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Communications technology—friend or foe?

Digital communications technology (and our reliance on it) is growing at a phenomenal rate. A.I., bots, mysterious algorithms, privacy paranoia, and constantly changing policies with Facebook and Google ... it can all seem a bit overwhelming. Just when we think we have a handle on one social media platform or search engine strategy, up pops another technology shift we must adapt to. It's an unrelenting virtual game of "whack-a-mole" that requires constant attention, speed to adapt, and skill to master.

Without embracing communications technology at some level, regardless of the size of your business, is a little like stuffing your sales flyer into a bottle and chucking it in the ocean, hoping someone somewhere will see it eventually. Yet, even in the face of this reality, many business owners shun the full embrace of technology to drive their ability to reach existing and potential customers, which in turn, drives traffic and resulting sales. Mind you, digital communications is not the silver bullet for your overall marketing strategy. But without it, you'll lack the necessary ammunition to compete in today's economy—especially for Millennial spending dollars.

So, why the aversion to digital communications technology? We hear many reasons: "Too time consuming." "Too complicated." "Too expensive." Or this one: "I really don't see the connection with (insert social media platform name here) and sales."

Understandably, as a practical matter, it can be difficult at times to see the direct correlation between posting on Instagram, for example, and sales. But the cause and effect of building customer relationships that lead to sales is a different story. In fact, digital communication technology could be the best friend ever created for the small to mid-tier retailer for brand building by leveling the playing field with larger competitors.

First, you must have an "investment" mindset versus a "cost" mindset when it comes to digital communications technology. You are investing time to understand and master at least some essential components. And you are investing (or re-channeling) marketing dollars to boost your digital campaign—which by the way is a lot more efficient than traditional media!

Next, set as a goal to learn some new programs that will make your life so much easier. For example, I'm constantly surprised that so many are unfamiliar with Adobe Acrobat software. Many may have Adobe Reader in order to read PDF files, but Acrobat allows you to review, edit, add notes, etc. to PDF's. For internal approvals and corrections, it's well worth your time to check into. The same goes for file sharing programs like Dropbox and social media managers like Hootsuite. Technology like these need not be the sole domain of creative types because they are useful to the entire organization—including you!

Then assess your marketing strategy and budget in terms of "traditional" media (anything printed or broadcasted) versus "non-traditional" (digital communication). If you're not devoting at least half to digital, you're probably missing the mark. Remember, your website is every bit as critical as your physical store. Your social media is every bit as important as your advertising. Your blog is every bit as important as the advice you give on the phone.

Brand and Founder, cont.

And lastly, communications technology can only be your friend if you keep the humanity in it. All brands, yours included, need to be “human” to be relatable to your customers. Never let the technology get in the way of building authentic relationships, establishing consistent positioning and justifying true differentiation that gives the customers (that you now reach so efficiently) a reason to buy from you.

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