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CHANNEL

How partners can leverage social media



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DECEMBER 24, 2018, 3:10 PM

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Industry experts share insights on the opportunities social media offers to regional partners for marketing strategies.

The growth of social media platforms and trends are increasingly posing as optimal opportunities for channel partners to promote and market their operations.

While traditional marketing methods are effective, KS Parag, value-added distributor FVC's managing director, believes utilising professional social media platforms offers additional avenues for channel-led firms to communicate their marketing information.

He says, "Integrating social media into traditional marketing efforts allows us to keep partners constantly informed of new initiatives, promotions, events, vendor alliances, and training opportunities. This way, partners do not have to solely rely on email alerts but can also access this information via social media as well at a time convenient to them."

Concurring with Parag, Enterprise Systems' CEO Pouya Parsafar, says, "First and foremost, social media helps get the word out about your business and provides the opportunity to grow relationships.

"Your followers are people who know your organisation, have likely done business with you in the past, and will be most likely to tell their friends about your business. Social media sites are becoming the go-to place for clients who want to learn more about your business.

Although one of the challenges today is persuading channel partners and distributors to accept social media platforms as relevant marketing tools. While the acceptance levels are gradually increasing, not all partners feel comfortable using these platforms for business.

Parag says, “Social media can be a powerful marketing tool if utilised the right way. While partners understand the importance of it, often times partners focus on growing their business and maximising on existing opportunities.”

This is especially true considering the tough business landscape that partners go through in the region.

“Partners are focused on completing projects and reaching out to new end-users that will increase their overall profits. In such a situation, the key challenge is the time used to access social media platforms, and the initiative to capitalise on marketing promotions offered on social media platforms by vendors and distributors,” he adds.

“Major social networks, including Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram, offer free mobile apps that let business owners manage their presence on-the-go,” Parsafar says, “More importantly, these apps let customers connect to their favorite brands. These users aren’t just sharing updates from their own lives, they’re searching for businesses, products, services and connecting with brands through their social channels all while on-the-go that’s accessible via mobile.”

Other challenges for partners include information management issues.

This is primarily in the areas of privacy, security, accuracy, and archiving, spanning issues such as personally identifiable information, security of company data and information, and the accuracy of publicly available data, explains Parsafar.

“By adopting the use of specific social media tools, businesses appear to be tacitly endorsing the privacy, security, and other policies employed by those social

media providers as adequate.”

He adds that a lack of social media strategy has been a roadblock for companies for a while now.

“Partly because it’s still fairly new, and also because social media is always changing.”

According to Parsafar, 28 percent of brands feel that a lack of strategy is the top barrier keeping them from becoming a social business.

“In order to optimise your social media marketing campaigns, you must have a strategy with clearly defined goals and objectives,” he adds.

Often the question partners have in mind is if they will be able to gain a monetary value by using social media tools for their marketing strategies?

“Twitter, Facebook, and others are no-cost marketing channels to join, potentially a zero-dollar investment which makes any return exponential. So, in order to track ROI, the key elements would be to identify your monetary investment in social media and attach a dollar amount to your social media goals,” explains Parsafar. “To follow this strategy, one needs to choose goals or actions to track activities such as online purchases, new followers, likes on posts and so on. One must then track these goals and then assign a monetary value.”

Parag says, “Partners need to realise that the clever use of social media can also contribute to helping them highlight their specialisation and promote their expertise, successful alliances and projects – which could lead to new business prospects.”

According to Parag, vendors and distributors can provide support by co-promoting their partners' efforts and highlighting outstanding business growth and contribution to help partners crack new opportunities.

However, according to The Channel Institute, who provide certificates in digital co-marketing training course for both channel partners and vendor channel marketers, believe that vendors are not doing enough to support their channel partners with social media marketing.

“Vendors are overly reliant on providing the infrastructure, such as software platforms and content, but do not help with the soft skills required to enable partners to drive value from these. Partners typically do not understand how to customise content and social media marketing for their specific value proposition, enabling it to cut through the general noise in the marketplace.”

According to the firm, a major reason why these “soft skills are not being transferred is because channel managers and even channel marketers at vendor companies are themselves uncomfortable making recommendations in an area where they feel under-skilled.”

In any business, being seen and heard are powerful drivers for the growth of their operations. In this regard, both vendors and partners must work together and embrace social media marketing tools to leverage its benefits.



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