



6 ways tradeshow can power your Social Media Marketing

BY MICHAEL HAMILTON – PRINIPAL - GETSYNCHRONICITY

Q: It's difficult to find interesting & relevant content for my social media channels. Are there I'm overlooking?

A: Yes, and you've been attending them for years ... tradeshow.

Social Media Marketing is here to stay. To most, this isn't a big surprise. It's no longer a question of "if" we use it, but how and when. Most companies now have a dedicated person or team whose focus includes creating and managing their company's social media channels. Gone are the days when social media was an afterthought or add-on; it's now a major part of the marketing mix.

All of that said, social media marketing remains an elusive prey. Disparate platforms and quixotic user interests are moving targets, and striking the right tone with your message on social media is a continual challenge.

This means that the moment anyone attempts to quantify an aspect of social media marketing, their efforts are immediately stamped with a "sell-by" date. Social Media Marketing is still a teenager, and behaves in an age-appropriate manner; inconsistent and unpredictable.

However, there is one aspect of social media that has never ... and, to be bold ... WILL never change; the constant need for new content. The bedrock of social media is its "social" aspect, and if you don't have anything new or interesting to say, your audience will tune you out. As Internet commentators regularly observe, social media is essentially one long conversation, and how you fare depends solely on what you contribute. Simply "joining in" is no guarantee of success.

This is where tradeshow can help. Some of you may be thinking, *"We already include tradeshow in our social media mix. We send out announcements, product roll-out updates,*

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etc. on all of our channels. We push out sporadic LinkedIn articles, and we even live Tweet from the show floor. We've got the social-media-trade show connection covered."

These are all valid ways to include social media in your marketing mix.

But ... (you could see that "but" coming a mile away, couldn't you) ... trade shows offer a larger, and oft-overlooked, opportunity. Trade shows are the only place where your customers, prospects, industry thought-leaders, strategic partners, and your Executive Team are in one place at one time. Furthermore, they've come together for a common purpose and have done a modicum, if not a great deal, of preparation before attending.

Trade shows, therefore, offer an extraordinarily rich vein of relevant content that can be tapped to feed your social media beast for weeks, if not months, without having to invest an inordinate amount of time and money.

This brings us to the obvious question; apart from announcing your presence at an event, or detailing what you're featuring in your exhibit, what other sort of social media content can trade shows generate?

The following are 6 proven ways to leverage the unique opportunity trade shows offer to create meaningful, relevant content for your social media channels ... and for your general marketing mix as well.

1. In-Booth Demos. This one, at first blush, seems obvious. As I mentioned above, most organizations use social media to push out their Press Releases regarding new products or upgrades, especially when they'll be doing it at their next trade show. They may even attach links to pre-produced videos or MOAs.

But consider this; there is never more interest in a trade show--and the industry it supports--than DURING the show. What is also unique is the energy and excitement generated by the show. This, then, is the opportunity; capturing live demo videos in your exhibit.

This approach frames your message with the excitement & interest shown by your in-booth target audience. There is an added bonus that your reps will (most likely) have created and rehearsed new demo presentations that use new or newly updated support graphics. And all of this staffing, support graphics, and exhibit space is an investment your company was already making ... taking advantage of it, then, is extremely cost-effective.

In-booth demo videos (pushed out through social media) offers an additional benefit; it gives your target audience who could NOT attend the show (or who couldn't get to your exhibit) a chance to experience your brand and message.

2. In-booth traffic-building activities. Building on the previous idea of recording your in-booth demos, you can also capture the excitement generated by any in-booth traffic-building activities you may be implementing. Whether it's interactive media, a physical game, speed-briefing, formal presentation, or something in between, seeing and hearing attendees participate is a compelling way to communicate more than your product message ... it communicates your brand *personality*. This is expensive to do in print or commercials, but who better to show your target audience who you are than their peers?

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The next idea builds on this in an exponential way.

3. Pulse of the People. Tradeshows generate a great deal of buzz. What if you could capture that buzz and use it to your advantage?

This point has not been made yet in this article, so let's do it now; people don't like to READ the Internet ... they prefer to WATCH it. Add to this the fact that people are more interested in what their peers have to say than watching a pre-produced commercial. Putting this together, if you were to capture video of the viewers' peers talking about their aspirations, goals, and challenges, you would have a potent, relevant communication tool.

