Controlling your brand's conversation is trickier than ever before - just ask the Chiefs

By Sarah Gooding   3 May 2018

It's safe to say the expectation for brands to maintain a socially responsible image while still delivering highly effective products and services is greater than ever before. But how does a brand control the image it portrays when its reputation is defined not just by its own behaviour, but also that of its consumers?


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It's a question that Kaizer Chiefs faced as it prepared to appear before the PSL Disciplinary Committee on 3 May, to answer on behalf of its fans for bringing the league into disrepute.

A 2-0 defeat saw frustrated fans storm the pitch, assaulting supporters and officials, and damaging property. And while the brand did release a statement pointing out that violent behaviour goes against everything it stands for, it's still left to face the music for an incident it essentially was unable to predict or control.

An unpredictable playing field

The truth is that as we navigate increasingly volatile operating environments, the number of uncontrollable forces with the potential to determine the direction of your brand is only going to increase. It means that as communications professionals we have to be more deliberate than ever before about creating threads of content that engage consumers throughout their daily motion and counteract some of these 'negative' forces.

The good news is that in a world of growing uncertainty, AI can help us take back some control over the unpredictable. Think about the sheer number of brand crises to which we've born witness over the past year. What if H&M had been able to predict the way in which South African consumers would react to its poorly-thought-through advertisement? Soon technology will enable brands to do exactly that and more.
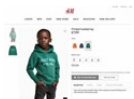
'I have H&M clothes I'm going to burn'
Kyle Zeeman 10 Jan 2018

Foreseeing campaign outcomes

I'm talking about the kind of technology that will enable brands to test campaigns in simulated environments that mimic market conditions before they're even unleashed on target audiences. And the time that would have been spent sourcing information from customers can now be spent building models and scenarios that produce deep insights and help us make better decisions. Yes, we'll get better at predicting success, but imagine the kind of marketing disasters this could also help brands avoid? In future, companies will be able to predict how campaigns will likely be received before they potentially become a crisis.

Hyper-targeted content

We'll also get better at predicting whether consumers will or won't respond to our brand message. Growing volumes of data, combined with the accessibility and affordability of predictive data analytics tools, has given businesses the ability to do extreme segmentation on customers and develop more particular types of relationships. With this level of hyper-targeted and hyper-personalised marketing, we'll be able to serve up the most relevant content to an individual based on their past reading patterns and digital behaviour. And when we give them content they're most likely to engage with, they'll be more likely to convert.

Predicting the best possible approach

Once we know exactly who we are speaking to and have tailored our messages to the relevant customer segments, algorithms will also help us increase our rate of success in engaging those different segments.

Digital campaigns are already shifting from the traditional model of only focusing on one specific engagement, like new Facebook followers or retweets. These future campaigns will be geared more towards A/B testing approaches with different customer segments. And when we know which approach works best, we can run start running campaigns with more successful engagements.

At the end of the day, brands can't afford to ignore the fact that there is an increasing number of external forces that can propel them to success or land them in crisis. In fact, WE's Brands in Motion research shows that every brand is constantly in motion – either moving forwards, backwards or spinning on its axis. The direction of that motion is always relative to the uncontrollable forces being exerted upon that particular brand as well as those forces it creates itself.

How brands harness their motion will determine the direction in which they move. And leveraging AI for smarter decision-making and more effective marketing can help brands take back some of the control over the forces acting on them.

Soon, we won't have to wonder how a particular piece of content or campaign will be received by consumers, or whether it will be able to influence their behaviour and have a positive impact on a particular brand's momentum.

Thanks to AI, we'll already know.

ABOUT SARAH GOODING

Sarah is passionate about the organisational structure of the growing team at WE in Johannesburg and maintaining an open, integrated culture that is geared for long-term success.
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