

Social Media - 7 things that L&D can learn from Marketing (Feb 11)

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96% of marketers now use social media as part of their toolkit so what tips can L&D professionals pick up from marketing colleagues?

Marketing departments have very similar challenges to the learning and development function in business – both are looking to improve the way that they connect with consumers (or learners), drive leads (engagement) and influence behaviour.

Marketers are increasingly looking to social media to help with the challenge. The Chartered Institute of Marketing highlight that 17% of participants in their most recent [Marketing Trends Survey](#) say that their spend on online marketing is greater than their spend in offline marketing. Recent research with 100+ marketers flagged that 96% are now using social media in their digital marketing mix with 3 in 5 having a presence on Facebook and LinkedIn ([Digital Disciplines Report](#) Feb 2011).

Many within L&D are looking to follow this lead (the latest [TM Benchmark](#) highlights that over 70% plan to use social media in our learning mix over the next 12 months) but very few are currently doing so (with fewer than 20% using Facebook and LinkedIn). Given that the marketing department are ahead in adoption, what top tips can L&D learn from our marketing colleague's successes and mistakes? Here are just a few ideas that we have picked up from a number of great marketing blogs and reports*:

1. Master the art of conversation

Marketers have found out the hard way that social media is not just about broadcasting your company's products and news; it is best used to engage consumers in conversations that are of interest to them. Consumers are more interested in the brand and there is an added bonus that marketers can use conversations to help to build understanding of client's needs which in turn results in building better products.

Lessons for L&D – don't use social media to shout about your existing learning services but about engaging in new types of conversations between staff so that knowledge and understanding is shared and acted upon.

2. Insight - Understand your consumers (learners)

Many marketers have created great new sites with lots of cool gadgets to promote conversations with their audience without really knowing what their consumers actually think or what their information needs are. First Direct Bank understood this in their [marketing campaign](#) to win back consumer confidence following the banking crisis. They already had insight into their customers and knew that their customers appreciated the small things that the bank did for them. This insight then helped their marketing agency come up with the idea to film reactions of their customers to the bank just doing nice things like giving out chocolates and flowers and then publish live feeds on the bank's site. The programme got national coverage and resulted in over 1, 600, 000 hits on the site thanks to a little bit of insight.

Lessons for L&D - This concept works in learning as well for example BT found out what staff were doing naturally in order to design their [Dare2 Share](#) platform plus they monitored what learning conversations were taking place in the business via the platform to identify new learning needs that weren't currently being met.

3. Find out where the conversations are happening & go there.

The CIM report flagged up a very useful point about meeting consumers where they are most comfortable. They outline that consumers tend to stick in a few online 'villages' (e.g. Facebook, Yahoo, LinkedIn, Skype, Twitter) where they trust the brand and are confident in the content that they receive their rather than roam around. Marketers are advised to set up a presence in their customer's village where they are comfortable rather than to try and drive them to another unfamiliar site. When GSK, the brand behind Ribena wanted to reach the mums to engage them with the product, they worked in partnership with Mumsnet as well as using channels like You-Tube to get their message across. ([Check out their story](#))

Lessons for L&D – do we actually know what online 'villages' our staff are comfortable in? are we meeting them there or creating new sites that contribute to information overload?

4. Sharing great content is at the heart of engagement

Continually sharing and giving great content that is useful or informative is at the heart of good marketing engagement. [The Content Marketing Institute](#) advocate that content developers need to be generous with content – it has to be useful, has to be relevant, has to keep the consumer wanting more.

Lessons for L&D - are we looking to be generous in our sharing via social media? Busy staff need practical ideas to help them in their job - hints and tips, job aids, new approaches, case studies, toolkits. Social media really kicks in when the learner is where they belong – in the heart of their workplace.

5. Creating consumer stars

Going back to the Ribena project, 12 families were invited to spend the day on a blackcurrant farm in the UK and 4 different stories were created where mums were at the heart of exploring the brand (the britishness of the product, the goodness of the product etc) and these were then shared via a range of social media platform. When the consumers became stars of the content, it increased loyalty and created more advocates.

Lessons for L&D – if we want to exploit the opportunities that social media has to offer to change behaviour, how can we make learners the stars of the content, converting them from reluctant recipients of learning to passionate advocates for sharing? Better still how can we help them create their own content to share ideas and good practices with others?

6. Prompting useful conversations

Both the First Direct Bank and Ribena programmes used consumer centric content to stimulate conversations in online places which in turn led to increased awareness and behaviour change. They weren't afraid to share and this sharing got the campaigns noticed

Lessons for L&D – we create a lot of content within our profession but, at the very basic level, do we use social media to allow staff to have conversations around what we create, or for that matter, what they create? For example can staff discuss how they are using content back in the workplace, what they think about it, what they would change? Are we enabling broader conversations with experts in the business?

7. Aligning to business strategy but master the tools

Pete Caputa ,blogging on [Hubspot](#), flags the importance of aligning the use of social tools to business objectives but insists that marketers need to also master those tools if they are going to be effective.

Lessons for L&D – how do we build confidence in new tools? If you haven't already done so check out how Cheshire ICT Services built skills within their team plus Jane Hart's Handbook on social learning tools.

I have been intrigued for years about the lessons that marketing and learning and development can explore with each other. The social media agenda has provided even more overlap. Struggling with the same challenges, they may prove to be a useful ally for organisations looking to embrace social learning more fully.

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