

# Dick Maggiore: Brands must be smart about social media strategies

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Businesses churn out more and more messages, but 'engagement' from customers isn't keeping pace. There's only so much an audience can absorb.

By Dick Maggiore Special to The Canton Repository

Businesses churned out three times more messages in the past year, but their prospects and customers didn't pay any more attention to them. Not good.

Messages from businesses come in all shapes and sizes. They range from advertisements in the newspaper to taglines and even to how the phone is answered. Business messages also include the information put out via social media. Social media and other digital messages today increasingly are being referred to as "content."

The social media scene is growing in scope and magnitude every day. Social media are easy to tap and free to use, so it makes sense to use them to put content in front of the buying public. When social media users comment, like or share content, it is known as engagement.

It all sounds so easy. So why is content up threefold while engagement remains flat?

To make things worse, only 5 percent of today's content accounts for 90 percent of the engagement. If all this weren't enough, the cost to produce all this content has swelled, which is exacerbating the lack of return on investment.

In 2016, companies are spending about 12 percent of their marketing budgets on social media. That's double from just a few years ago. Three-quarters of companies are using social media today. It's getting tougher and tougher for our messages — our content — to make it through this glut and get into the minds of our customers.

No one doubts the ability of the advertiser to push out more messages, just the capacity of the audience to take it all in.

Our minds are stingy, and our time is limited.

The dramatic increase in social media spending and content production can be explained in part by hype in the media. Companies seeing, hearing and reading about other companies — especially their competition — using social media feel pressured to keep up.

Indeed, there are good reasons for social media to be part of your company's communications mix. Social media are not only for teenagers. In fact, the fastest growing age demographic is 45 and older.

Further, mobile devices are where we access content most often. When you think social media, think adults and mobile. Social has become our No. 1 activity on the web.

So it is clear: Social media matters to companies and to their customers.

How, then, do we get our brand into that elite 5 percent that's getting all the engagement?

Success in gaining social media engagement requires a balance of technology and marketing expertise. When optimally combined, return on investment rises. Marketing skill combined with technical know-how is how we get a shot at that elite 5 percent.

Due to Facebook's algorithms, for example, we know that those who engage with your posts are more likely to get more of your posts and vice versa.

Increasing engagement with our prospects and customers is the Holy Grail. It isn't about how much content we churn out. It's about relevancy. It's about being meaningful. It's about being entertaining. It's about providing something of value. It's about being just plain useful.

But it's also about one more thing, the single-most powerful concept in marketing: positioning. It is owning the right differentiating idea in the minds of our prospects and customers. The right idea can work like a hot knife cutting through butter. It's meaningful to your customers, and your competition doesn't own the idea. You do.

The overarching strategy is to be sure that your brand's difference, its position, breathes through every possible touch point, graphic, post and more. It's about doing all these things through the filter of your brand's difference.

As with all other communication avenues, it is paramount to differentiate your company, product or service from your competition. Social media is no different in that regard.

Facebook is by no means the only social medium for business. Others to be considered include LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest and Google+. But more isn't necessarily better. It's more important to be really good on one or two social media than bad on many.

It's time to get social right. And that means putting a tight focus on ensuring that your brand's difference and relevance comes through loud and clear every time you publish content.

*Dick Maggiore is president and CEO of **Innis Maggiore**, founded in Canton in 1974 and today the nation's leading positioning agency, building strong brands for companies in competitive markets here and across the country.*