Redesigning Adirondack Adventures:

Analyzing Crowd Culture to Develop

Social Media Marketing Strategies

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze present day crowd culture to better understand consumer

behaviors and engagement to help redesign the brand and marketing strategy for Adirondack

Adventures, a small white water rafting business in upstate New York. With small businesses

struggling to take full advantage of social media platforms and the potential they offer,

consumers and potential customers are left disengaged and consequently uninterested. By

researching the correlation between Web 2.0 technology and the emergence of crowd culture it is

my goal to develop a social media marketing strategy for Adirondack Adventures that will help

establish their brand, increase their exposure, and grow their customer base to become a top

competitor in their industry.

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Introduction

Throughout my coursework in the Information Design and Technology program I have had a focus on social media marketing and how it can be better utilized for small, local businesses. It has been my goal to discover new and innovative ways to use social media platforms to their fullest potential, in particular to help businesses that are struggling to establish their brand and grow their customer base. Through the study of Web 2.0 technologies and design processes such as digital narrative, website design and development, and graphic design I have learned that the impact information design can have is limitless. Through these different areas of study in addition to independent research I have developed a social media marketing strategy to help establish the brand of a local white water rafting company that will hopefully grow their customer base and make them a leading competitor in their industry.

Adirondack Adventures is a small, white water rafting outfitter located in North Creek, New York. Due to both the size of the industry and the remote location of white water rafting in upstate New York it has become a small, niche market with approximately a dozen different outfitters within the area. As a result, Adirondack Adventures has been struggling to remain in business and compete with other, larger outfitters. With so many companies offering the same services, Adirondack Adventures has struggled to establish its own unique brand. While many outfitters cater to clients as "family orientated" or providing services for camps, schools, and colleges, their marketing strategies are generic and they each offer the same experience every time. However, Adirondack Adventures was established and run independently by locals from the very beginning. They pride their service for its individuality and customized service, guaranteeing a different, but always authentic experience every time. Whether their clients are a

group of friends searching for a thrill or a family of four who want a to add a little excitement to

their sightseeing, Adirondack Adventures ensures a customized trip for each of their customers.

However, Adirondack Adventures has been unable to break outside of their previously

established client base. Their lack of online presence and isolated location has lead to a plateau

that makes staying in business a constant struggle.

A major factor in this struggle to stay afloat is the reluctance to adapt to Web 2.0

technologies and adhere to any type of structured social media marketing strategy. The business

has relied heavily on community word of mouth as well as a small establishment of repeat

customers. The community in which the business is located is small and isolated which limits the

effectiveness of their word of mouth strategy and the subsequent generation of new customers.

Their limited online presence and traditional marketing strategies has been surpassed by present

day consumer culture. However, I believe that the integration of an innovative social media

marketing strategy could be the key to Adirondack Adventures not only establishing their brand

and increasing their customer base, but becoming one of the leading competitors in their

industry.

Social media marketing is nothing new to small businesses. It has become the go-to

method for companies to interact with their customer base and advertise upcoming specials,

events, etc. It is accessible, free, and fairly simple to manage. While some may see it as a passing

fad and others as the future of all business conduct, almost everyone has jumped on the

bandwagon of social media marketing. While Adirondack Adventures does have a Facebook

page, it is basically inactive and serves no real purpose in customer interactions. "The fact that

small enterprises use social media doesn't mean that they are able to use them in a profitable

way, to develop a winning and successful business strategy." (Cesaroni & Consoli pg. 257)

Some of the limitations that face Adirondack Adventures are a lack of how social media

platforms function, including their potential concerning consumer relationships, as well as a lack

of time to manage their social media accounts with the consistency necessary as well as lacking

the funds to hire someone to do so for them. The answer to this problem, I believe, is to

structure a social media marketing strategy that relies heavily on consumer created content.

Recent studies have shown the shift in the success of brand generated content to consumer

generated content has lead to a consumer co-collaboration. "Social media opens up a new way

of doing business, based on innovative concepts such as sharing, collaboration and cocreation

(Vasileiadou and Missler-Behr, 2011; Choi et al., 2014)." (Cesaroni & Consoli pg. 257)

Collaborations between businesses and consumers has lead to more engaging content creation

and increased exposure and consumption for brands.

At the core of this study is the concept of crowd culture, which has evolved alongside

Web 2.0 technologies, moving away from information retrieval to information interactivity.

Social media platforms have bridged the gap between once spread out, isolated communities that

can now communicate instantaneously. Now people with any interest can find a community to

communicate, collaborate, and create with. Due to this new level interactivity in crowd culture,

the way in which communities communicate and consume information pertaining to their beliefs,

their desires, and their needs have begun to dictate how business marketing campaigns are run.

Crowdculture has lead to consumer generated content for brands and businesses. Consumers are

transitioning into "prosumers" and creating engaging conversations and brand content for other

consumers. This new wave of consumer co-creation is the perfect solution for Adirondack

Adventures. First, it taps into their small niche market and expands exposure to crowd cultures all over the country, second the consumers/customers can generate most of the content and conversations on Adirondack Adventures' social media platforms, and third help to shape Adirondack Adventure's brand of providing an authentic, customized white water rafting experience from the customer's perspective.

Background on Adirondack Adventures and the White Water Rafting Industry

As mentioned before, the white water rafting industry is a small niche market in the adirondack community. Each company provides the same service outfitting customers with the necessary gear and equipment and a guide as well as providing transportation to the put-in and take-out points on the Hudson River Gorge where the 17 mile excursion begins and ends. So regardless of which outfitter consumers choose, they will be provided with gear, transportation, lunch, and travel down the same 17 miles of the Hudson River Gorge. So why does it matter which service customers choose? What keeps one business ahead of the other?

One of the main incentives for potential customers is safety, when consumers are looking to book a white water rafting trip they want to know that their equipment works, their guides are knowledgeable, and their safety guaranteed. Another incentive is fun, for many people looking to experience white water rafting they are seeking out a thrill, an adventure. In addition to safety and excitement is an authentic, local experience. As a major tourist attraction, the adirondacks offers beautiful scenery, a surplus of outdoor activities, and shopping and dining attractions. So when picking an outfitter to book for a white water rafting trip consumers are looking for a place

that offers an intricate knowledge of both white water rafting and the local area and community. So how are white water rafting companies branding themselves? And how are they advertising?

