

Social savvy



How social media can help you reach customers

BY JENNIFER BRINGLE

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE THINGS that can only happen on the internet.

One night in late February, social media exploded with debate about the color of one of the most talked about dresses in recent memory—was it white and gold or blue and black?

The virtually instantaneous speed of the spread of the infamous dress photo—it had been shared/posted/viewed hundreds of thousands of times in mere hours—further proved the viral nature of social media content.

A good viral moment can mean big things for a brand or retailer—you can't buy the kind of exposure the maker of that dress received; the company reported that the dress accounted for 60% of its overall sales the day following the viral post. And even if your content doesn't go viral, social media still can be an invaluable asset to your business, particularly in the juvenile industry.

According to the latest data from the BabyCenter Mobile Mom Report, 73% of moms use parenting social media for brand and product recommendations. A whopping 89% of moms frequently use Facebook via a smartphone or tablet. And 61% of moms are using Pinterest on mobile devices. Additionally, 92% of moms share deals and finds with other moms on social media, and nearly six out of 10 make purchases based on recommendations from other moms online.

These users are your customers, and if you really want to reach them, you need to be present where they spend their time.

"It's very simple: We are where our moms are," said Debbie Lee, VP of marketing at children's product com-

pany Skip Hop, which has nearly 100,000 likes on its Facebook page and more than 20,000 followers on both its Twitter and Instagram accounts. "We want to be able to dialogue with her, convey information and laugh with her through the moments of her early parenting life. We know that moms have very little time—so snackable, social content is a critical tool for her as an information seeker and sharer."



Lee

BUILDING ENGAGEMENT

Juvenile product guru Jamie Grayson, better known as The Baby Guy, agreed.

Grayson has a major following on social media, with more than 145,000 likes on his Facebook page, more than 44,500 followers on Twitter and nearly 38,000 followers on Instagram. His Facebook posts routinely garner thousands of likes, comments and shares, building a following of mostly moms that has translated to business opportunities, such as the recent partnership with Boba to create a baby carrier.

"I think e-media and social media are the most important things you can do to reach consumers," Grayson said. "In terms of connecting with parents, Facebook is a very easy thing for parents to



Grayson

get on and check stuff out and see what's going on."

But having a presence on social media doesn't just mean throwing up a Facebook page with a couple of posts or occasionally tweeting. Retailers and brands must be consistent with their posts, and they must establish a voice and a dialogue with their followers—sharing content that starts a conversation, not just bombarding them with advertisements for the brand.

"You can have all the numbers on Facebook, but if you don't have the engagement, it doesn't matter," Grayson said. "It's called social media for a reason; it's not just a billboard, and if you're not having conversations with people, you're going to lose their interest. From a brand perspective, what are you doing to keep your content interesting and fresh that would make a consumer follow your company on Facebook?"

It's important to strike a balance between brand promotion and more fun or informative posts that give an added level of value to your followers, said Kristin Sprague, digital publisher at Progressive Business Media, parent company of Kids Today.

"Every post shouldn't be a sales pitch," she said. "Have a mix of posts that bring industry-related value, messages about your product or business, and lastly, topical things that are random and reflect the personality of your company or brand."

POSITIVE SPIN

Another mistake retailers and brands can make with social media is being afraid of negative feedback. While no one wants to see negative posts on their Face-

book page or Twitter feed, it's important for companies to use that feedback as an opportunity to demonstrate customer service.

"Don't delete negative feedback," Sprague said. "This can cause the poster to become more frustrated and fuel them to posting in multiple locations to have their voice heard. The best practice, as long as the post doesn't contain foul language, is to respond—briefly—with an opportunity to give the poster a chance to contact you offline. This shows other potential customers that you have an interest in discussing the issue and it also gets the conversation offline, where you want it for control."

Companies and retailers can use social media as a tool to diffuse a negative situation and redirect the conversation, as long as they are willing to engage with consumers who might share negative feedback on their pages.

"Before social media, tablets and smartphones, marketers—whether they were retailers or manufacturers—used to control their brand; now consumers have tremendous control and effect on a brand," Sprague said. "Social media gives the real brand owner a platform to take their brand back and give a venue to control the conversation about them."

SOCIAL TIME

While the importance of maintaining a strong social media presence makes sense in theory, finding the time and resources to put that into practice may be more challenging. But there are strategies that smaller companies and retailers can implement to maintain and grow their social media presence without dedicated staff for the task.

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"Typically, the best engagement happens at 9 a.m., around 2 or 3 in the afternoon and around 9 p.m. at night—when moms have gotten settled in at work or home, after lunch and in the evening once the kids are in bed," Grayson said. "Start posting at those times and monitor your engagement. You don't have to put a post up and watch it all day—check back in periodically and respond to questions or comments. Just do a few posts a day and see how it goes; it's really important to try to do two-to-three posts a day because one post a day will get swallowed up in the feed."

Maintaining a strong social media presence takes time and work. But for retailers and manufacturers in this industry, it's a crucial (and relatively inexpensive) tool for directly reaching the consumers who buy your products or shop in your stores. And it can be one of your best assets in building the kind of relationships with those consumers that make them loyal to your



Photo credit: Laura Cornet

Laura Cornet, a Netherlands-based designer, created this social media mobile project, which allows babies to take selfies, as a commentary on the use of social media.

brand and invested in your business.

"A strong social media presence means that we are engaging with our consumers in an authentic way and creating connections," Lee said. "Our consumers are our teachers and our best brand ambassadors. At Skip Hop, we are very committed to truly listening to consumer feedback – it's embedded in how we do business, develop products, create content. It makes us better at what we do every day, which benefits our business extremely positively." ■

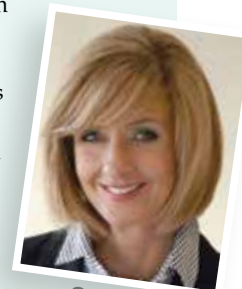
Social Cues

These tips can help you manage your social media channels and make them work for your brand:

"Make sure you are consistent with the frequency of your messages; if you post three times a week, that's what your followers will grow used to. When a business births a social media presence, the worst thing they can do is abandon it. Potential customers will perceive a lack of inactivity as a sign they do not take their business seriously or are no longer in business." **–Kristin Sprague**

"Facebook uses algorithms based on clicks that determine the exposure a page receives. You can increase the number of clicks per post by posting very small paragraphs, split up into two or three separated sentences with a link. This prompts Facebook to add the 'see more' link, which ups your click count per post. Also, photo albums and collages are a good thing because you have to scroll through the photos and that counts for more clicks." **–Jamie Grayson**

"We try to provide our moms and dads with what they need and want. This could be any combination of product information (new products, key features), along with third-party objective product feedback (blogger reviews), brand-generated content (insightful and funny parenting quotes, fun product composites) and of course, last but not least, consumer-generated content." **–Debbie Lee**



Sprague



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