



## Using Social Media to Better Engage Customers

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### **Customers want to tattoo my brand on their chest?... Really?**

Your customers love, love, love you and what you do. They want to say something today about your business. Your customers are willing to drop everything and tell each and every friend and colleague in their network to buy your products and services. They'd like to share a great experience they had with your brand. Some even want to tattoo your brand onto their chest! *What are you doing about it?*

In October, 2009, GoToU featured the power of "Testimonials." As you may recall, testimonials are a form of Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM) and can serve as a better and more honest representation about yourself, your product/service or company than you could ever say. They provide a confident reason for customers to believe in you and an assurance that you will deliver on your promise. Testimonials are more likely to be believed than advertisements, direct mail, and other marketing materials. They are the top reason or influence for buying certain types of products, especially those that involve high technology. It's obvious that good testimonials serve to provide substantive credibility and legitimacy for your business, product or service. A well crafted testimonial can also clearly lift your unique selling proposition, further assure your competitive positioning, and/or articulate personally associated benefits of your products/service, to name a few, to existing and prospective customers. Testimonials help acquire new customers while providing confidence in loyal, retained ones. Testimonials can showcase cache clients unique to your business. By successfully tracking your sales and marketing "How'd you find out about us?" "Why did you choose our company vs. the competition?" it may become clear that testimonials are having an impact on your sales and marketing objectives. The topic goes on sharing different kinds of testimonials, how to develop successful ones, the value of good testimonials and how to use them to generate business.

In our new 'social' media world of content marketers and user-generated content sources (i.e. blogs, Facebook, Tweets, etc.) customers expect an opportunity, at every turn, to voice their opinion about your business, products and/or services. This usually comes in the form of a comment box, email reply, and/or reTweet, to name a few. There has never been a better time to solicit testimonials from your customers and engage them.

### **Customer Engagement**

According to Wikipedia, customer engagement refers to the engagement of customers with one another, with a company or a brand. The initiative for engagement can be either consumer- or company-led and the medium of engagement can be on or offline. Engaging customers in a social media atmosphere leverages customer contributions as an important source of competitive advantage – whether through advertising, user generated product reviews, customer service FAQs, forums where consumers can socialize with one another or contribute. It's pretty obvious the more you engage your

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customers the better chances you have of identifying the evangelists in the group and soliciting a response.

There are several social media tactics to consider in order to heighten engagement and support testimonials. Here are a few:

1. **Start a discussion thread** on a topic about your business, product or service. In other words create your own targeted evangelical groups and facilitate user generated content around a specific part of your business, product or service. It's easy to do this on Facebook and with most blogging software (i.e. Wordpress, Blogspot, etc.). Some suggestions for increased response:
  - a. Make it fun
  - b. Keep it simple
  - c. Be humble & honest
  - d. Provide incentives and encourage your customers to participate
2. **Ask questions.** The best way to get customers talking via social media is to ask questions. Then, listen. Then, respond. Focus on pain-points, personal stories of satisfaction, encounters with other similar products/services. Make it your own mini-focus group and watch the comments pour in. Something as simple as "Have a great story to tell about how we served you? Share it here." Or "Tell us what you like best about product/service/business."
3. **Post news regularly.** Be your own reporter covering the most relevant and pertinent information your customers want to know about your business, products and/or services. Be sure to include all events and contacts with large groups of customers. Write formal press releases and make them exclusive via social media distribution first. Mention achievements, accomplishments and extreme acts of customer service. It's likely they will want to share information about their experience
4. **Provide a clear call to action.** Encourage re-posting, re-tweeting and viral spreading of your content by simply stating what you want them to do next (i.e. "Be sure to 'Like' this and share it with you friends"). Ask customers to post a video or picture of them with your product or the results of your service to name a few
5. **Experiment.** Provide special offers for those who tell a story and/or refer friends or share with their network. Do extraordinary things. Be different. Consider leveraging charity support as a way to generate traction.

Following is a recent fan post on a Facebook site that we manage for the Harold P. Freeman Patient Navigation Institute ([www.facebook.com/hpfreemanpni](http://www.facebook.com/hpfreemanpni) -- be sure to check it out. It's a great program and cause). We simply posted information on an event Dr. Freeman spoke at in the UK. It elicited the following response:

*Since the implementation of the Patient Navigation Program which began in September 2010. We have saved the lives of 265 women. These women would have been missed by routine invitation appointments for screening, we managed to reach these women in the community and get them into screening.*



This powerful testimonial could not have happened, most likely, without social media engagement and interaction. So, what are you waiting for? Get more from your social media today. Engage, support, listen and encourage your customers to interact. Before you know it, one of them just might tattoo your brand on their chest!

***About the Author***

Angelo Biasi is General Manager of SMART Marketing Solutions, LLC, a leading full-service integrated marketing company in Naples, FL since 2001. He has helped create and execute marketing plans and integrated marketing solutions for companies such as Playtex, Bic, Rogaine, Tauck, and over 35 colleges and universities, to name a few. Angelo has an MBA in Marketing from the University of Connecticut and has taught Marketing at New York University for over five years. For more information or to learn more, email him at [abiasi@smartmarketingllc.com](mailto:abiasi@smartmarketingllc.com), visit [www.smartmarketingllc.com](http://www.smartmarketingllc.com) or call 239.963.9396.