When it comes to advertising, a lot of these companies depend on maintaining a repeat customer base. With companies such as Wild Waters, a large, well established outfitter in Warrensburg, New York, it about maintaining customer relations with large clients like summer camps and colleges. Another crucial element for white water rafting companies is networking with the tourist industry of the Adirondacks, including kayaking, camping, hiking, restaurants, shopping etc. Like most outfitters, Adirondack Adventures runs advertisements through popular travel publications and websites, despite the somewhat outdated ineffectiveness of this strategy. Each company, including Adirondack Adventures, has a website and a Facebook page, although for most these fail to convey a brand or encourage customer interaction. The online presence of white water rafting companies in the Adirondacks as a whole leaves a lot to be desired for today's online consumer. The websites are outdated and the social media pages inactive, leaving online consumers with a sense of inaccessibility. Studies have shown that consumers weigh a company's website and social media pages heavily in their decision to purchase. " ...perceived usefulness of a website encourages consumers to buy. Social media also have a significant effect on trust ... and this effect is strong." (Hajli pg. 399) When a consumer is looking to book a service, like a white water rafting trip, they want to feel like they are signing up with a company that is trustworthy and approachable. Having a website that was designed ten years ago with typoes and outdated photos as well as an inactive Facebook page does not do a lot to evoke a sense of confidence in the consumer.

I originally first became involved with Adirondack Adventures to help update their

website with a more responsive, mobile friendly design as well as updating their photos and

incorporating Web 2.0 tools such as a blog and links to their Facebook page. I also revised and

refined their written content to create a digital narrative that better matched their intended brand.

The business was mainly concerned with SEO, wanting their new website to place them higher

up on the Google search results. The concept of SEO itself is fading in relevance to website

success and advertising. Despite insistence to focus more on updating the Facebook page and

creating an Instagram and Twitter account as well, the business relied on the website alone to

generate more customers. This misstep in their marketing strategy was due to a lack of

understanding of consumers in today's online crowd cultures and the failure to see social media

platforms as advantageous tools to tap into those consumers. "Consumers have social

interactions through social media such as online forums, communities, ratings, reviews and

recommendations. These developments have introduced a new stream in e-commerce, called

social commerce, which empowers consumers to generate content and influence others." (Hajli

pg. 399) The website alone is not enough to establish a brand, and since Adirondack Adventure's

business model has been based on the concept of individual, authentic experiences it seems

natural that a social media marketing campaign based in consumer co-creation would have more

success in establishing just that.

Research Questions

To begin my research into an effective social media marketing strategy for Adirondack

Adventures there were five questions that clearly needed to be answered before starting

development. These questions then served as a guide for my research through the abundant

amount of information regarding social media marketing today. I needed to make sure that I

stayed focused on material that was relevant to Adirondack Adventures and specific to their

needs. The five questions were as follows:

1. How can small businesses effectively take advantage of the numerous, free networking

    platforms available?

2. What are potential customers looking for in business generated social media content?

3. What are the ways in which potential customers conduct their own research on products

    and services?

4. How can social media marketing strategies tap into different markets outside of a

    previously established small niche market?

5. How can Adirondack Adventures establish its brand through social media platforms?

The first question came to fruition because although social media marketing has become

a go-to for virtually all businesses, that doesn't necessarily mean that these platforms are being

used to their fullest potential. Many social media users today are in the habit of just scrolling past

advertisements or business plugs on sites such as Facebook. For a business like Adirondack

Adventures where the owner/operator has a limited understanding of how social media platforms

function, it seemed important to first establish basic small business fundamentals in terms of

successful social media marketing.

The second question pertains to what potential customers are looking for when using
social media as an information source for businesses. Investigating what type of content users
find most engaging would help prevent generating content that would just be lightly skimmed, or
even ignored. Which leads to the third question, how are users using these platforms to research
products and services. There are so many different websites, apps, and devices with which
people use to find the "best" product and service for them. How can a business like Adirondack
Adventures make their presence known amongst all these different resources? Between sites like
Yelp and TripAdvisor and the countless forums found online, I wanted to ensure that the social
media marketing strategy I designed would help spread the word about Adirondack Adventures
through a multitude of different resources.

The fourth question which is also related to the third looks to find an answer for
Adirondack Adventure to break out of its small target market. Being a local business in a very
small, isolated community has lead to a very slim word-of-mouth reputation for the company.
Their Facebook presence as of now only networks with people in their direct community. By
tapping into niche markets across the country, such as outdoor clubs, adventure seekers, team
building exercises for business, etc. their customer base could grow exponentially. Finally, the
fifth question pertains to establishing a brand for Adirondack Adventures that makes them stand
out from the dozen or so other outfitters in the area. Knowing this business personally, they offer
a very different experience than other outfitters, but how can this be personified via social media
web content? What will make potential customers connect with their business and their image?

Literature Review

In order to create a social media marketing strategy for Adirondack Adventures that would require minimum management from the business owner as well as help establish their brand and online presence, my research focused on crowd culture and consumer/prosumer co-creation and innovation. While Web 2.0 technology and social media marketing strategy may seem like a daunting task to a small business owner with limited understanding of how these tools and platforms work, today's online interactivity can actually relieve pressure from small business owners, especially one like Adirondack Adventures. Allowing consumers to create the content and keep the conversations going about a brand is not only ideal, it's the way consumer culture is shifting. "Consumers have social interactions through social media such as online forums, communities, ratings, reviews and recommendations. These developments have introduced a new stream in e-commerce, called social commerce, which empowers consumers to generate content and influence others." (Hajli pg. 399)

