

# Quality vs. quantity

## Sustainable social media strategy

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for smart marketing

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*[By David Reis, founder and CEO of social media agency DEI Worldwide. Originally posted in Promo Magazine.]*

A client recently told me they wanted 500,000 “Fans” on Facebook by the end of the year. When I asked them why, they just looked at me blankly. When I pushed, they just hemmed and hawed—ending up mumbling something like, “it is a good round number.”

When I further pushed to ask what they wanted to do with all those fans, and if they were prepared to spend the significant budget to manage a community of that size—“You’re going to have to have lots of conversations with them, you realize.”

They recoiled with alarm—“I thought social media was free!”

While most social media platforms are free to use, establishing a successful social media community takes thoughtful management and daily monitoring. It’s more than a one-time investment or an afterthought to a marketing campaign; instead it should be seen as a living and breathing long-term communication channel.

Unlike traditional forms of media, which tend to send one-way messages, social media enables a two-way dialogue, creating a dynamic brand-to-consumer conversational platform. This invitation to converse creates countless opportunities for brands to listen and gain valuable insight from their customers, that is, if you are prepared to effectively manage the community. In order to provide value and serve as an effective marketing tool, brands must understand and embrace the real-time, authentic and conversational nature of social media and be prepared to invest adequate time and budget.

Of course it’s important to have fans, and the more the merrier, right? This is not always the case—especially when the goal is to build a real community. The question should not be how many people “Like” you on Facebook, but rather how many really like your brand and choose to express it via their social networks. It’s important to keep in mind that it’s often quality over quantity and in social media it’s no exception. Sure, you can pay your way to build a large fan base, but are you simply paying for numbers rather than meaningful connections?

Most likely if you are advertising fancy promotions through multiple media outlets; you will attract a plethora of “gamers” as opposed to true brand loyalists. Although you will accomplish a wide reach and increased numbers in the short-term, this is far less valuable than a smaller but long-term community that was earned through organic word of mouth, highly targeted promotions and incentives, and careful, specific, social ads. Remember, social media is about connecting and engaging with loyal consumers, it’s not meant to be a traditional billboard on a social platform.

If you’re looking to build a truly engaged dynamic community, instead of buying fans through heavy advertising, fancy, overly broad, promotions and reach blocks, a better strategy is to be patient and slowly and carefully grow a targeted and influential fan base. Maintaining small and relevant promotional incentives (e.g. product giveaways or coupons) and valuable content/conversations, you will provide real value to your community of fans. By offering more relevant promotions that appeal to your specific consumer-base and promoting them through word of mouth and highly targeted social ads, you’ll be able to successfully, over time, attract

long-term valuable fans and witness far less post-promotion fan attrition.

Your most valuable fans are the ones who, given the slightest encouragement (maybe a product coupon or even just social recognition), will shout from the rooftop (or more likely their personal Twitter, Facebook, Blog, etc.) about your brand to their established networks of followers. These passionate fans will help to organically spread the word about your brand through their own personal networks, which is the beauty, and true power, of social media.

With careful community management, brands have the ability to foster and enhance organic word of mouth about their products and services through these channels. What good does it do to get a whole slew of fair-weathered fans who are only there for the freebies and will abandon you as soon as they spot a better promotion that comes along. The focus and attention should be shifted to those highly engaged and influential consumers who, with careful nurturing can be changed from brand enthusiasts into brand advocates.

It's important to listen to what your fans are saying and encourage their engagement. Fans generally "Like" your page because they already enjoy your products/services; don't try to hard sell to them or push your marketing objectives. Social media should reflect a natural flow of brand/consumer conversation. Instead of pushing branded messages, offer engaging and valuable content that they will want to share with their personal networks. Always monitor for trends or opportunities to address their feedback, complaints and compliments; it's important to show that you are listening and value what they have to say.

In order to get people excited to talk about your brand you must have a presence and a voice in the space; it's essential to make these communications two-way. Brands must interact beyond posting updates and static content; fans want to be acknowledged and recognized by the brand and have a genuine exchange of dialogue. Take a look at the percentage of fans actively engaged on your page. If you're not satisfied, simply take a look at who "Likes" your page and to determine if you are attracting the right audience. By increasing the proportion of engagement posts (conversation starters) you'll likely witness an increase in interactions among your engaged fans. The more interactions you can encourage leads to higher impressions, which in turn, spreads social currency about your brand.

Brands already in the social space and those who are thinking about it need to look at social media as an independent channel. It's far more than a traditional marketing platform and if you are only looking at the number of fans, chances are you're not realizing the real potential of social media communications. Once the value and opportunity are realized, brands will begin to shift their thinking from pure numbers of fans to the more important quality of fans and engagement with their social communities.

Slow and steady should be the mantra of social media. Perhaps if we were to look at traditional advertising—based on the 30-second spot, and immediate gratification, as an attempt to get you out on a date that night, social media should be looked at more as the less dazzling, consistent over time, commitment to a long term relationship and family—perhaps less exciting in the short term, but infinitely more satisfying, and valuable, in the long term.



smartstuff, November 2010

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Sustainable social media strategy *cont.*

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