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How Dell made 6.5 Million Dollars with Twitter



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twitter is crack for media addicts. It scares me, not because I'm morally superior to it, but because I don't think I could handle it. I'm afraid I'd end up letting my son go hungry....

from "Stop the World" by George Packer, The New Yorker

twitter (is) an always-on data stream from really bright people in their respective fields, whose tweets are often full of links to incredibly vital, timely information. The most frequent objection to twitter is a predictable one: "I don't need to know someone is eating a donut right now." But if that someone is a serious user of twitter, she or he might actually be eating the curmudgeon's lunch, racing ahead with a clear, up-to-the-second picture of an increasingly connected, busy world....

from "Why twitter Will Endure" by David Carr, New York Times

If someone approached me even five years ago and explained that one day in the near future I would be filtering, collecting and sharing content for thousands of perfect strangers to read — and doing it for free — I would have responded with a pretty perplexed look. Yet today I can't imagine living in a world where I don't filter, collect and share. More important, I couldn't conceive of a world of news and information without the aid of others helping me find the relevant links....

Nick Bilton, NYTimes Bits blogger in 'Controlled Serendipity' Liberates the Web



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Introduction

These days, if your company doesn't twitter – it's likely that you'll have strange looks coming your way. The 4 year old company has made a significant impact in the marketing and PR departments of most businesses looking to cash in on social media marketing.

And with good reason. Take a look at the tweets in the next chapter. Chances are that if you're selling enough products to consumers, they are talking about you. A year ago, they said PR was dead. Before any company even officially launches a new product, there are people on twitter already discussing it over secretly leaked files or designs. The recent crash of an airliner in the Hudson river was first reported by twitter users, not mainstream media.

While companies around the world are still grappling with how to use this amazing new medium, there's someone who seems to have cracked the magic code to making money from twitter – Dell.

Dell currently has over 1.5 million followers across numerous twitter accounts and has generated sales of 7 million dollars through it, breaking the common critics argument that twitter is just another over-hyped communication channel without any real use in the business world.

Over the last 3 years, Dell has spent time in understanding, listening and responding to their customers over twitter. We invested significant time and effort to understand how they did this, and talked to people inside the company for their perspectives and contributions. In this research paper, we will tell you exactly how and what Dell did to monetize twitter and become the poster boy for businesses looking at twitter to help them generate revenues and grow their customer base.



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How Dell started with twitter

“At first, it seemed like the most logical thing to do. We got online with twitter in 2007, when the whole world was jumping on the bandwagon. It took us a good 6 months of experimenting before we finally realized what we could do with twitter.” – said a senior brand manager on the initial twittering days of Dell.

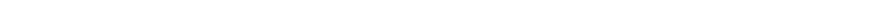
Twitter was initially used as a listening tool for people’s views and reactions to Dell’s products. Applications like Twhirl helped executives like Bob Pearson (Head of communities and conversations at Dell) see what people were talking about.

Soon, the company established its first sales channel – the DellOutlet, giving away discount coupons and codes that could be used on its website.

The company soon hit 1 million dollars in sales through twitter.

"A million dollars isn't a lot of money, but it shows that people want to sign up for feeds," – said Bob Pearson. The million dollar mark signaled the next phase in Dell’s interest with twitter as the company earmarked higher attention levels to the growing micro-blogging community which stood at around 5 million at that time. It now made sense for Dell to invest in and enter conversations about its products to showcase itself as a customer focused company.

Dell subsequently established regional Dell twitter sites as well as product specific twitter pages to give its customers choices on what products or regions they want to follow. Not only did this help their followers, but it gave the company a more relevant audience as well.



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Dell's Twitter Strategy

Today's corporate leaders are struggling to figure out how to use social media to further their business strategy. At Dell, we believe this is backwards thinking. Social media isn't a means to further a corporation's strategy, it's a means to help determine it.

The "Mom and Pop" businesses in our neighborhoods have always followed sound and pragmatic business practices, rooted in developing, maintaining and strengthening relationships with customers. The customers and the businesses valued those relationships because "Mom and Pop" offered convenience. They listened to their customers and used their suggestions to improve the business. They provided great service and found ways to thank their clientele. Social media is really nothing more than the simple application of these business practices in a digital form.

At Dell, we have a longer perspective on the social media conundrum than most. We've been an active leader in the space since 2006, with a depth and breadth to our social media presence that has earned top billing among brands using social media to engage stakeholders.

Manish Mehta

Vice President, Social Media and Community, Dell Inc.