Social Media Marketing for Small Businesses

Maria Cesaroni and Domenico Consoli discuss the ways in which small businesses are both at and advantage and a disadvantage when it comes to social media marketing in their article Are Small Businesses Really Able to Take Advantage of Social Media. While social media has exploded and become a go to marketing strategy for all businesses, big and small, it is not necessarily utilized in the most effective manner. "The fact that small enterprises use social media doesn't mean that they are able to use them in a profitable way, to develop a winning and successful business strategy." (Cesaroni & Consoli pg. 257) Cesaroni and Consoli begin their

investigation into problematic social media marketing for small businesses with the development
of Web 2.0 technology. Beginning in 2005, Web 2.0 technology transformed simple information
retrieval to information interactivity and collaboration. "It represents a breakdown with
traditional organization models towards an open and cooperative architecture. Its main keywords
are: sharing, cooperation and interactivity." (Cesaroni & Consoli pg. 258) From Web 2.0
technology emerged social media, where people could connect and interact for both social and
business purposes, creating virtual communities. Businesses now have the ability to directly
communicate with their consumers as well as allowing consumers to communicate with each
other. Consumers contribute valuable content to businesses through their conversations and
collaborations. "According to Levine et al. (2001) "markets are conversations" and with the
digital revolution consumers have changed their role, from passive consumers to active
prosumers." (Cesaroni & Consoli pg. 258) This consumer interaction and contribution has
become essential for social media marketing success.

Web 2.0 technology has changed the way internet presence works for small businesses. "It's well
known that website is a very important space both for small and large firms. For customers it is
important that companies have an easily navigable website, with a rich content and a rich
description of firm's activity, mission, history, ownership, governance, markets, quality and
environmental policies, social responsibilities, performances, products/services. Nowadays it's
also important for businesses to have in their websites a bar with links to social media. (Cesaroni
& Consoli pg. 260, 261) Most small businesses have adapted to social media practices, however
simply having a social media page is not enough. Many small business owners create social
media pages out of a sense of jumping on the bandwagon, if everyone else is doing it then it must

be worth it. A lack of understanding of how these platforms operate and how they can be used to best increase their business in terms of consumer interactions and behaviors can seriously limit business growth. Contributing to this issue is the limited time business owners have to manage social media accounts. Many small businesses are run by one or very few people, on top of all the other responsibilities of owning a business, learning social media strategy and giving it the time and attention is needs can be impossible. Due to business size and profitability owners may be unable to afford to hire someone to run their social media sites. It is not uncommon for small businesses to have young family members help them out. "Small firms very often lack a well-defined marketing strategy and they simply respond to immediate and specific customers' needs." (Cesaroni & Consoli pg. 259, 260) For small businesses whose target audience is the community in which they belong, they miss out on potential growth offered by a structured social media marketing strategy. "Small enterprises can obtain great benefits from social media. In most cases, small enterprises without a commercial network use social media to interact directly with their customers… Often the result is a remarkable increase in sales and customers base." (Cesaroni & Consoli pg. 264)

Crowd Culture

Douglas Holt introduces the concept of 'crowd culture' in his article for the Harvard Business Review, *Branding in the Age of Social Media.* In this article Holt discusses the rise of social media and how it has shaped today's marketing industry. When social media was first on the rise corporations saw an opportunity to "leapfrog traditional media" and connect directly with their target audience. (Holt pg. 42) The common belief was that if corporations could

generate interesting, culturally relevant content they could nurture and grow a substantive consumer community. As Holt explains it, "brands succeed when they break through in culture. And branding is a set of techniques designed to generate cultural relevance." (Holt pg. 42) However, the same digital technology that allows for this type of social media networking has also drastically changed the way our culture functions. "Digital crowds now serve as very effective and prolific innovators of culture—a phenomenon I call crowd culture. " (Holt pg. 42) Crowd culture moves away from the traditional methods of media marketing. Whereas corporations were once able to monopolize the entertainment industry with commercials, pop-up ads, and print ads, technology now allows for users to opt out of said advertisements, creating a big obstacle for traditional marketing strategies.

"Social media binds together communities that once were geographically isolated, greatly increasing the pace and intensity of collaboration. Now that these once-remote communities are densely networked, their cultural influence has become direct and substantial." (Holt pg. 43) Social media has bridged major gaps in terms of online communities and with that comes the quickly diminishing appeal of mainstream media. "It turns out that consumers have little interest in the content that brands churn out. Very few people want it in their feed. Most view it as clutter—as brand spam. When Facebook realized this, it began charging companies to get "sponsored" content into the feeds of people who were supposed to be their fans. The problem companies face is structural, not creative. " (Holt pg. 44) Consumers are no longer looking to be bought with brand generated content for the masses, but rather brands that use consumer content that speak directly to the needs of their specific crowd culture. "While the rise of crowdculture

diminishes the impact of branded content and sponsorships, it has greased the wheels for an alternative approach that I call cultural branding." (Holt pg. 46)

One example of cultural branding discussed by Holt is a campaign from Chipotle's. Cultural branding is about promoting innovative ideologies that break with common conventions. (Holt pg. 48) For example, Chipotle saw a need for healthier, more sustainable fast food when crowd cultures began exploiting and protesting dominant, industrial fast food conglomerates such as McDonalds. They saw that consumers were searching for an alternative, and they capitalized on the "cultural opportunity." Chipotle targeted the crowd culture that was building momentum around "organic farming and pastured livestock." (Holt pg. 48) Chipotle went on to "diffuse" this new ideology with two short films depicting industrialized farmers going back to more traditional, sustainable methods of farming. While these videos were not especially creative or big budgeted, they spoke to a culture that was looking for change. Chipotle's success in cultural branding lead to them being one of the country's most successful fast food industries, despite others being dominant for years. "By targeting novel ideologies flowing out of crowd cultures, brands can assert a point of view that stands out in the overstuffed media environment." (Holt pg. 48)

Social Consumers

A Study of the Impact of Social Consumers by M. Nick Hajli explores the different ways in which social media influences brand popularity. Social media platforms and Web 2.0 technologies have caused a major shift in consumer value. Consumers are now co-creators of brand generated content, adding value and trust with their online interactions. "By using social

media, consumers can create content and offer valuable advice to others (Füller et al. 2009)." (Hajli pg. 389) According to Hajli, two major factors consumers take into consideration when searching online for a new product or service are Perceived Usefulness and trust. The term perceived usefulness is self explanatory, does the product or service seem like something that the consumer wants or needs? In previous studies it has been proven that perceived usefulness is directly correlated to consumer acceptance of a new system or idea. There are several ways in which perceived usefulness can be achieved. "For instance, quality of a website in terms of system, service and information quality has a significant impact on perceived usefulness, which in turn encourages consumers to buy (Ahn et al. 2007)." (Hajli pg. 390, 391) Another way in which perceived usefulness is achieved is through consumer created content. When consumers like or share a product or give it positive reviews and ratings, the perceived usefulness of that brand is increased. "Research has shown that potential consumers are more interested in other users' recommendations rather than merely vendor-generated product information (Ridings & Gefen 2004)." (Hajli pg. 391) For example, a potential consumer in a store is more likely to take a recommendation from a friend or peer rather than from a sales person.

