

DIFFERENT WAYS OF ENGAGEMENT IN CONVERSATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING: EVIDENCES FROM TWITTER

Development of Web 2.0 in the 2000s has introduced a revolution in communication to which organizations in all sectors are continuing to adapt. With the traditional media and static web sites, the marketing department goes out to look for the groups of the customers and markets, tries to reach and persuade them. On the Internet, the visitor arrives at the site and weighs up whether an offering of the organization could provide with incentives for buying and eventual relationships. Another significant impact of web 2.0 is an arrival of social networks (Facebook, LinkedIn) and social media (Twitter, YouTube, Flickr), which enabled users to create their own content and to share it, engaging in dialogue [1].

Increasing use of the Internet is fundamentally changing an approach to marketing. These changes can be deducted to two contradictions: a) arriving visitor instead of reach the prospect; b) identifiable relations instead of anonymous. The first stands in the fact that in most cases, a prospect possesses some amount of information about an organization and its offerings *prior* to contact it. The situation makes senseless many organization's efforts to attract the prospect's initial attention, since somewhat has already attracted him or her before the visit. Visitor's wish to engage in conversation with the organization can originate not only from the incentives of the latter, but (as in most cases) from sharing, comments and engagements by other people. The second means that there are facilities to track every arriving prospect (registered user) and customer, so the focus of marketing is shifted from building and maintaining relationships with customers groups *en masse* to identified relationships as the basis of customers' wishes and preferences [2].

Given differences mentioned above, the single most principal function of the marketing in the Internet is to engage a customer in the conversation with organization [3]. Effective social media marketing therefor has to gather as many customers and prospects as possible around an account of organization. How can this task be accomplished? Some observations from the social media may be of interest.

Twitter, for example, allows distinguishing tweets, commencing with the @ signs that stand for replying to someone that is for conversation. Gathering as many people as possible to a given twitter account is supposed to correlate with high rate of @-signed tweets. To some surprise, this is not as expected (fig. 1).

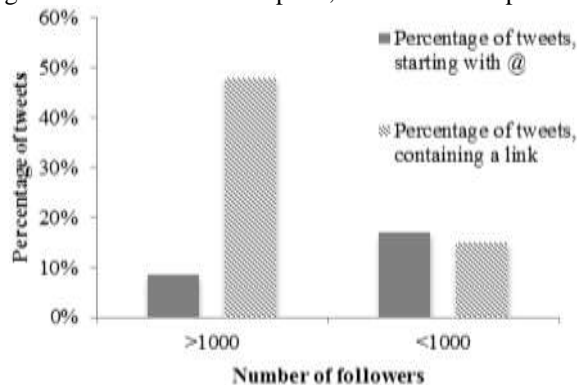


Fig. 1 – Follower count, reply and links contained percentage in tweets

Instead highly followed accounts tweet more links than their lesser-followed counterparts. These accounts did not build their reach by being in conversations; they built it by sharing interesting content in a broadcast fashion. From the other side, there is a limit, beyond which a number of shared links become to be felt by followers as a sort of spam, irritating them and moving them off from the given account. This threshold lies somewhere between 60% and 80% of tweets. [3]

Engaging in the conversation on social media and the Internet in general is not likely a way of building the reach. Instead, focus should be given on gathering and sharing as much interesting, relevant content as it is possible. For most non-celebrity individuals and brands, social media users do not follow them to hear them talk about themselves constantly.

Recent results show also that self-reference is correlated with lowered follower counts. The same pattern is observed for the relationship between self-reference and replies to the messages in social media. [3]

Effective social media marketing requires from an organization considerable efforts to inbound customers. Success follows creating an appealing content which is to be neither purely commercial-driven, nor organization-centric since it is often seen as boring. Statistics from Twitter show that sharing attractive links gains more followers, than even a dialogue with every single follower.

2. E-Marketing: Applications of Information Technology and the Internet Within Marketing / Molenaar C. – London: Routledge, 2011. – 256 p.
3. The Science of Marketing: When to Tweet, What to Post, How to Blog, and Other Proven Strategies. / Zarrella D. – Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2013. – 194 p.

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