbial press release on PR Newswire,” he says. “It's interesting to see how quickly communication has changed.”

“If you're not spending a lot of time on it, you're not really getting the ‘bang’ out of it.” – David Campbell, Optimal Networks



3 ‘FREE’ TOOLS AREN'T REALLY FREE

REALITIES OF CONTINUOUS ENGAGEMENT

The real barrier when it comes to adopting social media, according to the small businesses interviewed, is time. As it turns out, low-cost social media tools are actually pretty costly in terms of the time that must be invested to maintain them. And small businesses are struggling to balance the investment with anticipated outcomes.

“Communications—including social media and external communications, like press releases—take time,” says Sharon Grevious of Acuity. “There are no quick wins when you're communicating for a small company because you've really got to test things out to find out what is going to resonate with who and where and in what fashion, and certainly what your senior leadership has the appetite for.”

Unlike a static CR report, which generally tends to be an annual (albeit, onerous) undertaking, social media requires constant monitoring and engagement throughout the year.

“Engagement is an ongoing thing,” explains Colin Moffett of Weber Shandwick. “Marketing has always been an episodic thing, so you do a big campaign, and you regroup. You do a big event, you regroup. And now you have to find ways of engaging people on a daily basis and that's a big shift for people—and a big ask.”

Erin Orr of the Virginia Spine Institute explains that building relationships takes more than just the click of a button. “It's searching, it's monitoring—not just your competition and the other

things out there, but it's about yourself and potential connections.”

Add to the time it takes to monitor and engage with existing users one more important piece: the time it takes to evaluate and figure out how to use new platforms (or learn how to adapt to changes in existing platforms, in the case of the new Facebook Timeline format).

“Tumblr, Foursquare—it’s just so much,” says Adam Greenberg of Potomac Pizza. “What’s going to work? What’s going to be here? Where’s the best investment? There are so many different options, so many ways to go. It’s really just mind-boggling.”

How much time is enough? Quite simply, it varies. For a company like Dell, it takes a social media command center that monitors some 22,000 topics around the clock. For others, like Vistaprint (with 140,000 Facebook fans and nearly 18,000 Twitter followers), it takes more like three to four hours for monitoring and engagement.^{xv} For pages with followers in the hundreds or low thousands, some recommend about an hour a day—and this is consistent with the small businesses interviewed.

Hodgson Consulting President and CEO Matt Hodgson’s approach to creating content for social media is one of efficiency. “Use social media, but limit yourself to 30 to 45 minutes a day or an hour,” he advises. “Type up what you want to write in three sentences and put it out there. You don’t have to write a book.”

“tumblr, foursquare—it’s just so much. what’s going to work?...there are so many different options, so many ways to go. it’s really just mind-boggling.”



“A lot of the metrics we’ve used for a long time don’t tell the whole story.” – Colin Moffett, Weber Shandwick

4 SIZE MATTERS

OR DOES IT?

How do you know when you’re being successful on social media? For many organizations, it’s all about the ‘Likes’ or followers. But is this preoccupation on the size of the community ultimately hindering successful engagement?

“We only have 900 [fans] on Facebook, but that’s a start,” Adam Greenberg of Potomac Pizza says. “If we had 5,000 fans it would be that much better, but you’ve got to start somewhere.”

Numbers-wise, there are some interesting benchmarks that should put most small businesses at ease about the sizes of their online networks. On Facebook, if you have more than 100 fans, you’re in the top 65 percent of all users. On Twitter, having 100 followers earns you a spot in the top 7 percent of users.^{xvi}

The question of how big your online communities should be points back to the ultimate question of what you’re using the communities for, and what you’re trying to accomplish.

For Optimal Networks, it’s less about attracting new fans and more about improving relationships with and providing value to the ones they have. “It’s a way to give people who are already friends of Optimal a way to tune in and get better information faster,” says David Campbell. “And for them to let us know what they think, and to communicate back with us.”

