



Is b-to-b ready for Twitter?

Jon VanZile

Story posted: October 12, 2009 - 6:01 am EDT

Kent Huffman isn't just the CMO of Dallas-based BearCom Wireless, he's also "Meg A. Hertz," a cartoon character who tweets for BearCom under the name @WirelessWoman.

Through WirelessWoman, Huffman uses Twitter to help build relationships with BearCom's corporate clients and partners by tweeting about news and technological developments. BearCom's business is partnering with wireless companies to provide wireless technology to the corporate market.

And someday Huffman hopes that WirelessWoman will help generate sales leads—even if that really hasn't happened yet.

"I spend about 30 minutes a day on Twitter," Huffman said. "It's returned my time investment in terms of developing relationships with partners; and, going forward, it'll—hopefully—be a lead-generation tool."

Thus Huffman seems to sum up Twitter in the b-to-b market: It's worth a limited investment of time, and there's hope it might someday pay off in sales; but for now, it's an amusing way to stay in touch.

Scant data exist on Twitter's penetration into the b-to-b world, but BearCom is likely typical of b-to-b users. Twitter is not well-suited for advertising campaigns because of the length of tweets (140 characters or fewer). And there's little proof that building a Twitter following increases Web site traffic, orders, or sales leads.

Instead, it's a relationship tool, just like other social media.

"Twitter should never be a stand-alone marketing tool," said Jonathan Soleymani, a consultant with Digital SOL Consulting. "It should be part of a much larger marketing effort that includes Facebook, and advertising and other marketing."

Yet, despite the uncertainty and Twitter's current limitations as a b-to-b marketing tool, Mark Schaefer, founder of Schaefer Marketing Solutions, still believes that b-to-b companies should get on Twitter sooner rather than later.

"One criticism of Twitter is that people say, 'In my business, no one is on Twitter,' " Schaefer said. "That may be valid, but I think that if they're not on Twitter yet, they will be soon."

Twitter's growth has indeed been explosive, and its adoption is heavily skewed toward adults, according to a study released this past summer by Nielsen Co.

Nielsen found that Twitter reaches almost 11% of all Internet users, but that more than 80% of people who tweet are older than 25. (These numbers are based on a July 2009 analysis of 250,000 U.S. Internet users provided through Nielsen's NetView Audience Measurement Service.)

According to Schaefer, Twitter has the potential to outstrip even Google in terms of strategic importance to businesses—and



not just online businesses.

"Twitter is the most powerful feedback tool business has ever seen," he said. "People are talking about your company and your product all the time, but now they're doing it in writing and in public. You never could control the conversation, but at least now you can be part of it."

Building a b-to-b Twitter following, however, is a difficult task, and the rules are still fluid. In the past six months, BearCom has gained an estimated 1,600 followers who receive between two and five tweets daily. Of these, Huffman says that about 75% are re-tweeted.

When it comes to tweeting "rules," there are few in the b-to-b market. Schaefer and Huffman both recommend short tweets of no more than 120 characters—short enough they can easily be re-tweeted without typing or editing the original tweet.

And Twitter is not the place for sales messages, Schaefer said. A steady stream of sales tweets only risks annoying followers, and it's easy to "unfollow" a Twitter account.

Even with Twitter's potential and its dizzying adoption rate, it seems likely that Twitter as a b-to-b tool will continue to lag behind its use as a purely social or business-to-consumer (b-to-c) tool.

"You're not going to make or break your business on Twitter," Schaefer said. "Right now, a lot of businesses are trying to figure out how to survive, not improve their Facebook page or update their Twitter account. But once this economy turns around, I think you'll see Twitter take off in the b-to-b world."

PRINTED FROM: <http://www.btobonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091012/FREE/910079988/1146/FREE&template=printart>

Entire contents © 2009 [Crain Communications, Inc.](#)