The idea that consumers prefer the recommendations of other users as opposed to brand generated information builds on Hajli's idea of trust as an important factor in consumer considerations. Social media has created many different spaces for consumers to look up information and seek out consumer recommendations. There are hundreds of apps and forums with information available to consumers at any time. For each consumer, where they look to find their information is different. Consumers will look for sources that they trust, and trust emerges from a sense of support. "Emotional and informational support are two dimensions of

social support in an online context (Liang et al. 2011)" (Hajli pg. 392) Hajli uses the platform

Twitter as a good example of a place where consumers seek out this support, both informational

and emotional, and as a result these types of sites and social interactions can directly affect

consumer decisions based on trust. If a consumer is a member of a large Twitter community in

which they interact regularly, it can be assumed that they will use this community to help

influence their purchasing decisions. Collaboration and co-creation on social media sites, such as

liking content, adding comments, and posting content generates perceived trust for products and

services. Consumer content has become an essential element in social media marketing

strategies. "This research shows that advancements in the internet and the emergence of Web 2.0

along with social media have empowered customers." (Hajli pg. 400) It is because of this

phenomenon of consumer contribution in terms of trust and perceived usefulness that businesses

encourage consumers to interact with their brands through comments, reviews, and ratings.

Co-Creation of Innovation

Web 2.0 technology has changed the way the Internet is used, creating an environment

where users can communicate and collaborate on almost anything whether it be socially or

professionally. In terms of professional use, Web 2.0 technology has lead to business innovation

in perhaps somewhat unexpected ways. *Co-creation of Innovation Using the Potential of Web*

2.0 Tools by Dorota Jelonek, Elzbieta Wyslocka dives into the topic of online consumer

contributions to businesses. This concept of co-creation by consumers has been gaining

acceptance rapidly in the field of social media marketing strategy. Consumers have become a

part of the innovation process, using their contributions to build a product or service as well as a

marketing campaign. "Companies should see customers as co-creators of products and hence value. Products should be designed in ways that allow users to design all by themselves, remix, and share." (Jelonek & Wyslocka pg. 21) Rather than trying to tell the consumer what they should want or what they need, companies are now going directly to the source, allowing consumers to construct their own wants and needs. This idea is not necessarily something brand new, there are a variety of other existing methods such as crowdsourcing and user centered design. (Jelonek & Wyslocka pg. 21) However the focus of this article is how Web 2.0 technology, which is based on user participation, is shaping co-creation innovation.

Being able to directly communicate with consumers via Web 2.0 technology, such as social media platforms, is not enough. Jelonek and Wyslocka discuss a major issue found in their research which was that often times what companies thought their consumers cared about in regards to social media interactions often did not match up with what the consumers actually wanted. Consumers aren't just looking for product information or technical support with social media interactions. "On the basis of the research results, it has also been indicated that personalization is an important determinant of the success of activities directed towards cooperation with the client, performed in the space of the Internet (Jelonek 2014)." (Jelonek & Wyslocka pg. 24) Web 2.0 tools have allowed for companies and consumers to have real, direct conversations and consumers want to be seen as valuable co-creators and innovators. Consumers can become product experts and are willing to test products and services for companies via interactions made possible by Web 2.0 tools and technology. "The results obtained in the research allowed to positively verify the hypothesis that young clients eagerly get involved in the

process of co-creation of on-line innovation and take roles of consultants, innovators and people testing new products and services." (Jelonek & Wyslocka pg. 26)

With the rise of co-creation of innovation via Web 2.0 tools comes another potential obstacle, with so many different platforms for consumers to collaborate on companies need to become more flexible and incorporate many different avenues of communication. "In the research it has also been confirmed that for young clients the appearance of a wide range of communication channels is important because 60% of clients asked a question or submitted a proposal while using one communication channel and in the further communication they searched for solutions utilizing other Channels." (Jelonek & Wyslocka pg. 27) The different platforms in which people decide to interact are constantly changing and evolving, with fluctuating popularity and the next big thing always on the horizon. Companies need to continue to stay on top of Web 2.0 technology and its always changing landscape. "The winners will be those company who are able to link strategy, innovation, product, customer experience and employee engagement, all in a landscape of shifting sectoral boundaries, new bases of competition and Web 2.0 tools." (Jelonek & Wyslocka pg. 27)

Measuring Consumer Engagement

It is well known that sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube have become important environments in consumers lives and influence communication habits and behaviors. Consumers engagement with a brand's social media content has become essential in social media marketing success, however a system in which brands can measure user engagement has yet to be established in the marketing industry. *Measuring Consumers' Engagement with*

*Brand-Related Social-Media Content Development and Validation of a Scale that Identifies Levels of Social-Media Engagement with Brand*s by Bruno Schivinski, George Christodoulides, Dariusz Dabrowski aims to create a scale that will allow companies and brands to measure the success of the social media interactions with consumers. "In contrast with the static websites in the early days of the Internet, the interactive nature of social media ultimately has changed how consumers engage with brands. When using social media on a regular basis, consumers come into contact with myriad brands and products by reading, writing, watching, commenting, "Liking," sharing, and so forth." (Schivinski, Christodoulides & Dabrowski pg. 64)

