

Andy Latimer:

Today at Bluewater Talks, we're talking about how you can leverage user generated content and brand content to drive sales. Certainly now that we're in the COVID era or the post-COVID era, hopefully in the post-COVID era, where more and more people are starting to recognize the importance of that sticky, sticky content that keeps your customers engaged. With more and more people engaging online, engaging in the digital space, it's never been more important to understand what the potential is of creating relationships with your consumer and your future brand ambassadors by engaging them in user-generated content of their own and the branded content and brand content that you're creating.

Andy Latimer:

Today, joining me to discuss these great things here at Bluewater, We've got a couple of our social media managers here, Stephanie Gill and Amber Craft.

Stephany Gill:

Hello.

Amber Craft:

Hi.

Andy Latimer:

Thank you guys so much for joining me in this unique format where we just get to sit back and talk about the things that obviously we used to talk about. Used to be, we'd talk about it around the water cooler. Now we talk about it on Zoom calls and whatever connected devices that we're playing with. As we all know, things have changed significantly over the last six to nine months, but regardless of that, the situation that we're looking at now and even before COVID, is that how do you create these followings?

Andy Latimer:

We really want to discuss today, how important user-generated content is and how it can be impactful for your brands, as well as how people share it, how they tie in and engage with your content. Especially now, how you can take this type of elements and these type of pieces in your social media platforms and how that becomes the relationship, I guess, you keep with your customer. We've seen great brands do it. I mean, right now, we're in what we believe is the great age of direct consumers, so your engagement that you have with your customers and your potential clients has never been more important today. What are brands missing if they don't integrate brand content and user-generated content into their platforms?

Stephany Gill:

I think that word that you mentioned, relationship, is key in creating user-generated content. It's that connection with real people and the sign that you get it, that you know what they're feeling, that you are able to take that piece of content and communicate the pillars and the messaging of your brand in a digital format. definitely, the relationship piece is key in creating that type of content.

Andy Latimer:

Yeah, I think you're right. It is in the relationship. We saw it with one that we work with, Blackstone griddles, right? When we first started working with them, they kind of developed on a social and digital side of it, mostly paid. As they got more organic and as they got more content they were creating, you started to see more and more user-generated content start to fuel. Their user groups started to pop. The feedback on their own content started pop and it became this brand that had such a rabid following that the more paid we put on top of it, the organic base and the social base of it just grew. I think the connection between that is huge. I always say, look, you can buy as much traffic as you want, you can buy as much as many people as you want coming to engage with your brand, but if you don't have something to sticky, if you don't have any content that's sticky or if they're not fully engaging the brand, are you going to keep them long?

Andy Latimer:

No matter what size of business you're dealing with, this can go from the local restaurant, all the way through the biggest brands. It's asking for the engagement. If you post around your restaurant, "Hey, follow us. Share your meal on our social side of it in all of our social platforms," that engagement starts to create this energy and this feel. That's what makes the authenticity really start to happen. How important is it, the content Amber, how important is that it's authentic, and real and meaningful content as opposed to what seems as contrived, or fake or are overly produced?

Amber Craft:

I think it's one of the most important things because when consumers are out there trying to make a decision between multiple brands and multiple items, especially during the holidays...

Andy Latimer:

It's shopping time.

Amber Craft:

Right, so when you see someone else posts something and they're relatable to you and you get their feedback, it definitely influences you and helps you make your purchasing decisions. I think it's one of the most important thing.

Andy Latimer:

Well, they really become your brand ambassador, right?

Amber Craft:

Yeah.

Andy Latimer:

I think we've seen that with multiple brands as you go through. Those brand advocates or brand ambassadors that suddenly are starting to talk about your product, give you validation. I think from a standpoint of, if you have the right triggers now to turn them to the purchasing environment and turn them to the ability to shop and buy, then that validation is very real. Is there a good time or a bad time when you see organic or user-gen content to give what we would say, that call to action or that trigger that says shop now, buy now? Do you attach buy now buttons to any of your user-gen? I mean, where do you go with it?