For others, it’s about being more targeted and realistic in their expectations of growth. “I don’t care if I come up high in a search engine ranking because I don’t care if someone in California necessarily pulls up our site,” says Steve Tripp of Chaney Enterprises.

Matt Hodgson of Hodgson Consulting echoes this. “I’ve got a 30-person technology company,” he explains. “I can guarantee you that in Idaho there is no conversation going on about me. The conversation is going on about brands, the celebrities, the government, whatever the latest trends are. It’s not going on in the majority of small or medium-sized businesses.”

So how can small businesses maximize their relatively small social followings? Ignore the up-front statistics of page views or the number of friends and followers. Instead, according to Colin Moffett of Weber Shandwick, focus on questions like: Are you getting people to interact with what you’re saying? Are you getting people to spread what you’re saying? Are

you getting people to comment? Are you hearing anecdotal stories, people who walk into your business and say they read about you?

A basic rule of thumb for Facebook—answer any and all posts by fans. An astounding 95 percent of wall posts are not answered by brands.^{xvii} That adds up to a huge missed opportunity for engagement.

“It’s no longer social media; it’s just media.” – Colin Moffett, Weber Shandwick



5 SEGMENTING SOCIAL AND NON-SOCIAL: THE NEED FOR INTEGRATION

For many small businesses, including the ones interviewed in this research, social media tends to be a box that gets checked. Facebook presence? Check. Twitter profile? Check. Blog? Check. It’s about credibility and being present where it’s now expected of you.

“Ten years ago, would you do business with a company that didn’t have a website, that you couldn’t find on Google?” asks Stephen White of Aronson LLC. “Sure. You found it in the Yellow Pages, or your friend told you it was OK. Would you do business with them today? No way.”

But aside from fulfilling expectations, the degree to which these additional tools are integrated into the full communications mix varies widely. Similarly, questions abound as to whether these tools should replace or complement existing channels.

“Would I be better off knocking on two doors a day and saying ‘hi’ than spending half an hour on Facebook?” asks Adam Greenberg of Potomac Pizza. “I have to knock on your door to tell you to friend me on Facebook—so I’m not sure you can have one without the other.”

Matt Hodgson of Hodgson Consulting agrees. “If I get a Tweet on my phone and it has something about volunteerism or a crisis I need to address, am I more likely to react? I don’t know. Maybe. But if someone called me and said ‘Matt, I’ve got a situation, maybe you can help,’ I am likely to react. I still think that messages are sent and received best through personal interactions.”

In short—“you should not replace things that are still working,” says Colin Moffett of Weber Shandwick. But companies—in particular small businesses—still struggle with how best to integrate the online and offline tools available to them, in particular when parsing out which pieces of their CSR story to tell and when.



1: Align with Authenticity

2: Choose Your Channels Wisely

3: Stock Your CSR Content Pantry

4: Know (and Empower) Your Audience

5: Embrace Experimentation

FIVE

BEST PRACTICES

FOR CSR COMMUNICATORS

.....

1 ALIGN WITH AUTHENTICITY

The formula is simple. When your community involvement is an authentic reflection of your values and there's a strategic link to the way you do business, communications are more integrated and authentic and less of an add-on.

A “strategic link.” This is de rigueur among big corporations like IBM, Pepsi, Nestle, Deloitte, Citibank—but what does it mean to small businesses? Many small businesses naturally fall into strategic alignment with causes and local organizations without even realizing it—it's about listening to the needs of the community, and seeing which can be best met with the resources and expertise of the company. Hodgson Consulting, for example, has been a partner of local nonprofit A Wider Circle for several years. Why? According to Matt Hodgson, it's because the types of things A Wider Circle needs most (namely, physical labor in moving and loading furniture or participation in fundraising events like a 5K or softball tournament) are a good match for the company's assets (its predominantly young, male workforce).