The authors of this article were looking to develop a scale on which brands could measure user engagement, in doing so they constructed the three dimensions of engagement:consumption, contribution, and creation. Consumption of brand content consists of consumers reading and liking brand posts, even sharing posts on their own social media feeds is considered consumption. Consumption is considered the lowest level of engagement with brand related content. These interactions still add value to brand content but increasing views and gaining likes. When a consumer comments on a brand related content or engages in conversation about brand related content it is categorized as contribution. By contributing their ideas and opinions consumers are not only engaging with brand content but adding value to it and this is considered the middle level of consumer engagement. Finally, the highest level of consumer engagement with brand related content is creation. Creation consists of posts, images, and videos of brand related content from the consumer. These three dimensions of user engagement are changing the way brands should be looking to sculpt their social media marketing strategies. "Advertisers should closely monitor social-media channels and the brand related activities

consumers are more intensely engaging in, while also trying to stimulate the activities they want consumers to be more active with." (Schivinski, Christodoulides & Dabrowski pg. 75)

An important concept to take away from consumer engagement is consumer acceptance. By generating content that encourages consumers to consume, contribute, and create with, brands are also having their content accepted by the consumers. "Consumers' contribution of brand related content is a key metric for evaluating the success of social-media marketing efforts (Nelson-Field et ah, 2012) and plays an important role in the process of communication message acceptance (Coulter and Roggeveen, 2012)" (Schivinski, Christodoulides & Dabrowski pg. 75) In order to keep consumers engaged and to continue to see the three dimensions of engagement thriving , brands should be closely monitoring successful brand content that generates engagement and continue to structure their social media strategies around those measurements.

Value Creation and Consumption

The present digital economy has drastically influenced the way consumers can customize their activities. "They can craft each consumption experience to fit specific contexts, needs, emotions and other factors. A teenager's night out is documented and shared with her friends in a series of selfies posted on Snapchat." (Voyer, Glavaenu & Gritzali pg. 381) *Value Creation and Consumption: When Consumer Creativity Generates Value in Online Forums* by Marie Taillard, Benjamin Voyer, Vlad Glaveanu, Alkmini Gritzali discusses the different ways in which consumers creativity and can add value to companies and brands. The authors establish consumption as a creative activity. Beyond the product or service itself, creativity is in the experience: alone or with others, privately or in public, physically or virtually, now or later,

home-made, customized or factory-made... These are only the most obvious of the infinite ways

in which consumers creatively craft or design each of their consumption experiences." (Voyer,

Glavaenu & Gritzali pg. 381) By studying how consumers interact in an online forum, the

authors gain insight into the effects consumption and contribution can have on fellow consumers

in an online environment, specifically an Epicurous.com forum where cosumers colloborate on

recipe ideas and tricks.

The authors found that conversation is an incredibly powerful tool not only in structuring

audience engagement but also in value creation. "It is the very nature and structure of the

conversation that promotes the accessing, adapting and integrating process, namely value

creation. By engaging in the conversation, participants pick up on each other's ideas, consider

them (access), confront them with their own (adapt) and respond with their own inputs

(integrate), which results in value creation." (Voyer, Glavaenu & Gritzali pg. 382) Many studies

have looked at the importance of customer interactions and co-creation innovations with brands

and companies, however this study focused on the importance customer interactions have on

other customers. "The present research suggests that consumer research needs to better align

itself with systemic views on creativity, particularly socio-cultural perspectives (Glăveanu,

2010a), and to recognize a broader role for creativity in consumption." (Voyer, Glavaenu &

Gritzali pg. 383)

Computational Methods for Socially Significant Data

Making Sense of Reported Socially Significant Data Using Computational Methods by

Peter Burnap, Nick J. Avis and Omer F. Rana is a study on how to best obtain, analyze, and

visualize qualitative data about social behaviors on the the internet. The authors discuss how much information is poured out every day with ever evolving Web 2.0 technologies, with people posting on Facebook, Twitter, etc. "Social data are published through a number of different sources. Blogs, wikis, social networking sites, and web sites all have one thing in common – they publish textual data." (Avis & Rana pg. 221) While a lot of this data may be irrelevant, a lot of it may be very relevant to a number of different studies. The article did not go into specifics about which types of software were used, but gave the impression that several different types were tested and used. By using CAQDAS data pertaining to people's moods, wants, needs, etc. can be extracted out of all information shared. Every day millions of people are posting about their lives, from what they are eating to how they are feeling and what their plans are for the holidays. This type of date can be used for anything from marketing to psychology studies. In terms of marketing, with so much information being posted and shared every minute of every day it can be impossible for companies to pinpoint consumer wants and needs. The incorporation of CAQDAS could vastly change the scope of brand social media marketing and simplify the social media management for small business owners.

While the aim of this study is to develop software to gather quantitative data concerning socially significant data, in order to do so the authors used software that obtained and organized qualitative data in their study and development. By using CAQDAS researchers are able to gather an infinite amount of user generated data which can be an invaluable asset to any business. " ...the field is relatively immature and a number of aspects need to be considered to support full penetration and impact of these methods." (Avis & Rana pg. 226) If companies were able to sort through millions of consumer posts to sort out what is relevant to their brand, social

media marketing success could skyrocket. This area of research could change the scope of Web 2.0 technologies and their influence on online business. However the ethics of this type of research is complex, as stated by the authors on page 13 of the article. "Without COSMOS the data and computational services are isolated and not easily brought together for investigative research by social scientists, which leaves social research in a position where corporate commercial research is being viewed by some as the new social research paradigm, which unfortunately fails to provide us the ethnographical insight that self-reported data does." (Avis & Rana pg. 228) There are various rules regulating private information stored on the internet, however with Web 2.0 technologies like Twitter and Facebook there is still quite a bit of public information to be found. At what point does this type of technology cross the line of being intuitive to being invasive. And how can this type of technology simplify marketing strategies for small business owners.

