

FIVE THINGS EVERY PRODUCE EXECUTIVE NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA



As social technology moves forward, the produce industry needs to adapt to this evolving trend and turn its brands and businesses into social entities that reach out to broader community. To that end, business managers need to understand five crucial points about social media in order to use it efficiently within their organizations.

1. Balancing gains against risks

Social media offers several business opportunities, including communication, collaboration, communities and collective intelligence opportunities. Each of these business opportunities can be used both externally, between a company and other nodes of the business, such as customers or suppliers, and internally, within a company itself.

Social media also brings risks, such as reputation or security issues. However, social media opportunities far outweigh its risks, thus choosing not to go ahead with social media because of possible risks is a counter-productive strategy. Whole Foods, for example, embraces social media wholeheartedly by leveraging Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram and Google+ to its business advantage.

Not only does Whole Foods have one overarching account for its brand, but also hundreds of social media accounts for every local Whole Foods store. This allows the company to capitalize on each local market and be more relevant to each and every consumer.

2. Aligning social media goals with business goals

Aligning social media goals with the more general business goals is crucial to your social media strategy. Implementing social media without a properly thought-out plan can bring more risks than opportunities, or simply lead the company to waste valuable time. Executives need to develop a sound strategy that will serve to answer business needs rather than simply incorporate Facebook or Twitter into the company's website.

Many produce brands simply add a Facebook icon to their brand's website and think that they are now in the game. Strategy, however, is key, as going enthusiastically in the wrong direction is the biggest trap with social media; thus executives need to make sure the social media project is supported by a clear perspective, one that is along the lines of the company's general business objectives.

3. Actively supporting the project

Implementing social media needs to happen as much at the mana-

gerial level as at the lower levels of the organization. A business will not move forward by simply hiring a social media administrator who does not have proper knowledge of the business, industry and the general vision of the company. Executives need to be actively involved in the social media project by creating a social media vision for the company and supporting social media investment throughout the project's implementation, rather than looking at it from afar.

4. Include training

Developing a social media training program for your employees will serve to create a common language for everyone to communicate with regards to what social media is and what it can achieve for the organization. Secondly, it will help reveal different aspects and issues that may not have previously arisen, which will allow for a more carefully developed social media strategy to take shape.

Preparation is key to both reduce risks and optimize benefits, which social media training answers efficiently. For example, many produce brands have faced recalls. Instead of being open with the public about these recalls, many brands remain silent on their social networks. In the transparency-driven culture we live in, brands need to

address the negative issues as well as the positive. When a recall occurs and leaks in the news, consumers will turn to the brand's social networks for clarification and verification, but a brand that remains silent or, worse, that tries to cover it up, is the brand that cannot be trusted, and thus does not drive consumer loyalty.

5. Thinking about culture

Organizational culture can either be impeding on the use of social technology within your business, or, on the contrary, a constructive catalyst. Organizational culture typically falls between a closed to open continuum, and having a culture at either one of the extremes can be damaging to the company. A closed company culture will not help social media thrive as a strategic tool, and an overly open culture might lead to information leak and company vulnerability.

Organizational culture needs to be open for social media to become a tool for progress, and at the same time, it needs to be within a regulated, defined cultural framework so that social media use is conducive to growth.

These five crucial points will allow produce executives to develop a sound social media plan in order to take their organizations one step ahead of their competitors. Social media is here to stay, so it is important to incorporate it within your produce business now if you do not want to end up lagging behind everyone else tomorrow.

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By Steve Nicholls

Steve Nicholls is a social media expert and the author of *Social Media in Business*