

INTERNET

Bentley stuck in hunt for Facebook likes

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By JOE MCCARTHY

Bentley Motors recently overestimated the enthusiasm of its Facebook fans when it had called for 25,000, then 20,000, users to sign up to get their names engraved on the automaker's factory walls in Crewe, Britain.

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Luxury Daily

The "Thanks a Million" initiative began Sept. 17 in response to reaching a million Facebook fans and quickly provided a cautionary tale for brands that hastily assess the plausibility of social media participation. As of this article, 14, 529 spaces remain on the wall, but the duration and frequency of promotions may have rendered the initiative too visible to shelf.

"There are some good lessons to be learned from this experience," said Ron Kurtz, president of the [American Affluence Research Center](#), Atlanta. "First, just because someone becomes a Facebook 'fan' of a brand does not mean that the fan really follows the brand on Facebook and reads the postings of the brand.

"Second, this probably indicates that many of Bentley's Facebook fans are not part of its target audience, at least not in terms of being able to afford their cars," he said. "Third, this demonstrates that brands need to be careful in choosing incentives that will really appeal to their fans.

"This requires a good knowledge of who the fans are, which many brands do not seem to have. Fourth, the focus on the important question of whether brands should be that interested in building their number of fans rather than the quality and relevance of those fans for their business."

Tight position

The Thanks a Million effort began with an earnest premise. Since Facebook users are allowed to write on Bentley's Facebook wall to express appreciation for the brand, the automaker planned to show its gratitude to fans by engraving names on its factory wall.



Bentley Factory in Crewe

The wall will act as a “monument to the passion and enthusiasm of fans our around the world,” according to Bentley’s announcement. Any fan of the brand’s Facebook page is invited to sign up, which requires allowing the Facebook application to access your page ([see story](#)).

The auto brand originally reasoned that 25,000 fans could be enticed to sign up for the large-scale engraving. After failing to attract fans at a reasonable rate, the number was scaled back to 20,000.

If fans continue to sign up at the average daily rate, which ignores the fact that the brand's most ardent followers have likely signed up already, the initiative would continue for more than 150 days.

Furthermore, considering that the effort has been elevated to privileged places of promotion such as the Bentley's home page and the background of its Facebook page, such longevity would limit its ability to present a fresh image to consumers.

Additionally, fans may grow weary of the beckoning image to sign up for something that may not meet their desire for exclusivity or tangible value.

Although very little is asked of fans from the initiative, the effort may still seem too costly for the result.

Matching content

When counting on huge numbers of fan participation, brands must ensure that the content has enough pull. Other

brands have effectively measured the likelihood of participation prior to execution.

For instance, U.S. apparel and accessories label Michael Kors furthered its “WatchHungerStop” campaign through a month-long initiative that included giving away T-shirts at five stores on World Hunger Day Oct. 16, stepping up social media efforts and encouraging consumers to make small donations when purchasing products.

T-shirt recipients had their pictures taken in the Photo Stations at participating locations, which were then live-streamed on Times Square billboards and on the WatchHungerStop microsite. Continually injecting new energy into the campaign increases the chance that it will have an enduring effect on the fight against hunger ([see story](#)).

Also, Neiman Marcus introduced fashion and music-inspired activities Sept. 26-29 into its CUSP departments across the United States to boost and maintain the in-store presence of younger consumers.

The CUSP event revolved around the musicians ZZ Ward, Natalie Bergman of Wild Belle and Noelle Scaggs of Fitz and The Tantrums, who each starred in individual promotional campaigns for CUSP products. To increase nationwide participation, the brand teamed up with Vogue to encourage fans to enter an Instagram sweepstakes for a chance to win a \$2,500 Neiman Marcus gift card.

Since social media tends to guide the conversation surrounding a brand, all content should be judiciously executed.

"I think this is somewhat of an embarrassment for Bentley, especially for its marketing department," Mr. Kurtz said.

Final take

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