

What Marketers Can Learn From Consumers' Sharing Habits

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Email is still the main way consumers share, but the content they share has lessons for marketers

Consumers are sharing content online in a variety of ways, and using different platforms to share with different groups of people.

For the April 2011 "Content is the Fuel of the Social Web" report, AOL and Nielsen Online analyzed more than 10,000 social media messages to see how consumers share content online. The study found that 93% of internet users turn to email to share content, while 89% use social networks and 82% use blogs.

Web users, however, use different platforms to share online content with different groups of people. Social networks are the top method for sharing content with friends, as 92% of users do so, while email is the most popular way to share with family (86%) and colleagues (26%). In sharing online content with the general public, consumers prefer to use message boards (51%) or blogs (41%).

At The One Club's Creative unConference in May, Paul Adams, global brand experience manager at Facebook, said that the average person has four different friend or influence groups. Each has an average of 10 people and they are based around life stages, experiences or hobbies.

"We are highly influenced by people who are up to three degrees away from us," he said, which presents a tremendous word-of-mouth marketing opportunity via social sharing.

By studying the ways in which consumers share content online, marketers can determine the best ways to reach consumers and make an impact on social sites or via advertising.

Additionally, the study found that 60% of shares were links to published content, such as a news or media site. Meanwhile, 36% of shares consisted of embedded content, such as branded experiences on a social network, enabling users to share content without leaving the platform or social network.

Corporate websites, by contrast, made up a small portion of all shares. By actively being a part of the conversation on social platforms like Facebook, or having branded entertainment content available, marketers can leverage the popularity of embedded content and still get their message out.

Marketers can also use consumer sharing behavior around published content to inform their media buys. Advertising on relevant media outlets and websites can help marketers reach their target audience and connect with the people with whom consumers are sharing that content.

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