

Generating Leads

Using social media to leverage relationships

by: Ryan Mulvany, Technology Assurance Group (TAG)

Have you ever scrolled through social media to see a fellow successful professional performing a choreographed TikTok dance routine that leaves you scratching your head and wondering, “Does this stuff actually work?” Social media has permanently changed the way humanity connects, relates, shares and communicates.

Obviously, this has strong implications for the business world because businesses are built on communication. Strong communicators have always won in business and this revolutionary tool is being leveraged by the most intelligent marketers on the planet to create platforms that enable individuals to reach millions at the tap of a button.

Most business success is a function of how well a company communicates its value proposition, and in the digital age it is no different. With dozens of new social media platforms sprouting up every day — like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook (Meta), BeReal and LinkedIn — the modern managed print services (MPS) dealer must learn how to integrate these tools into his (or her) marketing strategy before he is left in the dust.

But then again, how is a meme of someone doing the Electric Slide actually going to generate real, qualified B2B leads? Eighty percent of social media is a waste of time, but 20% is gold. Just like any business tool, the problem with social media arises when we try to simplify it. It is tempting to toss out all nuance and just poll colleagues to see if most people think social media is either “good” or “bad.” The problem with that approach is that it is never that simple.

To put it bluntly, at least 80% of the conversations on social media are not conducive to business no matter what marketing strategy you use. However, instead of dismissing it altogether, we just have to get better at finding the 20% of interactions that can generate business.

The key is in choosing where we put our focus, wisely. For example, Dr. Eric Berg is a medical doctor who produces content about ketosis, intermittent fasting, weight loss and many more things related to healthy living. He has never had his own TV show, nor did he gain fame from working with celebrity clients, and he essentially started from scratch.

However, by consistently delivering content for years, he



has built his own media channel on YouTube, which now has 8.8 million subscribers and more than 2 billion views on his videos. So, even though there are a lot of pointless interactions to sift through, it is important to ask how 8.8 million raving fans (who have opted-in to be notified the moment he releases new content) could affect your business.

It took Berg years to become “an overnight success.” In a recent interview, he said: “It’s very, very, very, very difficult to talk to one person or two people ... To send a YouTube video and you’re getting like, six views. You could really easily go into a severe depression ... [but] it gets a lot easier as you get bigger.”

Later in the interview, he talked about “reaching critical mass.” He shared that it took him seven years to hit 100 million views, but then only four more months to reach 200 million views. How would 100 million views in four months impact your business?

Social media is being paraded around as the newest silver bullet that will magically repair a broken business. However, the truth is that it is just another marketing tool (albeit a very powerful one) that works as long as you do. Real growth requires consistency, a long-term approach and a genuine desire to impact the lives of others, which social media is enabling for creators and companies alike.

What do customers in the digital age want? And why does social media work? You are probably asking yourself: “OK, which platform is the best one?” That is the wrong question to

ask. The real question is: “How have prospects changed over the past 30 years and how is social media better at addressing those changes in demand?” The answers:

(1) Prospects have more options than ever before. Gone are the days when the local provider would win business because it was the only one people knew to call. Social media has flooded prospects with more choices than ever before, which is forcing businesses to step up their games and truly differentiate.

(2) Prospects are more educated than ever before. Prospective clients can instantly research your competitors and, in only five minutes, they can read a few reviews, check your social media links, skim your website and be totally informed about what they need. Many customers prefer to do this research on their own so they enter sales interactions from an informed place, where they have already decided whether or not to work with a company. This is often preferable instead of subjecting themselves to a likely high-pressure, uncomfortable sales experience with someone who may or may not actually have the ability to help them.

(3) Prospects are more skeptical than ever before. Most companies have sought to overcome the growth in competition by making bigger, bolder claims — which are tough for clients to believe without a relationship. The problem is, these companies are overlooking the importance of building relationships with their customers, which fosters trust more than bolder claims.

Relationships are built, not bought. For the business owners who are fortunate enough to recognize the value of the opportunity in front of them, their next reflex is typically to dump a bunch of money into ad spending. However, more often than not, that earnest intention backfires and they lose a bunch of money and then have to resentfully decide whether or not to hire an agency that can actually work through the drawn-out scientific process of profitable ad generation.

The reason this does not work most of the time is because it is tough to purchase a relationship, especially when we approach it with a transactional mindset. This is what we refer to as “below-the-line” prospecting. “Below-the-line” prospecting is when you do anything cold — cold emailing, cold calling, cold outreach, cold direct mailers, etc. — with the defining trait being that there is no relationship between you and the customer beforehand.

