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Social Media Optimization: Spin your “Friends”

“Spin” is usually associated with politics and that automatically gives it a negative connotation. However, spin is really just appealing to a group of people, setting the wheels of thought in motion.

Now, I want you to think about you and your friends. I’m sure you discuss new products and services, right? We all do. As a matter of fact, any product or service can live or die within the confines of your social circle. The 10 people you know may not overtly impact the global lifecycle of the product, but it’s certainly up to the members of your clique to decide the fate of the products and services you use.

Let’s focus locally. If you need a plumber, you’ll likely look to your friends for a recommendation, right? Right. Your friends are more than happy to tell you about the guy they love and you know they’re going to tell you about the one they absolutely hate. Friends make for very effective advertising. They can put a positive or negative spin on anything to help you make up your mind.

The different online communities, like MySpace and Facebook, are made up of friends. Even blogs, message boards and other comment heavy sites are actually quite similar to the conversations you have with your friends and associates. These people are constantly interacting with each other and they discuss products and services with people they might not otherwise know. They come to rely on each other’s opinions. These people have likely never even met in person. Still, they can spread the word about how great a product is and why everyone needs it, just like a normal group of friends. The only difference is the number. The potential for reaching greater numbers of people is much higher on the Internet and that’s where Social Media Optimization (SMO) takes over.

There are MySpace members with hundreds of thousands of “friends.” One girl even got her own reality show after becoming the most social person on MySpace (A Shot at Love with Tila Tequila). That doesn’t make it good TV, but it certainly proves the point. Sites like MySpace have a lot of influence over the general public. Someone who may only have one or two true friends in real life may have thousands of virtual friends. They may not interact in person, but they talk and share information as much as, if not more than, you and your “real” friends.

Yet, even with the rise of these social sites, the Internet still allows you to be fairly anonymous and anonymity breeds honesty. People can vent their frustrations and speak more freely about certain topics when they don’t have the chains of in-person interaction to shackle their emotion. That’s powerful communication and a potential goldmine for new and existing products. The voice of the consumer has always been the most powerful form of advertising and SMO is the way to influence those consumers.

That’s why I suggest you think of Social Media Optimization as “spin.” When it comes to social media sites, like MySpace, Facebook, or even YouTube, the idea is to influence your circle. Then, let your friends talk to their friends, and so on and so forth. That’s the spin. One wheel turns the other. A link or site can make its way around the world in a matter of days. I’m sure you’ve seen it happen many times over. You get a funny or interesting link from a friend, so you send it on to some of your other friends. A few days go by and you get that same email from someone else entirely. Then you get to say, “Yeah. I saw that the other day.” That’s the spin.

Hundreds, thousands, or even millions of people saw what you saw, and many of them saw it because you put your stamp of approval on it. You may not have sent it to them directly, but you passed it on to someone who passed it on to someone else. Your influence spun the thoughts of countless others. Now, picture the same process happening millions of times a day on the ever increasing number of social media sites. It's not quite free advertising, but it's pretty close. More than that, it's effective.

By optimizing different Social Media outlets, you can make several faces for your products and services. If it helps, look at them as individual portals. They may all discuss similar topics or even represent the same product, but each outlet is a different avenue leading back to the source – you. Each profile, microsite, or blog post is another chance for you to spin someone new. Each is a chance to influence how your brand is interpreted by an almost countless number of possible consumers.

So, you tell me. Should spin be solely reserved for repairing damaged credibility in Washington or Hollywood? I think spin is better used to describe effective Social Media optimization.

Discuss amongst yourselves.

Jeremy Simpson