But moreover, the variety of ways Hodgson can support A Wider Circle encourages the development of an ongoing, long-term relationship. “Going out and doing a volunteer activity is great for team-building, great for the pizza and T-shirt—but it doesn't make the impact that these nonprofits need,” he says. “Finding an organization to get involved in that has frequent things that you can get involved in or you like getting involved in so that you can sustain that relationship and build it is really where the power comes from.”

.....

HOW TO FIND THAT PERFECT MATCH

- Take stock of your mission, values and assets.
- Don't limit yourself to just those organizations or causes that the CEO or board members have ties to (though they're a great place to start).
- Do your due diligence on any potential nonprofit partner.
- Look for partners you could support in more than one way (financial, in-kind, skilled or unskilled volunteering, board service). This leads to deeper relationships and greater impact.
- Look for a true partner—one who will share in the communication duties, for example.



COURTESY: Virginia Spine Institute

SPOTLIGHT: VIRGINIA SPINE INSTITUTE

Based in Reston, Va., Virginia Spine Institute is the D.C. region’s only medical facility that is solely dedicated to the treatment of spinal disorders. Its purpose, quite simply, is to improve lives. And it has been able to strategically funnel that sense of purpose into the two organizations that it has supported over the past few years—the Spinal Research Foundation on a national level, and Reston Interfaith locally.

“What’s unique about [Reston Interfaith], and I think where we naturally align with them, is they’re about getting people back to the best quality of life that they can have,” explains Nancy Goldbranson. “They take care of people at every stage, whether they’re homeless by providing shelter, assisting them with finding jobs, getting off of addictions or into assisted living, or helping families get back on their feet. It’s about improving our community, and in essence we do the same thing from a medical standpoint.”

VSI takes a natural alignment of missions and values one step further, by being holistic in the types of support it offers Reston Interfaith throughout the year, ranging from running food drives or backpack drives, to preparing brown bag lunches, to financial support. In their own words, it’s a “strategic partnership.” The benefit of this is that it gives them tons of different types of content to post on their social media channels (including a blog, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) throughout the year as each type of support or event occurs.

ANATOMY OF AN AUTHENTIC POST

VSI highlights its partner as an equal, both by calling it that (rather than saying “we donated to” or “we sponsored”), and by linking to reston interfaith’s own facebook page

VSI uses Facebook to share the impacts of its partnership with Reston Interfaith on Facebook. How does authenticity translate when you’re communicating in short status updates? Check out one of VSI’s recent posts to learn some tricks of the trade.



1

We are proud to partner with Reston Interfaith again this year to provide 70 Thanksgiving dinners to families in need! Doing good is what seems best. Doing good also earns you respect. But more than that, it makes you feel good! Thank you to our generous employees for the food donations and dedication to helping others!! Gobble, Gobble!

2

provides a specific data point for further proof

3

thanks employees

4

links it to the season (and has fun doing it!)



5

showcases a great image as visual proof

6

encourages engagement

Like · Comment · Share

👍 5 💬 2 📄 2

“you have a responsibility to communicate what you’re doing so that other people ... want to emulate your organization in a good way.”

.....

2 CHOOSE YOUR CHANNELS WISELY

While many of the organizations interviewed for this research admitted that social media was very much a box that needs to be checked off, or a credential that needs to be furnished, the truth is that not everyone needs to be on every channel. Are your audiences currently using these platforms? And do the channels lend themselves to the type of information and content you want to share, the schedule that you can maintain, and the engagement you're hoping to encourage? If not, you don't need to be there (at least, not yet).

If, in fact, you do need to be on all of them, you should be using them in very different ways.

The obvious solution that most small businesses turn to when faced with having to post content on multiple channels is an auto-linking program (like Hootsuite or Tweetdeck) that allows you to cross-post identical content on Facebook and Twitter simultaneously. But if you go this route, you're almost certainly sacrificing engagement for the time it takes to tailor your status update for one of the other channels. Studies have shown that auto-posting to Facebook decreases likes and comments by as much as 70%.^{xviii}

"We've learned to make our content more versatile," says Erin Orr of Virginia Spine Institute. "I'm not a big fan of automation. We like to customize a lot of the stuff, so we're not going to put it up the same way on all the channels." In Orr's experience, Twitter has been better for media contacts, while YouTube and Facebook have been where they've been able to connect with more patients—so they'll make minor tweaks in the way they share content so that it will resonate more with the particular audience that frequents that channel.