While cold outreach was never really very effective back when we relied more heavily on traditional sales methods, customers from the digital age especially do not like this style of outreach. In fact, Apple just released a “Silence Unknown Callers” setting for the iPhone, which is the industry’s

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acknowledgment that robocallers and other forms of cold outreach have gotten out of hand. Apple is taking a stand for customer privacy not out of nobility, but because there is tremendous customer demand for it. In other words, if your business is built on cold outreach, it is going to get more and more difficult to keep attracting clients because there are more obstructions being placed in the way.

How do you leverage relationships for “above-the-line” prospecting that is easier, more enjoyable and much more profitable? If you were to reverse engineer a handful of your most profitable, loyal, best clients to analyze where they came from, you will discover that they typically came from an introduction or referral from a trusted third party.

This works so well because in contrast to the aforementioned “below-the-line” cold marketing approaches, “above-the-line” prospecting is when sales or marketing efforts leverage trusted relationships to open a prospect’s mind to hear your value proposition. The important detail here is to remember that it does not matter if you are the one with the relationship with the customer or if it is someone else who is leveraging that relationship for your benefit. It just matters that there is some relationship and some trust available for you to leverage. This is why salespeople always prefer to work with referrals over cold outreach. Instinctively, we know that it is much easier to win a sale when it comes from a referral.

But the real reason it works is because there is implied trust inherent in the very act of a referral. Every funnel, retargeting campaign, email autosequence and social media channel is another attempt to build this trust from the ground up — which can work, but they take time. And each will either work or fail to the degree that it engenders that trust.

This is why social media can work sometimes. If it effectively builds trust with an audience, it transforms every lead into an “above-the-line” lead, which has a much, much greater likelihood of closing. Of course, building a whole new marketing channel requires consistent investment of resources, time, effort, authenticity and value to achieve this level of trust with audiences, especially if we are starting from scratch. (Remember, it took Berg seven years and 3,000 videos to reach billions of views.)

However, there is a far simpler way to reach clients with “above-the-line” prospecting sitting right under your nose. How do you mine your existing customer base for gold and what, exactly, should you say? Technology Assurance Group (TAG) works with hundreds of managed technology service providers across the country who collectively represent nearly \$800 million in products and services. Still, it

blows us away when everyone wants to focus on new marketing methods to attract new clients when they already have juicy lists of low-hanging fruit sitting in their CRMs.

Our existing customers are just like prospects, except they already trust us to some degree. Why would we focus on chasing prospects that cost five times more to target, with no existing relationships, using unpredictable methods, when we have thousands of qualified leads who might actually appreciate a contact? Imagine if a former vendor (that you had at least some personal relationship with) contacted you tomorrow and said: “Hey (your name here), I know it’s been a long time since we last spoke, but I wanted to find out how your business is doing. Is everything going well? Is there anyone I could introduce you to who might help with whatever projects you’re currently working on?”

Can you feel the utter shock you would experience if you were contacted by a salesperson who was more interested in hearing about your current challenges, regardless of if they had anything to do with his company’s particular products? Could you imagine if he actually tried to help you by connecting you with someone in your network? Would that rekindle the relationship? Would that make you more or less likely to want to hear from that person in the future? There are likely hundreds, if not thousands, of these existing relationship opportunities in your customer base waiting patiently for you to reach out and leverage.

“But what if they don’t need my products and services?” If your customers need services that your company does not provide, you did not waste time — you just discovered someone else’s lead.

For example, the customer may respond: “Everything is great, but man, I’ve got to be honest — our website could use a refresh and I don’t know any good designers.” Even though your company may not provide website redesign services, other companies — like those in your customer base — may do exactly that. You did not miss a sale; you repaired a relationship and found a lead.

Now you get to go into your base, call your customer who does website redesign and say: “Sorry it’s taken me so long to reach out, but how’s your business? Also, I had a lead I

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wanted to send your way if that’s OK?”

Do you see how simple, yet effective, sales can be, especially when you are leveraging relationships to uncover opportunities? What do you think could happen if you reached out to every one of your customers and started sending them leads, while connecting with them in a way that makes you truly stand out as a thought leader who is demonstrating how much you value the relationship?

Sure, it will not be a match every single time, but can you imagine how much goodwill and momentum you would create toward your company? This is when people start working with you because they like you, not just because they need your services.

Relationships have always been and will always be the only silver bullet you need. Whether you are using social media to build trust-based relationships or you are simply mining your customer base, the objective is the same — to position your company as a trusted advisor that is a resource others look up to. Not only does this do wonders for rejuvenating your sales and marketing, increasing your close ratio and strengthening your brand, but it puts the humanity back into your business. It also happens to be the most cost-effective way to grow your empire and take your company to new heights. ■

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