

Social Pollination

- *Escape the Hype of Social Media and Join the Companies Winning At it.*
- by Monica L. O'Brien
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- Book summary adapted for educators by Douglas W. Green, EdD
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Who is Monica L. O'Brien?

- Monica O'Brien is a marketing consultant specializing in results-driven marketing strategy at the juncture of new media and traditional marketing. She has extensive experience doing marketing and public relations for startups and small businesses. She now teaches organizations how to establish and manage their online presence with modern media methods. She is a Chicago Business Fellow at the University of Chicago. She also has an MBA from the Chicago Booth School of Business with concentrations in marketing, strategy, and entrepreneurship. Her Bachelor's is in computer science, with a minor in physics.

Relationships, Authenticity, & Trust

- If you believe that these concepts are important for your organization, you can use this book to learn how to use social media to promote all three. (Doug: While the book is aimed at business, I believe that the basic concepts relate well to education. Social media is increasingly important to school districts, individual schools, administrators, and teachers. Each of these entities has to decide if they will use social media and how to use it to accomplish stated goals. The details of this book are necessary if you want to take advantage of the concepts covered here. You, or someone in your organization should have this book!)

Sharing is the Key.

- Social pollination allows a message of any kind to spread farther than traditional methods. O'Brian starts with 15 mistakes you can make. They include: not using social media at all, using it without a clear strategy, focusing on changing tools rather than strategy, incorrect use to tools, only using one tool, failure to build relationships, thinking you can control a message once it is sent, not participating in conversations once messages are sent, and abusing information you get from your network. Word-of-mouth is probably one of the most scaleable forms of marketing on the planet. This allows for messages to be shared over and over again. It may take time to get it going, but this stuff is powerful once you get the ball rolling.

Goals

- You need to start by looking at your goals, and as you move forward, you need to make sure your goals align with your social media goals. Individuals and organizations need to determine how much time they will commit to this effort. You can always grow so don't get too big, too soon. If you already have a web presence, make sure you look at it first. Next, look at what your competitors are doing. You want to aim for something better. You need to know who your customers are, (Doug: Educators have customers too.) and what they might be interested in. It is important to engage in an online conversation with them.

Strategy

- Brand awareness is something you will try to promote with social media. Make sure you make a good first impression. Don't hesitate to copy any approach from top competitors. In order to be seen as a thought leader, you need to share insightful ideas and opinion and build relationships with other leaders in your field. Don't forget there are other channels available to reach your audience. Give your current customers reasons to talk in a positive way. Such buzz will feed on itself. Make sure your efforts make it easy for customers to voice their issues. (Doug: If you don't hear the bad news, you can't do anything about it.) If you spot trends, put out a frequently asked questions (FAQ) list. Your social presence can also help in recruiting talent. You can also do cost effect research using social media.

Choose Your Channels

- This chapter lists the various categories of social media along with information on the most prominent players in each category. This is a great reason to purchase this book. O'Brien also lists blogs where you can learn more about all of this. The categories are: blogs, miniblogs, microblogs such as Twitter, social networks like FaceBook and MySpace, professional networks like LinkedIn, special interest networks like Ning, bookmarking sites like Digg and Delicious, photo-sharing sites like Flickr, Audio/radio networks where you can access Podcasts, video networks like YouTube, ecommerce and review sites like EBay, information hubs like Wikipedia, answer sites like Yahoo! Answers, and event sites like Evite and Meetup. You can use this list to decide which tools you want to start with.

Content - Relationships - Success

- You need to go beyond simple contacts to relationships and provide valuable content at no cost. The more you give away, the more you can sell. Manage your profile with care and don't play around. Keep all contacts appropriate. Use your current assets to build your base for each tool you use and ask your network what they want. Find groups related to your interests and participate in them. Some tools also allow you to create groups. Sort your content into meaningful categories. Offer RSS feeds for any tool that allows you to and use the abilities of tools to talk to each other. Pitch your best content to power users. Respond to people who comment on your content and leave comments as you visit other users.

The Psychology of Sharing

- In order to encourage people to share your content, you need to make the information relevant, make it simple to access, keep it on the cutting edge, and give it without strings attached. Make sure that the content is in a format accessible by all. (Doug: Use pdf rather than PowerPoint file formats.) If people gain insight, they are more likely to come back and share with others. Make content strong from start to finish so people don't get bored in the middle. Get opinions from others in your organization or in your network prior to posting when you can.

Where to get the content?

- While some of your content may be original, there are many other ways to get valuable content. You can be a filter for content you find and add value to it with your own ideas. There is a good deal of public domain content. You can also find article banks that contain work by people looking for new outlets. You can ask guest writers to submit content for your site and you can conduct interviews with people who have something interesting to say to your customers. As you find content elsewhere in the Web, you can create resource lists. Check out Delicious.Com for links to sites with tags of interest. If you find that you have lots of short content, you may be a candidate for Twitter, which allows messages up to 140 characters. Longer content can be syndicated into smaller chunks.

Making your content easier to find

- One way to draw attention to your content is to help the many Internet search engines find it. O'Brien provides specific sites and details that will help you do this. Search Engine Optimization can happen if you embed titles, keywords, and descriptions in the code responsible for displaying your pages. You can also help the search engines by submitting your site map to the various services such as Google, Yahoo, MSN, Ask, and Bing. Another strategy is to promote the creation of links to your content. Selecting a unique set of keywords will also allow you to show up near the top of searches. Your main keywords should show up in your headline. Headlines should emphasize your main point and should be catchy.

PR and Advertising

- O'brian advises the use of traditional press releases for the traditional media in addition to different approaches for bloggers who typically despise press releases. She suggests you try to tell a story that fits into one of these categories if you can. 1) David and Goliath, 2) Unusual or outrageous, 3) Controversial, 4) Celebrity, or 5) What's already hot in the media. Releases should be targeted to the news source. Use relationships you have developed via your social network to get the word out. Make sure the sources you seek talk to the audience you desire. Like other chapters, this one has a lot of detail you can use to get the job done.

Measuring Your Social Impact

- If you are making a serious effort to use social media to enhance your mission, you owe it to yourself to try to figure out the impact of your efforts. You should also monitor your own engagement with the people you are trying to reach. O'Brian provides many ways to determine your social reach and many are free. Some of this measurement activity is simple like checking the number of followers and the number you are following in Twitter. Tracking the activity at a blog is also fairly simple. If you are in a competitive situation, you can also track the competition. More data is almost always a good thing. Collect and use data, but don't become a slave to it. Pair data with good sense and intuition when you face decisions. Also, don't confuse correlation with causation. There is no formula to find cause.

Teamwork and Final Thoughts

- In the final chapter O'Brien covers the concepts of team building. Should you outsource your social media effort, hire someone to do it, or cover it with existing resources. You should consider using a consultant during the startup process, and she gives a list of questions you should ask to make sure your consultant has what it takes. She also gives some efficiency tips. Unlike most books, she gives her contact information and encourages you to contact her.
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