

INTERNET

Mercedes exec: Social media efforts should single out brand advocates

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By TRICIA CARR

NEW YORK - A Mercedes-Benz USA executive at the Luxury Interactive 2012 conference said that a brand's advocates on social media are the most crucial to reach so that marketers can create word-of-mouth that embodies their true ideals and lifestyle.

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During the "Creating Advocacy Through Social Media 'Marketing'" presentation, the executive said that luxury marketers need to acknowledge four different types of consumers on social media: advocates, loyalists, customers and brand admirers. Marketers can hone in on brand advocates via social media by giving fans something to talk about, shaping the brand experience and translating the retail experience to digital.

"We try to tell our brand story and we try to tell those points of difference about our brand," said Mark Aikman, social media lead at **Mercedes-Benz USA**, Montvale, NJ.

"There needs to be value outside of price," he said. "What do you get physically and emotionally from our product that you cannot get anywhere else?"

Luxury differentiators

Luxury brands have three key components that distinguish them from mainstream brands: image, price and customer loyalty.

Mercedes incorporates these brand ideals into its social media marketing to distinguish itself on the channel just as it does on other marketing channels.

Furthermore, the executive recognized that the brand is not the only entity that markets via social media.

“The power of word of mouth marketing is incredibly powerful,” Mr. Aikman said.

“Luxury brands are something that people display with pride,” he said. “They are an embodiment of who they are as a person.

“More than even, these consumers can share their interactions with products to a huge group of people.”

Mercedes has come to realize that these authentic consumer experiences are infinitely powerful on social media.

The most powerful luxury brands are not created through marketing, but are made through the lure of what that brand stands, and that is shaped by word of mouth, the executive said.

Different strokes

Some consumers embody the lifestyle of a brand while some are brand loyalists, but might not match up with the brand lifestyle.

However, luxury marketers should work to understand the brand advocates. According to the Boston Consulting Group, there are 2 percent of a brand’s customers that are advocates and marketers should recognize these advocates with relevancy.

Mercedes recognizes its advocates through brand ambassadors and real-life brand stories.

For instance, Mercedes enacted a television, social media, event and print campaign starring 2012 Wimbledon Champion Roger Federer and the 2013 GL-Class.

The multichannel campaign entitled “Many Rogers” focused on Mr. Federer who has been a global brand ambassador for Mercedes since 2010 and an ambassador for Mercedes-Benz China since 2008 ([see story](#)).

Also, the brand uses Impact Safety Survival Stories to share real-life instances of a Mercedes vehicle saving a life.

Embedded Video: http://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/S93acrFci8c?list=PLC5D129A16B8B8D11&hl=en_US

A Baby Named Crash video

Brands should also recognize the 80-20 rule. Eighty percent of a brand’s products or services are bought by 20 percent of its customers.

That 20 percent is more valuable to a brand than anyone who has bought a brand product only once, per Mr. Aikman.

“You should be paying attention to those who are passionate and want to buy your product again and again,” he said.

Furthermore, luxury marketers should get rid of the purchase funnel and embrace a long-term relationship, especially via social media.

“Once you have someone in your brand, your goal should be to never let them go,” Mr. Aikman said.

Social musts

The executive outlined three actions that luxury marketers should do on social media.

The first rule to follow is to give social fans something to talk about.

“Your fans will be talking about your brand whether you are in that space or not in the space, so you want to give them the tools and the education to do so,” Mr. Aikman said.

Mercedes often uses video to educate users on innovations and technology.

Next, marketers should look to shape the brand experience on social media.

Mercedes often does this via contests on the corporate and local levels.

For instance, Mercedes bridged the gap between its summer event sponsorships and digital efforts with a Facebook-based photography contest that let consumers win a 13-month lease for a 2013 SLK250 Roadster ([see story](#)).

“You should be sharing your brand experience with the people that follow your brand,” he said. “We look at every opportunity that we have and leverage that via social channels.”

Last, luxury marketers should provide a digital and social customer experience.

“If you have an amazing retail experience, how are you going to bring that online, digitally and socially?” Mr. Aikman said.

Final Take

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