

Features

3/29/2017

Get People Talking

Mason Day

If you've sat through any number of presentations on marketing, you've learned by now that one of the first things you need to do when developing a marketing plan is define your target audience. You ultimately want to create a profile of the exact type of customer you want to walk through your doors or visit your website. For our industry, we've typically pegged that prime customer as a female aged 34 to 44 with an interest in plants, decorating, etc.

Though the demographics change from region to region, and very slightly with the product set, it doesn't take too long to define who you're looking for in a potential customer. The problem is ... that's usually as far as those sessions go, and we adopt the "build it and they will come" mentality. In today's world, that just doesn't cut it and we're disappointed with the results we get.

We design advertisements, and pay for radio and television placements—and some of the forward thinkers have even expanded into paid social media campaigns—but still at the end of the day, a lot of that is hit-or-miss. Meanwhile, we see startups rocket to success and drive usage overnight. It almost seems like magic. How are they able to do that? One of the biggest answers to this question is: influencer marketing. Other industries have figured out that no matter what they say, customers are still reluctant to buy into the marketing. Now they've begun adopting the strategy of letting someone else spread their message and it's working.

Let someone else tell your audience how great you are. As we progress and look at the Millennial generation to become more of a buying force, it's important to know that people are now more aware of advertising than ever before. However, now in this digital age, influencers are becoming even more significant. Everyone has that group of blogs that they follow and Pinterest boards that they look to for inspiration on a daily basis—now is the time to utilize those influencers that have already done the leg work. They're already reaching that target audience with the content they post on a daily basis and those people have to eat, too; meaning that for a few bucks, they're more than willing to talk about your product.

Brian Brandenburg is the owner of a company that helps people do just that. His company, Faam, connects businesses to influencers to help them spread their message. Brian's take on it is: "Most forms of advertising are limited by their lack of social validation, defined as passive individuals following or conforming to the actions of others within a group. As is the case with influencer marketing, influencers and their followers form the group; your brand's passive audience is more likely to hear and act on the message."

When talking with Brian, he sees influencer marketing as a way to bridge that gap of making more people aware of what you're up to without being too "sales-y." He notes that "one of the great opportunities influencer marketing offers that it gives audiences something of value in exchange for their attention—a funny video with light branding, 'how-to' information with a bit of product placement or just an honest product review. Giving before you receive will always provide everyone with a solid ROI."

Even if you're not ready to take the plunge with an agency to help you out with influencer marketing campaigns, there are still ways to utilize this strategy. Every region and town already has a set of influential people that are blogging, posting and cultivating followings of people. Rather than focus on reaching the masses yourself, figure out a way you can get that handful of people talking about your business. Maybe it's as simple as establishing a program to provide them with free plant material or design services. The possibilities for "payment" are limitless.

Also, it's a great way to think outside of the box. We often think of influencers as people who are writing about plants in your area, but you've likely already explored that route. And besides, they're talking to people that most likely already know about your business (which is still very important). This gives you a chance to look at other people. Are there any influential chefs in your area? Fashion bloggers? Etsy crafters? Contact them and open up a dialogue about how plants fit into their lifestyles and the lifestyles of their followers.


Word-of-mouth marketing is always billed as the most effective way to create excitement around your business, and in the digital world, you now have a way to start that conversation.

Who's Already Doing It?

Proven Winners—The best example of an industry company that's already investing into influencer marketing is Proven Winners. By now you've probably already heard of Laura LeBoutillier or the online profile she goes by: Garden Answer. Keep a close eye on the products she uses in her videos ... by providing plant material for Garden Answer videos, Proven Winners is tapping into an audience of over 1.5 million people across Facebook and YouTube.

Chocolate Milk—Remember when you started hearing about how great chocolate milk was for you after a workout? That started with an influencer campaign aimed at college and high school coaches. Good coaches started having chocolate milk in their locker rooms and their teams started winning championships. A couple athletes noted they'd been drinking chocolate milk during their season and the buzz was created! Was chocolate milk the difference maker for championship teams? Probably not, but it was worth a shot for other coaches!

The Entire Food Industry—The next time you go out to one of those farm-to-table restaurants (that are becoming ever more popular), take a look at the menu. It's almost guaranteed that they're going to tell you where a lot of the items on their menu originate. For them, it works both ways. The farmers growing the crops and raising the livestock likely sell to the public in the areas as well, so it helps their awareness. However, in this case, it's also helping the restaurant. Those chefs rely on those farms. By listing where the ingredients come from, their credibility soars. Finding a mutualistic benefit for your business like this can help you create a large demand for your products and even a HIGHER PRICE.



Mason Day is the cofounder of GrowIt!, an app that allows users to share plant photos and receive care tips. Mason has one foot in the world of horticulture and the other in the world of consumer technology. He can be reached at mday@growitmobile.com.