

DO THEY REALLY LIKE MARKETING ON FACEBOOK?

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Abstract

Facebook has become the leading social media site and using it to connect with Marketing learners has an intuitive positive feel. This paper considers the early and ongoing use of Facebook in my three classes of Introductory Marketing at a 2-year college. Results of use are positive, with more than 50% of students “Liking” the fan page. Results of increased engagement are not so positive. Looking out at a phalanx of laptop screen covers during a class causes one to pause and consider, are the learners listening, engaging, or updating their profile (or some other non-related multi-tasking activity)? Although a considerable amount of thought and energy goes into making a lecture interesting, engagement can be difficult. In the fall of 2011, an experiment with social media was undertaken with the three Introduction to Marketing 1 classes that I teach. The thinking was that it might create a new pathway not only for engagement, but potentially offer improved communication.

Introduction

Social media sites have jostled for lead position over the past several years. In 2007, MySpace was the leader in social media and was the focus of thinking of how to use this product for marketing purposes (Schultz, 2007). It seems as if concurrently, Facebook rose to surpass MySpace as the leader, surpassing MySpace shortly thereafter (Sago, 2010). As Facebook spread campus to campus, country to country, and finally opened to any and all users, it has become the lead player in the social media arena (Sago).

Some uses of social networking methods have been demonstrated by both United States Presidential candidates in 2008. It was estimated that the Obama campaign alone had sent out a billion e-mails to the listing of over 13 million addresses collected (Powell and Richmond, 2011).

That students are using Facebook is obvious given the estimated users in several studies (Barnes & Mattson (2009); Karl, Peluchette, and Schlaegel (2010); Saber and Foster (2011)). That instructors may want to use social media, is a progression that might make sense. Connecting the two creates a number of challenges. Firstly, there has always been a feeling

that the technology cost must be acceptable to all students (Ovadia and White (2010), Saber and Foster (2011), Skiba (2011)). Secondly, there are some difficulties with the consideration of policing the use of laptops in a classroom environment (Saber & Foster, 2011). Thirdly, the way that student use Facebook may not be the way faculty members want them to use Facebook, there are opportunities for embarrassment for both parties (Karl, Peluchette, & Schlaegel, 2010). Finally, not all faculty members are comfortable with new technologies, and some may not want to engage in an exercise such as using Facebook (Gainey, Anderson, & Rooks, 2010).

But, I wondered, what if I tried an experiment using Facebook, but only with my classes? I had used Facebook for several years, I could create a ‘fan page’ and see the effects. This thinking lead to two questions:

H1: Would students who accessed a course based Facebook site find value in doing so?

H2: Would it increase the engagement, either on the Facebook page, or in class?

Method

Before the start of classes in the Fall of 2011, I set up a Facebook fan page for my Marketing 1 classes. I did not differentiate between my two sections of Business Administration and one section of Business Administration – Integrated, there was only one page. During my first lecture I mentioned that there was a fan page available and invited them to join. I continued to invite students to join for the two weeks of classes. During this time, I posted some useful information – the course Connect Site (a textbook publisher support page), ways to meet with me, and tried to engage students in some conversations about new television programs and commercials that might be interesting. Over time, I continued to mention that new information had been posted to the Facebook page and invited them to look it up.

At the midterm evaluation I asked some specific questions surrounding the Facebook page and the textbook, but not enough to gain any insight into how students were using the page, or not.

I received weekly updates from Facebook about number of total and new “Likes”, post views and feedback. From this I could track, globally, a weekly pattern of use. Each individual posting also gave feedback as to number of viewings and any feedback. I also asked students periodically if they were looking at the page.

Results

To date, the first semester of use by the fan page is ongoing. Out of my 84 students, 44 have signed on the page – more than 52%, and there have been close to 2800 views of different postings. Unfortunately, the number of actual comments has been very low – just a few comments to some postings. There have been several “Likes”, but these are not truly interactive. Through the use of the page, I was able to help one student get logged into her Connect page more quickly using virtual instant messaging. I have asked students on several occasions if they are using the page, some have indicated that they are. When asked about feedback, the over-all impression was that they are using it more as an information depository, rather than an engagement space.

As such, I might posit that H1 is being met – namely, that learners are using and finding value in having access to a Facebook page for a marketing course. I would posit that H2 is not being met, there is little difference in engagement, either on the page, nor an obvious increase in class participation.

Shortcomings

Clearly, “this plane is being built in the air”. The term is still not complete and as a result, all data are incomplete. I am hoping that by the end of the term, I will be able to more thoroughly collect some data from my classes and be able to report then.

Conclusions

The idea of using Facebook to better connect with students has an intuitive positive feel to it. So far, I would suggest that there are benefits, but as of this writing, they are somewhat limited. Perhaps, a good way of thinking about Facebook is that it is another tool to be used to connect with learners, not necessarily the best way.

References Available Upon Request