

## **Marketing in a Recession: *Ideas for structuring a social media plan.***

Now that the whole legal industry is in upheaval –swapping \$160,000.00 starting salaries for associate apprenticeship programs, implementing alternative billing practices, cutting loose under performing equity partners, and watching BigLaw compete with LittleLaw in global RFPs –slashed marketing budgets may seem more like a minor irritant than a cause to panic.

Branding and advertising, in the traditional sense, is on the back burner. Staffing, training, investment in marketing technology, competitive research . . . down, down, down. Market expansion? Way down –too risky and expensive.

However, if you are the one who is responsible for pulling it together and boosting that top line revenue in this economy, you should give online media a hard look.

The social Web offers all the things marketers need in a receding economy.

- \* Scale
- \* Targeting
- \* Measurement
- \* Adaptability
- \* Low-cost entry

### **Marketers turn to online media in a slowdown.**

With an average decrease [across all industries] in marketing budgets of 14%, new media was one of two areas least affected according to The Marketing Leaders Global Online Survey (Q1 2009) published by Forrester Research, Inc. (The least affected being customer loyalty programs.)

Although the slowdown is taking a different shape in different industries, much of our economy today is digital, including the way in which sophisticated consumers are researching purchases, reconnecting with distant friends, expanding business connections, and seeking value and opportunity. Makes perfect sense that marketers would flock to where their clientele are hanging out online, participating in social media and shopping.

*Fast Company* reported that according to a new Nielsen study, contrary to popular notions, adults use the Internet more than teenagers do.

“Teenagers spend most of their days in a classroom, in front of a teacher and a whiteboard. The phones we give them, if they have mobile Internet plans enabled, are usually of the get-three-free variety that come with a family plan—they’re not the Exchange-enabled BlackBerry Bold you swindled out of your corporate cell phone plan.”

[jump]

“It’s only we adults that are at PC workstations all day, looking for ways to avoid doing work or trolling the boundaries of our IT-installed browser filters. And we’re the only ones who have social networks big enough to require a tool like Twitter.”

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“... we all know that the two biggest time-sucks on the Web are social networking and shopping. The heavy users would be seriously social people, sure, but they’d also have to have some time on their hands. And since shopping online takes a certain amount of expendable capital to make it fun, they’d also have to be financially secure.”

Sounds like an attractive demographic for law firm marketers. The key for law firm marketers is to get their attorneys inserted into the conversations that matter --those that facilitate exposure and initiate potential relationships.

### **What do marketers need from the social Web?**

Adding social media to the marketing mix is no longer the novelty it was a mere 18 months ago. With a relatively low barrier to entry and even lower price tag, suddenly online media is taking on the appearance of a feeding frenzy. And it’s noisy, so you need a plan.

Use the “five needs” that online media meets to help you shape a plan.

**Scale** – What in my existing marketing plan will benefit from the scale online media offers? What else do I want to do that will benefit from the scale social media offers? How will we execute?

**Targeting** – Who are we not currently able to connect with that we’d like to connect with –or connect with more frequently, including our current client base? Where are they on the Web? What are they talking about? What will we do to insert the law firm into relevant conversations that matter to them and us? How will we execute?

**Measurement** – What measurements do we need? Do we want to know about our progress related to lead generation or to gather data that helps us plan for next steps or the future? What tools or data points can help us answer our questions? What tools shall we use? How will we staff and execute?

**Adaptability** –What are we good at now and how will we adapt online media to leverage our existing resources, people and content? How will we make it all more relevant and valuable to our constituencies at the same time help us move closer to our goals?

**Low-cost entry** –What tools are we using now that can be substituted with lower cost social Web services? How can we not sacrifice our brand or efforts in exchange for cost saving measures? What are we willing to spend to neutralize the greater investment of time?

I believe that if you organize your social media plan around these five features, not only will you have a decent road map, a year from now you'll have a track record for managing your marketing program through a recession.

Agree? Disagree? Post your comments at  
<http://virtualmarketingofficer.com/2009/06/30/how-to-structure-a-social-media-plan/>

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