Stephany Gill:

Yeah, that's a great question. I would say that it is definitely valid to use UGC in your ads. Of course, you have to ask for permission and go through the proper channels, but seeing ads with real people talking about the product in a way that's relatable and using language that you would use, it's definitely more convincing than a professional or an actor, sometimes, talking about the product because you feel that it is scripted. It's meant to make you buy. However, when you don't feel that pressure, when you feel like you are the one making that decision, then I think brands would be like very surprised to see the results. Personally, I bought something yesterday because of an UGC ad. They're definitely very effective in convincing you that you are making that decision yourself.

Andy Latimer:

You can put a ton of content out there. I mean, you can make content all day for the smallest companies to the biggest companies and only some of it's going to stick and only some of it's going to have that traction. Here's an interesting piece of data from Jukin Media that we looked at, ads featuring UGC garnered 73% more positive comments on social networks than traditional ads. I wouldn't have thought that. I wouldn't have seen that coming because I come from a background. I'm a producer and director. I want my stuff slick, and finished, and beautiful and exactly the way I want it, but why? I mean, why is that the case?

Amber Craft:

I think it's challenging from our perspective as the brand and the producer, being able to let our guard down and accept this kind of content, but it definitely is the case. We see it all the time with our campaigns. The UGC content, it just resonates with people. It makes it more human and relatable and it's what's really working.

Stephany Gill:

I would say just like any other trends we've seen in social media and digital, it might change tomorrow, so don't think that this is going to be the rule forever. However, if it is a trend, if it's something that's working, you don't want to miss out as well so go ahead and test it. It might not be for your brand. It might not feel authentic. The only way to know is to put it out there and see how people react to it.

Andy Latimer:

Well, you got to stay nimble for sure. I mean, I think the other side of this that comes out is sometimes you post something and I'll give you an example of one of the posts we made at one of the restaurants we manage. We posted an oyster that was enormous. It was a joke post. It was like, let me throw this out there, put a disclaimer on the post that said, "Our oysters aren't this big." Kind of the whole thing, but the negative that came out of it was bigger than the positive because the oyster was the size of a hand.

Andy Latimer:

Nobody really wants an oyster that big, but when we first put it out there, we thought, "Well hell, this'll be one of those things that it'll go viral because it's.. It'll get out there and people will share it a lot because it's just an enormous oyster." Nope. They jumped on it. They went super negative on it. How do you deal with things that when you see... Now that was a controlled post by the brand, but when it's UGC content and it's negative UGC content, how do you deal with that and How do you make that a positive marketing message.

Stephany Gill:

Yeah, I can speak to that. I would say that you have to have a plan before that happens, so just like you have to be ready to deal with a crisis before the crisis blows up in your face. Make sure that you have a risk management plan in place that you know who's going to do what when something happens, how they're going to respond, who should they go to? Who's the PR person in case of bigger brands? All of those things need to be in place before anything negative happens.

Amber Craft:

I've also seen a lot of brands actually have, just like we have on the backend, like brand guidelines or UGC guidelines that they have available on their website for a download and for people to view. I think that that'll just help make sure that they cover all the top lines.

Stephany Gill:

Absolutely.

Andy Latimer:

A little more coordinated, a little more guided in the sense of it?

Amber Craft:

Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Andy Latimer:

I think for a lot folks that may be watching this and saying, "Well, let me get the insight of the pros. These guys are handling big brands across the way and direct to consumer, and they understand it." For the guys that are how often should they be posting and how much content should they be putting out there? Because you can put too much out there. I mean, what's the rule of thumb?

Stephany Gill:

I would say that brands that target a younger consumer can probably post more content, especially on platforms like Instagram, Instagram stories-

Amber Craft:

Snapchat.

Stephany Gill:

... Snapchat. You can probably post even daily, or three or four times per week. However, for more established brands that may have tested this in the past and really didn't move the needle at all, two or three posts per week might be sufficient. Sometimes some brands need quality versus quantity. Do what's right for your brand. Look at your data, understand what works for you, test new things, but also if something doesn't work for your brand, then stick with what works.