The channels themselves, whether it's a blog, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or others, have certain quirks that help dictate what kind of content and format works best. For example, the average "half-life" of a link on Facebook is 3.2 hours, while on Twitter it's 2.8 hours—which means posting content on Facebook gives you an extra 24 minutes of potential face time.^{xix}

.....

MINOR CHANGES, MAJOR IMPACT

Honest Tea has been able to boil down some of the differences of the platforms and translate this into a content strategy for each.

"Facebook is a great place to have an open dialogue," explains Samme Menke, former PR manager at Honest Tea. "Consumers interact with other consumers. Twitter doesn't seem to

be the best place to have a conversation, but it's a good place to put out Seth's blog. People don't want to click on links on Facebook; they don't want to be taken away. But on Twitter, people expect to be taken away."

Can you spot the differences?



Honest Tea

Volunteering is very important to us at Honest Tea. Multiple times a year - including today - we volunteer with City Year, a non-profit organization that brings together young people for a year of community service. Additionally, since 2001 a portion of each sale of Community Green, our green tea with Maltese Orang, goes to City Year. Are you doing any volunteering today?



Wall Photos

Like · Comment · January 16 at 3:29pm via Publisher

24 people like this.



Pat Childers volunteering with trailsforyouth.org. The kids are drinking lots of yummy honest juices/puches that you generously donate to them!

January 16 at 3:59pm · Like



Molly Perry Is there any way I can get involved with Volunteering with Honest Tea?

January 16 at 6:06pm · Like

“people don't want to click on links on facebook; they don't want to be taken away. but on twitter, people expect to be taken away.”



HonestTea Honest Tea



Since 2001, a % of Community Green Tea sales go 2 @CityYear, an NGO where volunteers do a yr of community service.

yfrog.com/h8wletkj

16 Jan



Some of them can be chalked up to the shorthand and slang common to Twitter, but you'll also notice that the Facebook post ends with a question to encourage public engagement and conversation. You could pose a question on Twitter as well, but only you would be able to really track and follow any resulting conversation.

The changes are minor and likely don't take more than a minute or two to tailor (after all—coming up with the content is the hard part!), but they can make a huge difference in terms of engagement and how authentically your message will come across on different channels.

.....

3 STOCK YOUR CSR CONTENT PANTRY

More than 3.5 billion pieces of content are shared each week on Facebook.^{xx} This staggering number includes links, news stories, blog posts, images, videos and more. Today's cluttered content landscape means that small businesses need a consistent plan for what they're going to create, and when and how they're going to share it. "Create" tends to sound arduous, as if it will take a lot of time, energy and resources to develop anything of substance—but the truth is that if you can consistently fill in the gaps between the more substantive CSR storytelling devices (like videos, for example) with quotes, questions, links and other things designed to generate conversation, you'll be well on your way to formulating a content strategy.

Think of your CSR and community involvement content strategy in terms of a pantry. You want to have a fully stocked pantry of staple items that you can pull from and use when you need them; each has a shelf life and will need to be refreshed from time to time. Each will have varying degrees of how useful they are in generating engagement or helping you reach other goals, and of how bandwidth-intensive they are to create. A video, for example, can trigger a lot of engagement in terms of comments, shares and Likes. It has a fairly long shelf life—but it can require a lot of time to plan, film, edit and produce (see graphic).

