



Harnessing Facebook

What Facebook can do for your A/V business — and what it can't.

by Don Kreski

WITH MORE THAN A BILLION registered users worldwide, Facebook is pretty tough to ignore from a marketing standpoint. According to Edison Research, 56 percent of Americans now have at least one social networking profile, and 22 percent check social sites several times a day. Another research firm, comScore, says that Americans spent 18 percent of their Internet time on social media sites last year. Facebook, of course, is the most popular of the social platforms, with Hitwise figures showing that Facebook accounted for more than 61 percent of social site visits by the end of 2012.

Still, as large as Facebook has grown, it is a mistake to see it as more than a single piece in the puzzle that makes up an effective marketing program.

Some Facebook Basics

It's important to realize that whatever you put on your company's Facebook page should be primarily targeted toward those finding you on Facebook for the first time. According to the "The B2B Social Media Book," "as many as 95 percent of people who like your page never return, which means that most people who read and interact with your content do so in their news feed." A professional Facebook business page can help assure prospective clients that you are a credible vendor, but beyond those initial impressions, the platform can help you only if visitors push the "like" button.

For most business to business marketers, it's probably not realistic to expect thousands of people to push that button. But for the users who do take that step, a "like" becomes a subscription to regular news from your company, similar to opting into an email newsletter. People may "like" you because they're impressed with your work, because they want their friends

subscription. And if you post something especially useful or entertaining, it's very easy for them to share it with others who have not subscribed.

How AVI-SPL Uses Facebook

Because AVI-SPL is one of our industry's largest users of social media, I asked the company's social media specialist, Jessica Lane, and its PR specialist, Krystle Czajkowski, for their thoughts about Facebook as a marketing platform.

The marketing department at AVI-SPL is responsible for much more than their social media program. They produce an active press relations program, three email newsletters, a blog, a webinar program, regular YouTube videos, targeted advertising and direct mail, not to mention their efforts exhibiting at trade shows and hosting customer events. While Lane and Czajkowski see Facebook as a valuable platform, their 1,400-plus Facebook fans represent a small number of the people regularly seeing news and promotions from the company through their various communication channels. For that reason, the material they post on Facebook, more often than not, is originally created for some other medium.

Still, out of those 1,400 fans, Lane believes as many as 70 percent read posts from the AVI-SPL Facebook page on a fairly regular basis.

"We can see that the average post gets about 200 views and a really popu-

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—Jessica Lane, AVI-SPL

to know they are users of the latest technology, or they may do so in return for a discount, a white paper or some other premium. Whatever the reason, they will receive your posts on a regular basis.

Better still, a "like" is public. The friends of your "fans" can see what they like, so it's an endorsement as well as a

lar post [gets] maybe 600 views, which is almost half of the people following us," she says.

That's an especially impressive figure given that the company creates three to five posts each week.

Lane believes different marketing platforms are best suited for different types of communication.

"Facebook is best as a way to foster connectedness and communications — a way to show people we're not just a big company, but one that's made up of regular people trying to make our clients' lives a little better," she says.

One reason the platform works this way is that it encourages two-way communication. It's very easy for readers to comment on what they see and to post new material, and then for other readers to comment on those comments. When they do, readers' comments or posts appear in the news feeds of their own Facebook friends.

An important difference between Facebook and other platforms is the ease in which users can share photos. "To me, photos are the biggest value of Facebook," Lane says. "They help make Facebook lighter, more fun and more exciting than other media."

The emphasis on photos helps make Facebook a good place to promote activities that are more informal, such as community service and personal activities.

"We try to encourage employees to post their own photos and stories, to help show what is, after all, the heart of our company," Lane says, adding that Facebook is also a nice platform to create and maintain ongoing narratives. "When we installed a Cisco TelePresence unit at our office in Tampa, we created a series of posts and an album on Facebook where you could watch it come together step by step. That was hugely successful, with many people asking a broad range of questions, some very basic and some very specific and technical."

Interestingly, these Facebook fans are not all potential customers. Lane says that roughly 40 percent are AVI-SPL employees and perhaps 20 percent are vendors and other partners.

"We also connect to industry analysts and the media — people who influence



AVI-SPL sees its Facebook presence as a branding tool and a venue for more informal communication, not a source of sales leads.

those who buy," Czajkowski says.

Although a large portion of the company's Facebook fans are employees, it's not a good place to share anything sensitive or confidential. For that reason, Lane says AVI-SPL has started to use Bloomfire, which provides a password-protected, company-only social platform ideal for sharing company and project information.

It's important to note that the mere existence of a Facebook page will not earn a significant following. You can promote your social platforms by including links on your website, on your email signatures, on your newsletters, advertising and promotions, and on other social platforms. Czajkowski says AVI-SPL's Projector People team has tried some Facebook advertising. "They are putting up ads about specific products and promotions, while we're trying to create a conversation. Ours is a less-defined goal and we would not expect to get the same return for our investment."

That brings us back to the value of Facebook. For AVI-SPL and many others in our industry, it's all about brand building, not sales leads, about building relationships rather than attracting new prospects. A relatively static but professionally-produced Facebook page will be worth creating, especially since it's not difficult to do. But to maximize your results, you need to post items to your timeline frequently, and they need to be as useful and compelling as possible.

If you are already generating news and marketing material regularly for a press program or an email newsletter, be sure to repackage those items for your Facebook timeline. If you are not, Facebook is not the place to start. The most successful marketers know that Facebook is a valuable platform but not their highest priority. **CI**

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