Methodology

This study consisted of qualitative research concerning the developing field of crowd culture and consumer behaviors in an online environment. Following the methodology of Grounded Theory, I allowed my research to structure the study. Beginning with research on social media strategies for small businesses I came across the term "crowd culture" and its evolvement from Web 2.0 technologies. Research of Web 2.0 technologies and crowd culture organically lead to studies on consumer behaviors in terms of both engagement and co-creation of innovation. Exploring the why's rather than the how's of consumer engagement with brand generated social media content versus consumer generated content then lead to the construction

of a social media marketing plan that was designed for ease of use by Adirondack Adventures that simultaneously nurtured consumer generated growth.

Before developing this social media marketing strategy for Adirondack Adventures, I had to observe what other, more established, white water rafting companies were putting on their social media sites. Was there something there that was helping to attract more business? Or was I right to assume their success was due to an already established larger repeat customer base and clientele, thus presenting an opportunity for Adirondack Adventures to establish itself as the dominant online, social media presence in the white water rafting community. Being the first company to utilize social media platforms to their full potential could not only grow their customer base but establish an authentic, co-created brand with said customers. "By targeting novel ideologies flowing out of crowd cultures, brands can assert a point of view that stands out in the overstuffed media environment." (Holt pg. 48)

Project Research

To begin research into what other white water rafting companies were generating via their social media pages, I only had one source to study: Facebook. White water rafting companies in upstate New York are not making use of other platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, which is not too surprising as Facebook is the most widely used social media platform among all demographics. "The most frequently used social media is Facebook. The main reason is that companies must be present in channels most commonly used by customers. Facebook is a social media most used by people (young and old) and therefore companies need to be on this channel." (Cesaroni & Consoli pg. 261) However, by not incorporating any other social media

platform, these companies limit their exposure and possibly prevent potential customers from finding them. Content for these companies can be found through customer posts on Instagram and Twitter, but there is no official business page to tag.. Sites like Instagram and Twitter are perfect for the white water rafting industry because they showcase not only beautiful images of the scenic Adirondacks, and specifically the Hudson River Gorge, but they also showcase the customer experience, capturing the fun and excitement of the trip and the interactions with their outfitter and guides. While Facebook is still the most widely used social media platform sites like Instagram and Twitter can greatly increase online word of mouth and only increases online exposure. The lack of Instagram and Twitter accounts for the white water rafting community means that Adirondack Adventures could be the first to dominate those platforms.

Looking into the Facebook sites of other white water rafting companies proved what I previously believed to be true. The brand related content being generated by these companies are not engaging consumers. Falling into the trap that many small businesses find themselves in, these companies are just posting content such as water levels for the day and the occasional upcoming event or special offer. There is a noticeable lack engaging content for customers to consume and contribute to. There is an overall generic style among the various white water rafting business pages on Facebook, Adirondack Adventures included. There is no content pertaining to the consumer, nothing to capture their experience, their thoughts, their suggestions. Furthermore there is no consumer generated content to add value to these pages, nothing to entice a potential new customer into further engagement on the services provided. "Social media opens up a new way of doing business, based on innovative concepts such as sharing, collaboration and cocreation (Vasileiadou and Missler-Behr, 2011; Choi et al., 2014)."

(Cesaroni & Consoli pg. 257) These sites serve as the boilerplate standard Facebook page all businesses feel they should have without properly utilizing all the advantages they offer.

To get a feel for what potential customers' consumer behaviors are like I did some field research in a local mall. While this may seem unrelated to the industry of white water rafting, I was compelled to pursue it for two reasons. First, white water rafting is a seasonal industry that is currently in its off season, there would be no point in observing the local community in its day to day activities. Second, it is my goal to expand Adirondack Adventures outside of its niche market and tap into consumers of all sorts. Studying how people interact in a consumer driven environment would help me to better understand how shoppers make their purchasing decisions. My findings were interesting if not a little bit expected. Despite being in an environment filled with other people available to make a recommendation or answer a question, almost everyone was fixated on their phones. Whether it was to look up information or text a friend, that remains unknown, but even groups of people shopping together seemed to be utilizing their phones more than their companions. "When potential consumers are encouraged to trust in vendors by their peers, and also to trust in the SNS itself, they are more likely to buy through social networking sites." (Hajli pg 400) Meaning consumers are looking to social media groups they have established trust with more so than website content or person-person recommendations. The only exception to this trend was the older demographic of people approximately fifty years old and up, who were more engaged with the people they were with rather than their phones. The younger demographic was definitely more technology dependent, which further solidified the idea that Adirondack Adventure's best chance of expanding their business and becoming a lead outfitter in the area was with a social media presence.

Redesigning Adirondack Adventures' Brand

Before implementing a new social media marketing strategy for Adirondack Adventures, their brand needed a little tweaking. An outdated logo, inappropriate use of a Facebook page, and general lack of online presence has left Adirondack Adventures, commonly referred to as A[2], with a confused image. In order to redesign Adirondack Adventures' image and brand via a social media marketing strategy I had to start with cleaning up their Facebook page. The page had been used more for personal use, with pictures of staff gatherings and parties, images containing alcoholic beverages and employees smoking, all of which did not portray the business as an all inclusive, family friendly and safe outfitter for potential consumers. While they certainly portray their business as fun, the overall content was off putting to potential customers. Content wise, there was very little representing Adirondack Adventures as a brand. There are the occasional posts about upcoming specials or water level predictions for the weekend, which are all few and far between, but absolutely no customer interactions, nothing pertaining to customer experiences, etc. When I had redesigned the website for Adirondack Adventures, my intention was to make them look more modern, using clean typography, sharper images, and using a responsive grid that would work on any type of screen from desktop to mobile. With social media sites like Facebook, design options are somewhat more limited, but that only creates a more interesting design challenge. Through the use of written content, logos, photos, and customer co-creation I believe Adirondack Adventures social media image can better represent their intended brand and invite more customer interactions and as a result consumer co-created content.

Removing any images deemed inappropriate or something that would be better placed on a personal page, only images of the business including staff, trips, and scenery will be used. For future content generation an email will be sent to the owner of the business to forward to his employees encouraging that they keep track of pictures they take on trips or of the local area that they think would help promote the business so that the they can be posted and help maintain a consistent online presence for Adirondack Adventures. In order for consumers to contribute and create their own content, they must have enough brand generated content to begin with.