Think about ways you can combine your staples, too. A videotaped testimonial at an event, for example, is much less bandwidth-intensive—simply grab a digital camera or FlipCam, shoot a one to two-minute clip, and upload. Embed multimedia into your blog posts; post an inspirational photo and quote (and pin it on Pinterest!). Curate partner or supporter Tweets or posts into a blog post of your own, link them to your website, or put together a Storify. The possibilities can go on and on.

These should be your go-to pieces, and once they're in place and your pantry is well stocked, you just need a plan for using them. Aim for consistency. Steve Tripp at Chaney Enterprises uses a spreadsheet to track content options, and moves things up and down in posting priority as new content is generated. Find a system that will keep you on track, whether your goal is once an hour, once a day, or once a week.

"We realized the best thing to do is have a steady stream," Tripp says. "We're a sand and gravel and concrete company, so for our particular business we can commit to once a week and have it not scare us or freak us out." And the self-proclaimed "slow and steady" method seems to be working—Tripp notes that Chaney's Facebook page typically outperforms industry peers, even ones on a national level.

YOUR CSR CONTENT PANTRY

shelf life

bandwidth

engagement

inspirational quotes

that tie to your values or specific initiatives



links to articles on issues you support



links to articles that mention awards/recognition for your efforts



testimonials from partners



photos



videos



data/statistics on an issue you support



data/statistics on your impact in the community



blog posts



questions/polls on issues you support



curated tweets or posts from partners or supporters



.....

4 KNOW (AND EMPOWER) YOUR AUDIENCE

For many small businesses, a key stakeholder group can make up the majority of the audience on any given social media channel: employees. So, intentionally or not, you're equipping your employees to be brand ambassadors through the content you're posting on Facebook, Twitter and other social channels. Why not harness their energies to become your CSR storytellers as well?

How do you do this? Make it as much about them as possible.

- Post pictures and tag them. "Who doesn't like to see photos of themselves doing something that feels good and is for a good cause?" asks Sharon Grevious from Acuity.
- Ask them to contribute their thoughts and words to a blog post, a testimonial, or a quick video quote.
- Ask them to Tweet or post other real-time updates that can be curated into a story later (but just make sure you provide guidelines on professional vs. personal posting).
- Provide regular updates on impact and show appreciation for their role in making it happen.
- Ask them to share! It's easy to underestimate the power of someone sharing on Facebook or Retweeting. It's a simple action that can amplify your story, and the easiest way to empower someone to do this is to ask.

.....

5 EMBRACE EXPERIMENTATION

Fear of failure. It can paralyze small businesses on social media. "What if I only have 10 followers? What if people don't respond to my content? Or worse, what if people respond negatively?"

Thankfully, the risk of negative comments on CSR-related content tends to be relatively small. A recent survey of 50 companies' CSR and sustainability videos showed that only five percent of comments received were negative, while 44 percent were 'very positive.'^{xxi}

According to a recent Sustainable Brands study, "blogs and social media platforms are sur-

prisingly safe, civil places for companies that are willing to engage with them in an authentic manner.”^{xxii}

So why not get out there and try something new on social media? Small businesses generally have the advantage of being more nimble than their larger corporate counterparts, which often have layers of risk assessment and legal departments to navigate.

SPOTLIGHT: HODGSON CONSULTING

Interactive technology and web development firm Hodgson Consulting knows a thing or two about experimentation. It has embraced social media as a tool in encouraging engagement with its community involvement, in a way that’s very much in sync with its overall mission.

“Social media allows us to be a little more creative, a little less stodgy, because it can be immediately updated or immediately changed,” says Matt Hodgson. “We can get feedback immediately. People expect social media to be fluid, and because of that it gives you a little more license—which plays very well into who we are here.”

During the most recent holiday season, the company decided to add philanthropic and technological twists to its traditional holiday card, which is mailed to an audience of clients, prospects and friends of the company. It added a QR code to the mailer that, when scanned by a smart phone, would direct recipients to a website that enabled a donation to long-time Hodgson nonprofit partner A Wider Circle. For each person who scanned the code or visited the site and entered his or her name and company, a \$10 donation was triggered.

