

Creating Social Media Strategies: An Everyday Guide for Small Teams

Purpose

This is a lessons learned document for creating a social media strategy with limited time, resources, budget and staff. Insufficient material exists today in the form of guides and instructions for bringing all the tools together to create a social media strategy. Many individual guides and tips exist for each social media platform, but nothing that brings it all together (Kingsnorth, 2016). Social media has only been around since 2002, best practices are continually evolving and changing. The information and insight in this document could prove invaluable to employers, small businesses, small teams, non-profits, marketers, etc. who strive to learn more about social media strategy.

Background

Small Business Saturday may sound familiar to you, it is a nationwide campaign run by American Express (AMEX) to support small businesses across America the Saturday after Thanksgiving each year. It has been squeezed in between Black Friday and Cyber Monday since this is when most Americans start their holiday shopping. The Economic Development & Community Affairs (EDCA) department of Oakland County Government provides education and loans to small businesses in the Southeast Michigan area. EDCA staff often attends ribbon cuttings for small businesses. The community leaders and small business unit of EDCA thought having an online campaign and contest that ran parallel to AMEX's designed for local businesses would increase awareness for people to support the local economy. Once the idea was approved by executive staff, it was the marketing department's (within EDCA) job to execute it.

The idea was for the public to shop at small businesses in Oakland County on Small Business Saturday, then take a picture of or scan their receipt and upload it to the online form or text it to us at Shop.Text.Win. to 41411.

The Task

In the case of Small Business Saturday, nothing like this had been attempted on this scale. Oakland County has 62 cities, villages and townships, not all have downtowns, but all have small businesses. Forethought was not given to having a dedicated staff to run the campaign. The small team quickly became acclimated to the long list of tasks that needed to be done for this campaign to succeed. Issues that arose and how our team dealt with them are detailed in the following paragraphs.

Shortened Timeline

As far as timeline went, we knew we were preparing for one day, but the weeks that led up to that one day were the most important. Our campaign started in July with messaging to community leaders, but our social media campaign started in the beginning of November. Two months were given to create a campaign from scratch, we needed more like six months. Long hours were worked and all team members were on deck, we knew failure was not an option.

The question of which platform to message on was answered for us. We decided to use the established channels Oakland County already had which were Facebook, Twitter and websites. The brand was the national brand that AMEX had already created. Time was of the essence and we had to find images that would work with the content we were creating as well as size the images for each platform (Facebook, Twitter, website, E-mail marketing). The contest timeline also changed from one day (Saturday) to the weekend and then for the following year a full week. The campaign was ultimately

Multiple Campaigns

The decision was made to not only have a campaign for the public (shoppers), but also for employees of Oakland County since they were exempt from the public contest, small businesses that registered with our contest and small business employees giving information to

Multiple Audiences

Executives kept adding demographics to our audience, which made it more complicated as time went by. Our audience was ambiguous, which is not uncommon for government since the public in general tend to be our target audience. Social media is fast-paced and we did not want to oversaturate feeds with information about this campaign, we wanted people to be intrigued and look for more information. Our videographer created scripts and used staff to create a promotional video at a local small business to get the word out quickly on social media. The web strategist, intern and graphic artist sat down and came up with short concise messaging, including hashtags and images for each day we were going to post on social media. Once we had the messaging we created full pages showing what was to be posted on each day with the image, message, hashtag and platform and time to be posted listed on each full page. We also created a spreadsheet to keep track of

Brand Inconsistency

From year one (2017) to year two (2018) of the Small Business Saturday Campaign the images changed quite noticeably. The vision for the campaign was not clear from the executive staff and due to a shortened timeline; we had to run with stock images the first year. The second year we had more time to think about the brand and the graphic artist was able to come up with concepts for original images to go along with the messaging. Brand inconsistency was not witnessed by the public in this case.