

THE BIG BANG THEORY:

SEVEN WAYS TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA

By Edward Boches

Used to be that you needed a huge marketing budget, an oversized tradeshow booth, a direct sales force or a Super Bowl commercial to launch a brand. Now, you might be able to get away with a laptop, an Internet connection and some well-focused social media.

Businesses of all sizes can use social channels to get a much larger return on their marketing dollars than ever before. Here are seven ways to get started:

1 YOUR BRAND IS A BENEFIT

Many companies do a good job of describing a product's features rather than boiling them down into a single benefit. A simple handle that expresses what you stand for or declares your point of difference is memorable and will help you pop in search results.

2 TAKE YOUR MESSAGE AND CONTENT TO YOUR CONSUMER

Don't assume your customer will come to you. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube are all tools to help you find your consumers. Once you find them, join them: listen, engage, share and help.

3 CREATE AND GATHER CONTENT

Online, fresh is best. Fresh content will add to your online visibility. Sure, it's challenging and time consuming to generate content, but there are smart ways to go about it.

- Whatever you're doing, blog about it and report your progress.
- Ask a daily question. Answer it yourself or get opinions from others.
- Collect and link to content from other sites.

4 CONNECT YOUR CUSTOMERS AND PROSPECTS TO EACH OTHER

Whether on Facebook or on your own site, invite your customers to talk to each other, share ideas and guide

one another. Not only will you learn what people like and don't like about your product; you might find a bunch of people who will help you make it better.

5 DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS

Bloggers today can be more influential than traditional reporters. They have loyal readers. Their references or links to your site will drive up your search results. These days, their stories are even bubbling up to the mainstream press.

6 GIVE STUFF AWAY FOR FREE

If you sell food, give away recipes. If you've invented a sleep monitor, offer free tips on better sleeping. Free content generates awareness, builds loyalty, creates news and spreads the word.

Remember: what a brand does is far more important than what a brand says.

7 MAKE THE TIME, BUILD THE ROLE, OR HIRE A PARTNER

It takes time, energy and commitment to do this all yourself. If you can't do it yourself, give the role to a trusted employee. Or consider a public relations agency with real experience in social influence. But first ask for case studies as evidence that the agency you choose actually practices what it preaches.