“Everything about the card tied in with all of our philosophies,” explains Hodgson. “There was a ‘wow’ factor with the technology, a giving piece which was the main purpose, a great-looking holiday card, and it builds awareness for [A Wider Circle]. It was an extension of everything we’re doing already.”

Adopting a technology like QR codes, and sharing and demonstrating it to clients and prospective clients makes total sense for a web development company like Hodgson. It felt authentic, and because of this it resonated with the recipients. The company received tons of positive feedback on the card, and made a donation of \$260 to A Wider Circle at the end of the year. In this case, the experiment absolutely paid off—for Hodgson, for its stakeholders, and for A Wider Circle.

A TIP OF THE HAT TO YOU
THIS SEASON,
AND WE'D LIKE TO
THANK YOU WITHIN REASON

REDEEM YOUR HOLIDAYS

YOU HAVE HELPED US,
and WE HAVE HELPED YOU.
LET'S BOTH HELP THOSE
WHO NEED HELPING, TOO.





CASE STUDY:

HONEST TEA POLICY

RESPONDING TO ONLINE CRITICS

On January 31, 2012, the Susan G. Komen Foundation announced that it was defunding Planned Parenthood, sparking an outrage among supporters of women's health and reproductive rights. Many took to sites like Facebook to express their opinions, targeting not only the Komen Foundation, but its corporate partners as well. Two days later, Facebook fans of Bethesda, Md.-based beverage company Honest Tea began posting complaints on its wall, threatening to boycott over its support of the Komen Foundation.



One of the risks inherent in sharing your CSR story is that it opens you up to heightened criticism. People may not agree with the cause or organization to which you give your time or money. They may not like the amount you give, or may question your perceived motives. And when you share your story on social media, people who disagree have a public platform on which they can air their grievances—and your response to your naysayers is every bit as public as the criticism itself. In the words of Sharon Grevious of Acuity, Inc., “you can be as detrimental to your reputation as other people might be.”

So how did Honest Tea respond?
The same day the complaints began appearing, the company posted a status update on Facebook

It provided context for its support of a variety of cancer research organizations, and suggested proactive steps it was taking in light of the recent changes to the Komen Foundation’s policies. Fans were overwhelmingly supportive and engaged—171 Likes, and more than 60 comments of constructive conversation (many of which said “thank you, Honest Tea—we support you!”).

Five days later, Honest Tea added an additional comment to the conversation:



Honest Tea’s response was 100 percent aligned with its values. It didn’t delete negative comments or attempt to hide that people were unhappy with its affiliation. It created an opportunity for fans to have a conversation about an important issue and let them know that it was listening to their feedback.



Honest Tea

Honest Tea has been a strong supporter of cancer education and research. We have supported many organizations including the National Foundation for Cancer Research, American Institute for Cancer Research, Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, as well as Susan G. Komen for the Cure. We are in the process of evaluating our 2012 partnerships, including reviewing the recent changes to Susan G. Komen’s policies.

Like · Comment · Share · February 2 at 3:30pm via Publisher ·

170 people like this.

26 shares

- Deborah Snider** This MATTERS to your consumers!
February 2 at 3:33pm · Like · 3
- Gina Iliff** Thank you for the updates, I'm glad more than just your products are honest!
February 2 at 3:35pm · Like · 5
- Tenille Kaus** That is great news!!!
February 2 at 3:36pm · Like · 1
- Valerie Feighner** 2 Big Thumbs Up!!!
February 2 at 3:36pm · Like · 4
- Elise Wilson** Thank you for sharing this info, especially that you will "review the recent changes to Susan G. Komen's policies." It does, indeed, matter to your consumers.
February 2 at 3:39pm · Like · 10
- Melissa Kelley-Windisch** Awesome to hear you support PanCAN! I'd love to see that continue as pancreatic cancer is such a horrible disease!
February 2 at 3:39pm · Like · 4
- Keri Leaman** Thank you for this. I agree with Elise 100%!
February 2 at 3:41pm · Like
- Tiffany Swanson** Thank you, Honest Tea, for having some good sense.
February 2 at 3:43pm · Like · 5
- Kalin Yancy** Thank you so much for "reviewing the recent changes to Susan G. Komen's policies."
February 2 at 3:47pm · Like · 1

