Why Storytelling and Social Media Need Each Other to Survive

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This blog is written by a member of our expert blogging community and expresses that expert's views alone.

As the business marketplace continues to integrate social technology, it's tempting to say that the arrival of social media is as revolutionary as the digital revolution was ten years ago. It's also tempting to think that social media agencies will rob traditional media companies, whether they are advertising agencies or PR firms, of a large share of their clients ad spend just as digital companies have done. But such an outlook overlooks one key fact: social media needs powerful storytelling to thrive, just as brand storytellers must now embrace social media. Here's why.

It's easy to mistake social media as an end in themselves, but the currency that marketers and communities of all types still trade is emotion. In order for a brand to market itself effectively and to connect deeply with its community, it must tell a story that captures the attention of that audience and allows them to become emotionally invested in it. For that to happen, a brand must define itself clearly and articulate its core values, and then communicate them consistently. But that can only happen if a brand has defined its own narrative in the first place. Only by having defined itself can a brand maintain a compass in a marketplace where technology changes so quickly.

As such I contend that storytellers and social media marketers cannot survive without each other. Too often storytellers schooled in traditional media don't possess, profess or practice sufficient social technology expertise to adequately serve their clients. On the other hand, social media companies often don't have the hard won storytelling expertise of traditional ad agencies.

That's why I believe the most effective solution for a brand today lies in a combination of the two. For a truly effective social campaign, a brand needs to embrace the first principles of marketing, which involves brand definition and consistent storytelling. They must then trade in the timeless currency of emotion using traditional and social media. Finally they must moderate any conversation about the brand even as consumers are co-authoring the stories that brands are telling, augmenting any positive exchanges and tempering the negative.

The future, therefore, belongs to those brands and their marketing partners who offer the best of traditional advertising with the latest in emerging technology. For this reason, advertising agencies are as relevant as ever if they bring the same creativity to bear on technology that they do to ideas. Likewise, social media companies must combine their mastery of the latest in real-time, location based or augmented reality technologies in the service of clear and consistent storytelling. Only then can a brand confidently expect that its community of customers or fans will go to work for it providing that other timeless trait of effective marketing, word-of-mouth advertising.

Do you agree that storytelling is as important to a brand as social media? What brands do you think are combining the two effectively?