

White Paper

Will User-Generated Media Be the Death of Ad Agencies?



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If you believe everything you read, you will be convinced that user-generated social media is the newest and most powerful marketing tool since the invention of advertising. *Time* magazine made YOU the person of the year. Why did they do this? You can read about it at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1569514,00.html>.

Advertising Age magazine named YOU, The Consumer, agency of the year (read about it at http://adage.com/article?article_id=114132). Frito-Lay, Chevrolet, Alka-Seltzer, and the National Football League all invited consumers to create TV spots to debut during Super Bowl 2007.

Is this the first nail in the coffin of ad agencies? Will they be replaced by hoards of consumers creating television commercials using their cell phones?

I think J. Walter Thompson can rest easy. Consumer-generated media is nothing new. It has been around for many decades. For those of you who are old enough, you might remember the Howdy Doody show, born during the dawn of television in the late 40's and through the 50's. The producers had people send in pictures of kids who looked like Howdy Doody and showed them on television. The entire family would watch to see if their little Doody got his picture on TV. The difference today is that a contest like this can be done online where people upload electronic images to a web site and then consumers can vote to see who wins.

In 1990, *America's Funniest Home Videos* started the reality television craze by getting people to send in their funniest videos. If funny enough, the videos were aired on national television. This might also have been the first modern consumer-generated media platform. The show, after 17 years, is still on the air. Today we have Youtube.com, where anyone can post virtually any type of video they can make or copy. Members get to comment on the videos.

Newspapers have used letters to the editor for years to allow the community to participate in the medium. Now we have blogs – Myspace in particular – that allow anyone to voice their opinions with no editor to decide who gets to read them.

Consumer-generated social media may not replace the TV commercial as we know it, but it is a great promotional tool and always has been. Here are a few ideas, in addition to commercials, of how you can use social media concepts in your marketing efforts:

- 1- **Consumer Photo Contests** – The digital camera revolution has made it very easy for people to take and upload pictures to a web site. Instead of having your own judges make the selection, you can have the general public vote. This increases consumer participation and generates viral (word of mouth) promotion of your program. You can use video or art as well. It is a great concept for generating consumer data.

- 2- **Idea Blogs** – A blog can be used to get input on conceptual ideas or to elicit opinions on new products and services. Choose the best input and award prizes.
- 3- **Best Sales Approach Ideas** – This is a b 2 b solution. Get salespeople to present their best and most successful ideas for increasing sales. Award prizes for the very best and share them all with your sales team. This would work well for channel sales as well.
- 4- **Reinforce Product Training** – Have trainees make their own training videos and upload them to a site for all to share. Have them make the funniest or most accurate video. This will get other trainees to view the videos, and the act of making the video will reinforce learning.
- 5- **Idea Generation Contest** – Get consumers to submit their ideas on how to use your product or service in a different way. Post these ideas for others to share. It may generate new sales based on ideas you have not thought of or give you inspiration for new products.
- 6- **Myspace Accounts** – For companies with the right products and services, a Myspace account can be used not only to give information but also to solicit it.
- 7- **Sponsored Social Network** – The ultimate user-generated media tool is a sponsored social network. Within the network you can use forums, blogs, contests, points for awards, and a myriad of other tools designed to involve members and to get input.

These are just a few ideas. The only limitation is your own imagination.

Consumer-generated media promotions are not just for companies with big budgets. Programs can be created to fit almost any budget. An associate of mine, **Brandon Sutton**, (www.brandonsutton.com) recently created a new company, **Octane Corp** (www.octanecorp.com), with the goal of bringing high-level promotions to companies with lower budgets and requiring fast turnarounds. His technology platform allows for the rapid development of user-generated social media promotions as well as points-based promotions, surveys, and learn-to-earn programs – he even offers the service of creating a complete branded social network.

User-generated media promotions are a fantastic way to get customers and employees involved, to get involved customers to buy more, and to get involved employees to be more productive.

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