

Winning commercial business with Twitter

An agency success story



A little birdy (envision the Twitter icon) told us that member agency LaPlaca Insurance was finding success engaging commercial clients and prospects on the social Web. Read on for a synopsis on how and why the agency began the venture and what it has gained.

n paper, LaPlaca Insurance Inc., headquartered in Landsdale, Pa., is a typical independent agency – a family-owned shop with a staff of seven who write and manage a mixed book of regional business. But online, LaPlaca Insurance is atypical, finding tangible success with commercial clients and prospects through social networking.

Adding to the mix

It helps that Anne LaPlaca, agency president and daughter of agency founder Dave LaPlaca, is a marketer at heart and by (previous) trade: She spent 10 years as a director of international marketing for global health insurer CIGNA. There she learned the importance of using a mix of marketing elements. So when it came time to develop a marketing plan for her agency, she knew the value of including social networking along with the more traditional strategies of advertising, public relations, sales support and direct mail.

"In our ultra-conservative industry where change is slow, marketing is normally regarded as sales, and numbers are king," shares Anne. "So I initiated the [social networking] program slowly and with youthful employees who understand today's dependence on social media."

Landing help

Anne credits CampusPhilly.org for connecting her with a key youthful employee. She advertised for a marketing intern, and Julie Olley applied.

"I was very impressed with Julie's resume, especially her major in entrepreneurial and family business," explains Anne. "LaPlaca Insurance is both."

No doubt, Anne lucked out. Julie needed little direction to get started and maintains an infectious positive attitude, and her education was spot on.

"At Saint Joseph's, my professors spent a great deal of time focusing on social media marketing and its importance in the business world today," explains Julie.

Engaging staff

Staff buy-in was slow. In fact, Anne initially chose not to share very many details with the staff who didn't have extensive experience with or understanding of social networking.

"I figured if it worked as a PR tool that gave us positive exposure which someday translated into sales, then they would understand its

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A week in the life of a social media manager

Julie spends five to seven hours a week managing the agency's Facebook and Twitter presence. She relies on HootSuite, a platform that allows her to schedule posts to go out at predetermined times throughout the week. Then each day, she monitors the accounts to check for engagement and to engage with other businesses in the area.

"It's really important not to get into the habit of just loading posts into a social media manager [like HootSuite]," shares Julie. "You have to get on the sites each day and show people that you are alive and listening to what they are saying."

To see the fruits of Julie's labor, follow LaPlaca on Twitter (@LaPlacaIns) and Facebook (facebook.com/LaPlacaInsurance).



Content for the taking

A common concern among social networking newbies (new tweeps, if you will) is where to find fresh content. Look no further than our state-specific Twitter feeds for fodder for your agency's tweets:

@IAB_DE | @IAB_MD | @IAB_PA

importance and effectiveness," says Anne.

Julie confers that the process was slow but is proud of how far the staff has come.

"It took everyone in the office some time to understand the value of communicating on social media," shares Julie. "At first there were a lot of questions about what certain things mean, but over the past year, I truly believe that their knowledge has increased."

Finding success

Julie began maintaining the LaPlaca Insurance Facebook and Twitter accounts in the spring of 2012. Admittedly, the initial response of customers and prospects on both platforms was slow. But by the beginning of 2013, the agency's Twitter account took off.

"The follower engagement is very high with retweeting, favoriting, replying and mentioning," explains Julie.

And a big milestone came the first time that the agency's Twitter account generated a request to quote a business account.

"The biggest piece of advice I would give Jother independent

agencies] is to stick with it," explains Julie. "I have come across too many accounts on both Twitter and Facebook where an agency started to send out tweets and posts and then two to three months later stopped. I don't think you can tell if social media is worth it to your business in two to three months. The ROI will not be that quick."



Resources 2.0

Find more resources on using social media for your agency by visiting IABforME.com. Select Resource Center and then Technology.

Also, check out our Executive Management Conference, Oct. 29-30 in Gettysburg, Pa., for more expert instruction on social media management.



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