

Are Brands Ignoring Facebook's Interactive Potential?

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Consumers want more genuine engagement and interactivity with brands on Facebook, along with nonpromotional content

While brands are reaching more and more consumers via their Facebook pages, companies are not realizing the full potential of engaging and interacting with these brand fans.

In December 2011, consulting firm A.T. Kearney analyzed the conversations happening on Facebook between 50 of the world's top brands and their fans, comparing their interactions to those in December 2010.

The study found that in 2011, 94% of the 50 top brands' Facebook pages directed users to a one-way communication page, such as a tab or a closed Facebook wall that didn't allow consumers to initiate a conversation. This was up from 91% of the top 50 brands' pages in 2010.

Additionally, 56% of those brands did not respond to a single customer comment on their Facebook page in 2011; the same percentage of nonresponses as in 2010.

In other words, brands aren't interacting as much as they could or should. Consumers demonstrate their interest in a brand's Facebook page by "liking" and commenting on the posts that interest them. And in December 2011, 69% of all consumer actions on these top brands' Facebook pages were in response to personal posts from the brand that did not specifically promote a product.

While consumers' rate of interaction with nonpromotional messages clearly showed what content fans preferred, brands did not pick up on the feedback: only 13% of posts from brands were personal or customer-centric. More often, 61% of the time, posts were promotional, and, demonstrating consumers' disinterest in such content, these posts received only 11% of all consumer responses.

Overall, the A.T. Kearney study found that while some brands were responding to consumer comments and encouraging user interaction, most of those studied have a long way to go toward fulfilling consumers' wants online. With Facebook introducing its Timeline template for brands later this month, there may be a new opportunity for brands to change the way users interact with them on the site.

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