So here's the idea; the act of capturing this video becomes the in-booth activity. By erecting a step & repeat--or dedicating a portion of a kiosk--as a place to capture attendee video, you energize the entire booth. Passersby see a video camera in use (iPhone, etc.), attendees sharing their thoughts & ideas ... and they see attendees receiving a thank you gift for doing so. This is a powerful attract and generates increased traffic in your exhibit.

Customer video is an extremely valuable asset ... and it's an asset that can ONLY be generated (cost-effectively) at a tradeshow.

Furthermore, by asking well-crafted questions, attendees will deliver appropriate video content (the primary goal), but they will also qualify themselves. Nearby sales reps (who have been strategically positioned near this activity) can take over the engagement and continue a focused sales conversation based on what the attendee revealed. It's a Win/Win situation.

This video, then, can be edited onsite and posted to your social media channels at intervals during the show, or saved and edited post-event for future social media campaigns. Video that demonstrates how you listen to your clients to better solve their challenges is an extremely valuable asset ... and it's an asset that can ONLY be generated (cost-effectively) at a tradeshow.

4. Customer Testimonials. You probably thought of this already. Testimonials are incredibly tough to get, oral or written. But tradeshows are great at breaking down two of three primary barriers to getting one; your target client will be present at the show (Challenge #1), and (often) is in a voluble mood (Challenge #2). Also, tradeshows offer multiple opportunities to connect. Getting a testimonial across the finish line remains up to you, but the tradeshow gets the horse to the water and places its nose an inch from the surface.

Customer testimonials, as you already know, are PRIME social media content because most industries share a common trait; its inhabitants find the word of a respected peer more credible than any sort of marketing or advertising material.

Bottom line: Tradeshows are a conducive environment for soliciting testimonials. Take advantage of it.

5. Thought-leader Observations. It would seem this idea should have been included in the previous section, but "thought-leader" videos differ significantly; they are more of a "Pulse of the People" hybrid.

They, too, offer a personal POV, but it's one from a recognized industry thought-leader, which super-charges its importance and relevance. When they speak, your target audience listens. And if what they say aligns with your solutions, that is a powerful mix.

Thought-leaders are often hard to pin down, but they'll most likely be attending (and offering seminars) at your industry tradeshow. It's easier to be heard the lion in its den than in the wild.

6. Overview of the show. These types of videos are ubiquitous on show management or industry e-zine websites and social media channels. Unsurprisingly, they offer a general industry POV.

However, what if you could offer your target audience an alternate view of the show ... one that is focused through your brand lens? WHAT you feature, WHO you speak with, and HOW you position the information is entirely under your control. You can make your brand the STAR of the show by leveraging the excitement in your booth, as well as the excitement of the entire show floor, through your social media channels.

As referenced earlier, there is never more interest in a tradeshow than when it is currently happening, and your tradeshow social media program can satisfy your target audience's cravings while positioning your company as a major player in the industry ... even if you're not ... yet.

BONUS: All of the Above. A focused tradeshow social media video program will result in a file brimming with useful assets; demos, booth activities, pulse of the people, show floor activity, and perhaps some testimonials and thought-leader footage. What you do with this will be guided by the specific marketing parameters of your brand.

But in addition to pushing this content individually, you can also use them collectively to create a general overview video that is greater than the sum of its parts.

You will have a richly textured content piece that is informative, persuasive, and relevant to heat up your Social Media channels--as well as your other online outlets--for weeks and MONTHS to come.

And if you happen to attend multiple trade shows ... including smaller, banquet room affairs ... a successful social media video strategy can produce a steady stream of new, interesting, and relevant content you can use throughout the year. Your in-house social media team will love you for it.

Conclusion. The (not exhaustive) list of strategies reviewed in this article reference only social media programs that are 100% in your control. There are others; e.g. attendee-driven activities like Snapchat "Live Stories" Instagram Events, or simple Facebook "Like" campaigns. Those are absolutely viable ways to drive relevant content through your social media channels ... BUT ... (there's that "but" again) ... the nature of that content remains a virtual unknown until AFTER you see it. They are admittedly powerful tools, and can be used successfully, but they require a different management tool set, and a higher tolerance for risk.

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This article, in contrast, has offered *predictable* and *controllable* ways of solving the never-ending challenge of keeping your marketing messages current and relevant.

However, there is one important thing to remember; even though the content you're creating is predictable and controllable, at-show social media video campaigns **must be carefully planned and executed**. The medium is the message, and ***unfocused work can be detrimental to your brand***.

You may be thinking, "*Darn! Our industry tradeshow is over. Oh well...*" Never fear. If you missed the boat this time around, there'll be another one chugging along soon.

Be prepared.