

Facebook and more: Social networking in Peru



Photo by Joseph Hall (www.josephhall.org)

By Beatrice Ciabatti

A few years ago, it was not essential for us marketing managers to master social networking; it was enough just to know the very basics. Sometime over the last couple of years, however, this changed, and social media has become central to marketing plans.

This reflects the need for us marketing managers to be where our consumers are, and hear what they are saying. Most of all, it follows the principle that the most influential form of marketing is still word of mouth.

Currently, the communication channels between companies, brands and audience are evolving. We are witnessing a new type of communication with our audience, in which companies are no longer speaking to the consumers, but the consumers are talking among themselves about the brand.

One of the latest surveys of Ipsos-Apoyo gives us the profile of the Peruvian users of social networks: they average 24 years of age, 58% are male, most are single, and they connect an average of 5 times per week. 84% of them have a cell phone, and 63% have a computer at home. 53% (predominately in socio-economic sectors C and D) use Hi5, while 41% (predominately in sectors A and B) use Facebook. 66% of them have visited a blog.

Meanwhile, Facebook, with its 5.5 million members in Peru, receives the most attention from local companies trying to position their brand, especially in the insurance, retail and beer companies. The rest of the social networks and other tools of Web 2.0 (YouTube, blogs, etc.) have not received nearly as much attention from marketers.

In Peru, the penetration of social networks is close to reaching 85% of Internet users (of whom there are 10 million in Peru, or roughly 35% of the population). There is no doubt that social networks are fashionable and its millions of members are an attractive target for doing business.

Yet companies must be careful with their strategy. As people use social networks to socialize and have fun and so, companies must use entertainment to capture the attention of users. For example, the Facebook game Crazy Combi (launched by Inventarte) has generated millions of visits.



Brahma, a beer brand that has only 10% market share in Peru, has amassed triple the number of Facebook fans (153,000) of its competitors in less than six months. It has done so through daily communication with its audience, with a bold tone to entertain its fans and publicize the weekly events of the brand.

According to the website Socialbakers.com, which documents the impact of brands on Facebook, we find Inca Kola has some 491,605 fans on the social network. Here, the brand speaks to its fans about creativity and Peruvian food, but mostly it allows fans to post their pictures of special moments spent sharing Inca Kola.

Mistura is a major event and has over 200,000 fans, but the most remarkable fact is that it has not spent a penny on advertising.

Companies have started to leave their old comfort zone, in which they could say what they wanted about their brands. They have started to move into a new dimension, where companies have lost the power to dictate the brand to their customers.

Now, companies must participate in a dialogue with their customers, and authenticity is vital. The product is really tested, and if the marketing manager has done his or her homework, and the product delivers the promise made to the customers, the result can be amazing.

It is also important that social networking is undertaken by the same marketing team that already knows the strategies of the organization, corporate culture and is able to speak for the brand. Some companies designate a person known as the community manager; this is an emerging & fast growing professional niche, especially given the growth of branded online communities, corporate blogs and other social media marketing and research activities.

Hiring external professionals may not generate useful or beneficial communication with the consumers, and may distort the image of the brand. Likewise, the amount of relevant information that is obtained about consumers' taste and lifestyle is vital to plan the strategies of the company.

Just one last thing to remember is that the ultimate goal of social networks is that the company establishes long-term relationships with their customers, while letting them socialize and express their feelings about the brand.

That said, welcome to the magical world of social networking ... you'll be amazed!



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Beatrice Ciabatti is marketing director of [Ilaria-Peru](#).

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