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

- Have a policy for responding to comments on your social media channels.
- Post guidelines for your community on what will and won't be allowed (profanity, hate speech, personal attacks on other users, etc.)
- Let conversation happen—don't delete negative comments unless they are in clear violation of your posted guidelines.
- Develop crisis messaging that will be ready to go should negative things ever come to light about your community partners.
- Emphasize that you're listening to their feedback.



Special thanks to the
participating companies
and individuals:

- Acuity Inc.
- Aronson LLC
- BetterWorld Telecom
- Catherine Keller,
Business Civic Leadership Center
- Chaney Enterprises
- Colin Moffett, Weber Shandwick
- Hodgson Consulting
- Honest Tea
- Optimal Networks
- OPX Global
- Potomac Pizza
- Reznick Group
- Soupergirl
- Virginia Spine Institute

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Interviews conducted by Tracey
Wright, Graduate Research Fellow,
and Julie Dixon, Deputy Director of
CSIC.



SOURCES

- i. <http://socialmediainfluence.com/2010/11/16/the-social-media-sustainability-index/>
- ii. http://www.sustainablebrands.com/research/sustainability_current_trends_confluence_social_media
- iii. http://www.hitachifoundation.org/storage/documents/socc_report_2009.pdf
- iv. http://www.hitachifoundation.org/storage/documents/socc_report_2009.pdf
- v. <http://blog.crowdspring.com/2011/09/small-business-social-media-infographic/>
- vi. <http://microbusiness.vistaprint.com/2011/small-business-social-media-statistics/>
- vii. <http://blog.crowdspring.com/2011/09/small-business-social-media-infographic/>
- viii. <http://blog.crowdspring.com/2011/09/small-business-social-media-infographic/>
- ix. <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/social-media-marketing-industry-report-2011/>
- x. http://www.hitachifoundation.org/storage/documents/socc_report_2009.pdf
- xi. http://www.hitachifoundation.org/storage/documents/socc_report_2009.pdf
- xii. http://www.hitachifoundation.org/storage/documents/socc_report_2009.pdf
- xiii. http://www.sustainablebrands.com/research/sustainability_current_trends_confluence_social_media
- xiv. <http://www.dreamgrow.com/how-journalists-use-social-media>
- xv. http://boston.com/business/specials/small_business_blog/2011/09/social_media_mi.html
- xvi. <http://www.sba.gov/community/blogs/guest-blogs/industry-word/10-social-media-benchmark-statistics-how-are-you-doing>
- xvii. http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/social-media-statistics_b17188
- xviii. http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/social-media-statistics_b17188
- xix. http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/social-media-statistics_b17188
- xx. http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/social-media-statistics_b17188
- xxi. http://www.sustainablebrands.com/research/sustainability_current_trends_confluence_social_media
- xxii. http://www.sustainablebrands.com/research/sustainability_current_trends_confluence_social_media

ABOUT THE CENTER

Georgetown University's Center for Social Impact Communication (CSIC) is the nation's leading educational resource on social impact communication. Launched in 2008 and housed in the award-winning Master of Professional Studies program in Public Relations and Corporate Communications, CSIC aims to elevate the discipline by pioneering industry standards in responsible communication practices and by educating and inspiring the professionals who lead the way in creating positive social impact through their work. Learn more at <http://csic.georgetown.edu> and follow on Twitter at @georgetowncsic.

about the author
julie dixon is deputy director
of the center for social impact
communication at
georgetown university

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

School of Continuing Studies

Public Relations and Corporate Communications

CENTER FOR SOCIAL IMPACT COMMUNICATION