

## Social Marketing Turned Upside Down

Shane Wells



Twitter, Facebook & Blogs are on the forefront of marketing discussions wherever we turn. This is unfortunate, as most car wash owners do not have enough time for marketing and are not typically considered “social” in the broad sense of the term. So this begs the question: Will social marketing make such a difference in my car wash business that I need to go through the trouble of learning how?

Yes, social marketing is necessary to a car wash owner, but for all the not obvious reasons. Will you really “lose” customers because you do not have a Twitter account or Facebook page (or web site for that matter)? No.

Then why would Tweeting be to the benefit of the car wash? Furthermore, if you do market through tweets, posts, blogs or email, why would there be an increase in your bottom line? In order to determine this, we need to review a roughed out version of our standard business formula: Increased profit comes from increased traffic and higher average ticket prices. These are the result of a few basic customer interactions:

1. Satisfying customer experiences
2. More effective marketing
3. Knowledge of available services

Now, you are likely working to see the connection between these three standards we know and love and the unknown world of Twitter. Keep in mind that all of these social marketing media act as a megaphone for those using them. The communication is mostly one direction, it is often ignored, the real value to the end user is minimal, and it requires some effort on the speaker’s part. If you compare that description of social marketing to a view of traditional advertising, you will see the similarities (although social marketing is basically free). Yes, traditional advertising & social advertising are not that different, but is that really a surprise?

Back to the original question, “How will this make a difference to my profits?” The answer is in the differences; social marketing does not require money, but it does require effort on the owners part and a higher frequency of use. Basically, you, the owner, are developing continual ‘mini-messages’ for your customer to hear, rather than making a big effort one time (ie. bill board, radio spot, coupon mailer, etc).

For those of you have not tweeted or posted on Facebook I will give a few basic pointers. Typically one would post a message a few times a week, usually before early afternoon when activity begins to drop off.

What is a mini-message? Here are some examples from my own accounts that I have posted over the last year:

- Thank you to customers or employees
- Information about the local high school football team
- Water facts about home washing vs. professional washing

- Traffic report from where I am sitting on the highway
- A reminder about early morning specials
- Waxing tips for older vehicles quoted from Auto Trends

Notice that there was only one direct reference out of six about actually purchasing something from the car wash. Why is this? Why not have all six of those messages say “We are the best, come wash your car today!”?

The reasoning is the same in traditional advertising: (1) we must capture the interest of the person with something relevant to them so they will (2) take time to listen to our ad. Think of the Super Bowl. This has some of the most interesting content (the game) so advertisers are willing to pay huge money for the time to advertise. This still isn't enough, the advertisers spend large amounts of money on making the content interesting within their own ad. This is great because then we (football watchers & others) get excited for more than just the game, we get excited to watch the commercials because we know the content will be so good!

Good content. That is the key. No doubt, good content is not easy to come by. If we refer back to items 1-6 from my own tweets we can see these basic messages that were voiced over my ‘megaphone’.

- Be grateful for my customers or employees and take time to express it
- Take an interest in local issues
- Learn from industry associations & trade groups
- Be concerned about others
- Give a good special without giving away the farm
- Increase my knowledge of the industry even if it doesn't apply directly to me

For those customers who would actually read these posts they will find a nice resource of ideas, quotes, and fun information. More importantly, this is an exercise for us as owners. It requires us to focus on ourselves, focus in our business and how people perceive us. Think about it: What would your first five tweets be? If you think through this you may find it not as easy as you would expect. This media experience is a mirror for us to inspect our businesses in. By producing a media message one time per business day for others to hold us accountable by, we now become introspective again. We focus on what the customer perceives and how to bring them a better experience. Distill all this down in a bottle and it means increased customer traffic and higher ticket averages...higher profits.

This is the real value of Twitter & Facebook- accountability.

Get started and make sure to drop me a note about your experience. I know it would be thoughtful after all that experience.

*Shane Wells, MAI is President of Hi-Performance Wash Systems and a Partner in Eco Express Car Wash both located in Denver, Colorado. For more information, he can be reached at 303-322-2232 or at [shanewells@hpws.com](mailto:shanewells@hpws.com).*