



HVAC Advertising and Social Media - Chapter 2

by Bill Krueger, SKSW Inc.- August 2009

Why should a B2B company selling engineered products through distribution be in social media?

Here are some of the responses I've gotten: "We rely on our distribution to establish and maintain the relationships." "We don't have the resources to manage the communication stream one-on-one with end users, and this could work against the distribution if there were too many voices." "In the HVAC business, the products are sold mostly to contractors, not to the public" (although many products are reaching consumers' hands through direct internet sales). There's "social media isn't for business", and "we have a Web site". Do these sound like the arguments you've heard?

So what's wrong with that?

I think more established business types (how's that for PC?) subscribe to assumptions that are slowing down understanding and some very appropriate uses of the medium. The first is that, especially as an HVAC equipment manufacturer, "your customers all know who you are". Maybe, but I'll bet they don't know you as well as you think. Besides the distribution (which can sometimes be selective about what they promote and sell), many manufacturers rely almost wholly on their Web sites to educate specifiers or end users. This requires someone to take the action to visit your site – a very passive (and sometimes forgettable) strategy.

The second assumption is that social media is only "social". A lot of companies don't quite get the growth of "bottom-up" communications, which has been enabled by social media, but extends far beyond the social element. The top-down approach, where the marketing department pushes out messages in one direction, is still incredibly important. Strategy and message alignment is essential for all communications, and that's where you establish your baseline. But from there on out, a more fragmented spectrum of marketing tools, including social media, start getting traction.

You just need to be interesting.

Do you have something of interest to an audience that could attract them? Do you think an audience exists? Do you have new things to say every once in a while? If you do, then social media can work for you in the commercial context.

With all the media clutter that exists, you really have to be more aggressive, and push your message out in any way possible to get it noticed. Not just once, but a number of times. Social media provides an ideal vehicle – new product announcements, application bulletins, price changes and the like are great material. It's incredibly easy to use, and relatively easy to gain an audience, especially if you promote the venue through other channels.



People, including professionals, like this stuff. They use it. Everybody is pressed for time anymore, and services like Twitter make you quickly aware without slowing you down. As a marketer, becoming adept at sending a concise message in less than 140 characters is certainly a worthwhile skill. Of course, this means that you probably have to provide a link to a full announcement on your Web site, which is a great opportunity to drive trackable traffic! Don't forget to add a line at the bottom of your full announcement that says, "Contact your local distributor for more information."

One more thing – the price is right! So yes, I believe there are good, proactive business reasons to be in social media.

So, start chirping, or whatever...

Which vehicle should you use? My vote, right now, would probably be Twitter. If you're one of the companies that has offered an RSS (Real Simple Syndication) feed (good for you), don't stop. Some think RSS has seen its day, but there are those who swear by the feeds for business use, because RSS is "clean" – no spam. There are millions of users, and I'm rarely in favor of cutting myself off from an established audience, so do them both.

If you haven't done anything yet, I recommend you put together a strategy for social media and test it. Using good "closed loop" methods for measurement, build up a few announcements (Tweets, if you're in Twitter) and introduce your social media presence through your typical channels. Send emails to your distributors first, and engage them, then measure your results by follower count and hits on the specific landing pages of your Web site. If you have something good to say, you'll attract followers quickly. And that should turn into more sales leads!

Don't forget to read the first chapter of this series if you haven't yet. It discusses "owning your name", reputation monitoring and policies for social media use. More advanced articles are on the way, so stay tuned.

Question or comments? Let me know your thoughts. Email: bkrueger@sksw.com