 Additionally I reworked their company logo to update it and implement it into all areas of their online presence. Using graphic design methodology such as typography, color theory, and symmetry I designed Adirondack Adventures to reflect their new image as a modern, consumer driven business for adventure seekers of all kinds. The logo plays off of their nickname A^2. It moves away from the kitchy handwritten font on their old logo which spells out "Adirondack Adventures" alongside a figure in a kayak holding up a paddle, of which the location of the digital file is unknown. The new logo instead focuses less on a single service provided and more on their brand as an organization. By updating their logo and incorporating it throughout their social media activity consumers will associate the new logo with their new online presence.

Figure 1. Original Adirondack Adventures Logo

Figure 2: Redesigned Adirondack Adventures logo

I established an Instragram and twitter account for them as well, giving them a page and a handle for users to tag them. Since these three platforms can be easily linked together to post the same content on each one, it would not increase the social media management too much while substantially increasing exposure. Incorporating Instagram and Twitter is a great opportunity for Adirondack Adventure to showcase its own photos pertaining to trips and scenery as well as getting ahead of the competition in terms of social media outreach and exposure. In addition to developing the social media marketing strategy, instructions advising the owner of Adirondack Adventures on how to run these platforms and link all three within a single post will be included. My goal is to establish enough groundwork on their social media sites that when rafting season opens, in April, it will be ready to encourage consumer-generated content and thus eliminating

some of the limitations faced by Adirondack Adventures in terms of management and brand generated contributions.

Incorporating Consumer Generated Content

In order to create an incentive for consumer-generated content for Adirondack Adventures social media platforms there are a few different tactics that will be employed. First, in an effort to establish their brand as consumer driven, with the flexibility to customize each trip individually, it only makes sense that their social media content be consumer driven as well. Thus, in the "About" sections of all three platforms, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, there will be this blurb:

> "Join the Adirondack Adventures Community! Share your photos, experiences, and thoughts with us, post on our wall or tag us on yours @adkadventures1"

As further incentive to begin this transition for Adirondack Adventures, I recommend that they offer specials on trip prices, photo prices, and merchandise via their social media platforms in exchange for consumer engagement in terms of consumption, contribution, and creation. (Schivinski, Christodoulides & Dabrowski pg. 75) I also recommend that staff members have access to social media logins or create their own professional social media accounts in order to contribute to the content and conversations. I have created a content calendar for the month of April, which is opening month of the season for white water rafting, in order to get Adirondack Adventures started with their social media marketing campaign. The calendar is designed to

transition from mostly business generated content to consumer generated content. Each day has a post for all three social media platforms, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Images will be added along side each post, sourced from their website, stock of stored photos, and hopefully photos contributed by employees and guides. They will range from photos of past trips to captured scenic moments as well as promotional offers, descriptions of different services, customer reviews, and so on. Each post is designed to encourage consumer engagement, making these pages as much for the customer advantage as for the business advantage. Rather than trying to sell potential customers on the brand of Adirondack Adventures, the design of this social media campaign is for the customers to co-create the brand themselves, to start the conversations with each other. "It turns out that consumers have little interest in the content that brands churn out. Very few people want it in their feed. Most view it as clutter—as brand spam. When Facebook realized this, it began charging companies to get "sponsored" content into the feeds of people who were supposed to be their fans. The problem companies face is structural, not creative. " (Holt pg. 44) For consumers, the consumption and contribution of social media content will lead to a creative co-collaboration. I believe that once they grow their online community and encourage people to co-create with their brand that their social media communities will thrive without much influence from brand generated content. The idea is to make their online community just that, a community, not just another outlet for "brand spam." Their social media platforms will be for consumers looking to connect with guides, planning trips, networking with other consumers of similar interests, and so forth.

Social Platform	Sunday - 2	Monday - 3	Tuesday - 4
Facebook	Have you been down the Hudson river before? We want to hear from the people who make our jobs so awesome, share your experience with us in the comments!	It's almost that time of year again! Grab a wetsuit and grab a paddle it's time to catch the big waves of spring on the Hudson River Gorge!	Lunch on the river is an essential part of our day. What fuels your fire? Share your ideas with us and we'll make your lunch dreams come true!
Twitter	Are you following us on Facebook? Instagram? Hurry now and join the A2 community! @adkadvetnrus1	Are you ready for raging water? Experience rafting with A2 & book your trip with us!	Hungry? Tweet us your idea of a white water worthy lunch! @adkadventures1
Instagram	Take any good pictures lately? We love seeing the candid moments our customers catch. Be sure to tag us @adkadventures1	The water is rising and we can't wait to hit those waves! Have your picture of the Hudson? We'd love to see them! @adkadventures1	Yum. There's nothing like some good gruel to get you through the second half of the trip. Staff favorites include wraps, Starcrunch, and lemonade! Share your faves with us!
Social Platform	Sunday - 9	Monday - 10	Tuesday - 11
Facebook	The Adirondacks are beautiful all year long, don't wait for summer to experience some of the most exciting sight seeing in the great adirondacks!	Plan your perfect trip with us. Here at Adirondack Adventures it's all about the customer experience. We want to show you everything we love about the beautiful Adirondacks! Have questions? Ask! Post on our A2!	Have a favorite jam you want to hear on the bus ride to the put-in? Post it in the comments and you might hear your perfect jam when you book your trip with A2!
Twitter	Who's ready for big water? Tweet us your favorite time of year for rafting!	Did you go down the river today? Tweet us about it! Let's make this season the best one yet.	Tweet us your go-to morning tunes! It's all about good mojo at Adirondack Adventures, bus ride included!
Instagram	The water is looking mighty big and mighty cold! If you're going down the river this week bundle up! Remember no cotton, stick to polyester and wool!	Share your pictures from today and be sure to tag your guide! Let's make this the best season yet!	Do you enjoy watching your guide get down to some old school jams? Did you take a picture or video? If so we want to see it! Tag us @adkadventures1
Social Platform	Sunday - 16	Monday - 17	Tuesday - 18
Facebook	It's Sunday Funday at Adirondack Adventures! What are some of your #sundayfunday traditions?	Nobody likes Mondays but we sure don't mind our days in the "office." Come join us for a fun day of river fun!	The best cure for cabin fever? Class 4 & 5 waves on the Hudson River Gorge. Plan your trip now!
Twitter	Beat the Monday blues by getting out of the office & onto the river! Contact us today!	Wishing you were somewhere else? Tweet us your ideal way to spend Monday!	Consider yourself a thrill seeker? Adventure lover? Tweet us your favorite places to explore!
Instagram	No better way to wind down the weekend than with gorgeous views of the Adirondacks. Be sure to tag us in your favorite shots! @adkadventures1	Just another day at the office for Adirondack Adventures, wouldn't you like to come and "work" with us?	Sometimes a quiet day by the lake is all you need. Adirondack Adventures offer kayaks, canoes, and paddleboards for those looking to paddle the calmer waters.
Social Platform	Sunday - 23	Monday - 24	Tuesday - 25
Facebook	Candid photos are great, but we also provide professional action shots to document your adventure on the Hudson River Gorge! Share this post and you could win 20% discount on your photo!	Planning a trip with a big group of people? We'll start a group on our page and help you get all the details organized! Comment with questions, direct message us, or give us a call for more information!	The fun doesn't have to stop when you get off the river. Adirondack Adventures offers overnight camping trips for you and your friends! Book your two day excursion and let us know what you'd like on the menu!
Twitter	Retweet us & you can receive 20% off your professional photo of your trip down the river!	Adirondack Adventures will accommodate groups of any size, big or small! Tweet us for more information!	Tweet us your fave camp foods & book an overnight with A2!
Instagram	Candid photos are great, but we also provide professional action shots to document your adventure on the Hudson River Gorge! Share this post and you could win 20% discount on your photo!	Tag us in a picture of your big group and you could get 5% off your trip with a group of 10 or more!	Nothing says summer like camping. Tag us in your adirondack camping pics @adkadventures1 and book your overnight now!

