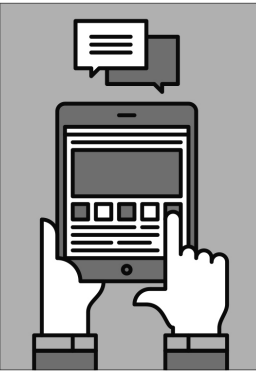


Getting to grips with consumer power through social media

Senior executives must familiarise themselves with social media, where news travels fast, and learn how to harness its power – here’s how...

TOP FIVE
LUCY FISHER



01 LISTEN TO CUSTOMERS

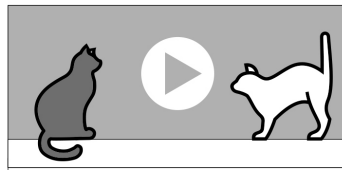
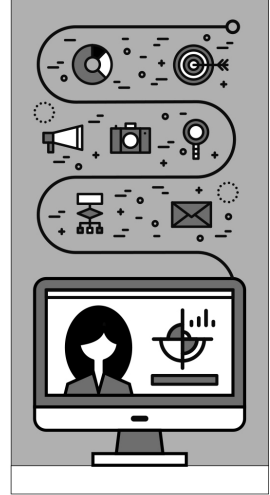
Dominic Burch, former marketing and innovation director at Asda, and founder of agency Why Social, describes social as “an amazing, free, real-time focus group”. “Typically, brands want to do the ‘sparkly’ stuff first,” he says, warning that it’s important to listen to customers and deal with issues first. This necessitates

investing in a good community management team and there are no short cuts to doing this well, he points out. Jean Pierre Diernaz, vice president of marketing in Europe for Nissan, agrees. He explains that the automotive brand uses social media to facilitate a conversation with its customers, whether that’s to moderate customer dissatisfaction or even collaborate on design.

02 LEARN FROM YOUNG STAFF

Jon Wilkins, executive chairman of agency Karmarama, which works with clients such as Costa Coffee, Honda and Unilever, says: “My top tip [for a C-suite audience] is to consider getting some mentoring from a millennial. Don’t just delegate. Find out how these platforms work.” Many brands are also recognising the power of influencers, whether these are YouTube stars or bloggers on special-interest channels. Nick Canning, joint chief executive at Iceland, has opted to leverage video channel, Channel Mum,

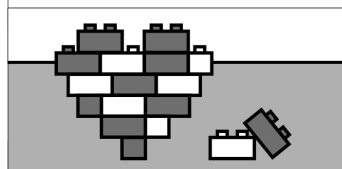
which was set up by founder of Netmums Siobhan Freegard for a long-term influencer campaign. Channel Mum features videos with ordinary people as opposed to celebrities, an increasingly common strategy for a vast range of brands, which have woken up to the need for authenticity when it comes to social media. The average watch-time of Iceland’s Channel Mum videos is two minutes, claims Mr Canning, who puts this down to the fact that the content is created by “people they trust”. “The younger generation consume media in a completely different way. They’re not watching as much TV,” he points out.



03 GET VIDEO

Video has grown massively in importance. But Leila Fataar, head of culture and entertainment at Diageo Europe, says she prefers to refer to the broader term moving image instead of video because this incorporates the likes of gifs or moving animations, which are increasingly popular.

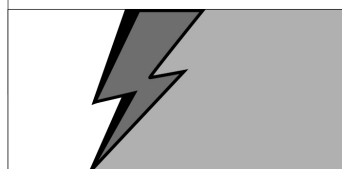
“The main thing is to create ‘thumb-stopping’ content – to think, ‘Would anyone care to share this?’” she says. Gracia Amico, chief executive of Europe’s first online portal for pet owners, PetsPyjamas, has seen this first-hand and says: “People really love to share pictures of pets and this really helps with our engagement.” Ms Amico praises Innocent Drinks’ The Big Knit campaign. “People are encouraged to knit hats for the bottles of Innocent and send them in,” she explains. “Every time Innocent sell a bottle wearing a hat, they donate 25p. Last year they raised £200,000 for Age UK. The shareability is huge.”



04 VOICE AN OPINION

Diageo’s Ms Fataar also believes that to gain cut-through in today’s content-rich digital world, brands need to have a point of view.

“Building communications around values gives the brand more weight somehow,” she says, pointing to LEGO’s decision to join in on the back of the #StopFundingHate campaign, in which the toy manufacturer said it would no longer be advertising with some newspapers. But Eimear Lambe, head of brand strategy at Twitter UK, warns that it must make sense for a particular brand to get involved in such a campaign or there is a risk of being perceived as opportunistic.



05 STAY RELEVANT

“There are lots of areas, such as politics or religion, where brands should stay well away,” says Rick Hirst, chief executive of media agency Carat. Indeed, Mark Boyd, founder of advertising agency Gravity Road, points out that the public relations stunt of tweeting an image of a shoe featuring a red lightning bolt, echoing that painted on the face of David Bowie’s

alter ego Ziggy Stardust, backfired spectacularly for Crocs around the time of the rock star’s death. “It was wrong on so many levels,” he says. “The opportunity [with social media channels] is to be more choiceful about when you’re going to publish stuff. It’s about creating things that people want to spend time with.” It isn’t easy, of course, and fortunately executives seem to recognise this. “We are not seeing any C-suite reticence about spend,” notes Mr Boyd. “Rather, we’re seeing the complete opposite because social media provides an opportunity to gain disproportionate share of voice, to scale a business quickly and to leapfrog competitors. It goes beyond just marketing and advertising – it’s so exciting.”

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