

As Facebook Changes, Marketers Must Follow

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Timeline, Sponsored Stories and other updated offerings will lead to different strategies on the site

With every adjustment or alteration Facebook makes, marketers who rely on the platform must adapt as well, according to a new eMarketer report, "Facebook Marketing: Reaching Customers in a Changing Environment."

Facebook has introduced several new marketing tools in the past year, including the Timeline format for brand pages; Sponsored Stories, Reach Generator and other advertising offerings that incorporate regular posts; and metrics that go beyond counting fans, incorporating reach, sharing and engagement into measurements.

Many of these updates improve on Facebook's free tools. But marketers beware: Subtle changes behind the scenes mean brands will need to incorporate paid advertising in the mix if they want to get much traction using Facebook's free services. This is critical for many marketers to understand, since 83% of all companies with at least 100 employees will use Facebook for marketing this year, eMarketer estimates. By 2014, that will rise to nearly nine in 10.

As Facebook has rolled Timeline out to all brand pages, it has meant a de-emphasis on tabs, which used to let brands choose their own landing page for Facebook users. In addition, Facebook's inclusion of ads in the newsfeed that seamlessly fit into organic content on the site are not solely an opportunity for paid media. In fact, in early 2012, during the Facebook Marketing Conference, the company said that when a brand posts an update to Facebook, only 16% of its fans actually see the content.

This is largely due to Facebook's Edgerank algorithm, which determines what status updates, posts and comments are shown on users' newsfeeds. The algorithm chokes back the amount of brand content users see as a way to manage the increasing content being posted to Facebook. So, while getting more fans to comment and engage with the post will increase its reach, the easiest way to win higher visibility is now, of course, by paying to integrate posts into the feed.

For marketers looking to keep their visibility and engagement high with Facebook users, the new ad formats require planning and integration between advertising and social media management teams.

"Starting with a good page post, a good strategy, and then figuring out how to amplify that and drive persuasion with it," said Grady Burnett, vice president of global marketing solutions at Facebook. "Paid and earned, when used together, perform best."

The full report, "Facebook Marketing: Reaching Customers in a Changing Environment," also answers these key questions:

- How are the changes to Facebook affecting marketers' strategies for the social network?
- How are consumers responding to the new elements and the evolving marketing tactics on Facebook?
- As Facebook matures as a website, is its relationship with brands and marketers advancing or regressing?

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