Figure 3: Excerpt of Social Media Content Calendar April 2017

Conclusion

Throughout this research process I have learned that Web 2.0 technologies and social media platforms are essential components to any business's successful online presence. They have completely changed the way people are communicating and as a result consumer behaviors as well. These platforms are for the most part free, accessible by anyone, and have bridged a gap between isolated cultures and communities. A new generation of prosumers is emerging, where brands and marketing campaigns are dictated by crowd culture and consumer generated content. While this may present huge obstacles to previously successful corporations in terms of redefining their brand, for Adirondack Adventures it provides an opportunity to become the first in its industry to adapt to these new practices and stand out as a top competitor in the white water rafting industry. Using consumer generated content to build Adirondack Adventures social media marketing campaign not only creates a more engaging, user friendly experience, it also eliminates the obstacles and limitations that were facing Adirondack Adventures in terms of social media presence.

By getting consumers to like, comment, share, and create their own postings about Adirondack Adventures they are increasing their exposure exponentially, generating buzz among a number of different communities, and developing a community of trust with established as well as potential consumers. When one consumer likes, comments, or creates a post about Adirondack Adventures it is seen by all of their followers. When a follower likes, comment, or creates a post based off of that consumer's post it is seen by all of their respective followers, and so on. This type of exposure and word of mouth information sharing expands Adirondack Adventures once limited community into a much larger and hopefully more profitable one. "Small enterprises are

usually deep-rooted in their local area, but recently they may take advantage of web technologies as they can expand their geographical boundaries." (Cesaroni & Consoli pg. 258) By building a stronger presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, their messages will be translated to sites Yelp and TripADvisor as well as countless forums for various crowd cultures. "Consumers have social interactions through social media such as online forums, communities, ratings, reviews and recommendations. These developments have introduced a new stream in e-commerce, called social commerce, which empowers consumers to generate content and influence others." (Hajli pg. 399) Adirondack Adventures will be able to infiltrate the numerous different resources that consumers use to retrieve information about potential purchases. As it has been previously discussed, consumers are much more likely to refer to a social community to get information and recommendations rather than a business website or social media page. However, that being said, it is still incredibly important that businesses maintain their websites and social media platforms to the best of their ability for it has been proven that the aesthetic and usability of these resources still weighs heavily on consumer purchasing decisions.

While laying the groundwork for Adirondack Adventures social media marketing campaign is a good a start, realistically I know that I will not be able to run their social media platforms on a long term basis. I also know that they do not have the time or the resources to do it themselves. Without implementing consumer generated content, all of this ground will have been for naught and their online presence will return to the state that it is currently in. My hope is to create an online community for Adirondack Adventures over the next season that will continue to grow and feed by itself for the foreseeable future. I also believe that once their is a consumer community established it will make producing business generated content easier for

Adirondack Adventure employees. Rather than trying to generate engaging content from scratch, they will be able to use the consumer generated content to produce what potential customers are actually looking for. Looking towards the future, new computational software that will allow businesses to sort out information shared on social media may help small businesses like Adirondack Adventures, create consumer driven social media content more easily and efficiently.

The ever evolving Web 2.0 technologies that have moved us away from information retrieval to information interactivity have been guiding our culture into a major shift from the idea of consumerism to prosumerism. In a society where internet users have been conditioned to glance over advertisements and opt out of commercials, generating relevant, engaging content for businesses has been a challenge. Where giant moguls like McDonalds were once dominant forces in their respective industries, they are now struggling to recapture said dominance with their social media consumer engagement. However, smaller contenders, like Chipotle, are able to build on this idea of crowd culture and generate the type of content that consumers are actually looking for. For a small business with an incredibly limited niche market like Adirondack Adventures, this new age of prosumers is a huge opportunity. Where they once were at a disadvantage in terms of large based clientele like camps and colleges, they have the advantage of redefining their brand and breaking into untapped markets. While the other outfitters in the area remain outdated, making little use of their social media platforms, Adirondack Adventures can be the first business to break out of that box, using multiple platforms, creating community buzz, and staying true to their business intent of providing an authentic, customized experience for each and every client.

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