

Marketing Minute ~ Goodwill Industries—a Study in Social Media

The image of Goodwill Industries is changing due to some social media campaigns to raise awareness and donations. The 107-year-old company has sought to increase their donor base and shoppers by reaching a younger, hipper audience. One Goodwill organization that uses social media and digital marketing effectively is the Goodwill of Greater Washington. The affiliate began experimenting with new media because it wanted to change its image.

Social Media with Style

“The image of Goodwill here was exactly what we did not want: that it’s a typical dirty, old thrift store,” says Brendan Hurley, senior vice president of marketing and communications for Goodwill of Greater Washington. While the stores had many core customers, the organization knew there was an untapped audience it could influence if it made the shopping experience more pleasant.

“While our mission is still the same, we decided to focus on Goodwill as being more of a vintage, contemporary fashion retail store,” says Hurley, who adds that it also decided to stop using the word ‘thrift’ and just refer to the outlets as ‘retail stores’.

In 2007, Goodwill launched a web site called the “Fashion of Goodwill”, which was also the name of an integrated marketing campaign it designed to change perceptions of shopping at D.C.-area Goodwill stores. It also launched the first Fashion of Goodwill Virtual Runway Show and Online Auction. The show also coincided with the launch of a Goodwill of Greater Washington eBay store and its DC Goodwill Fashion Blog.

The virtual fashion shows and online auctions were tremendously successful, according to Hurley. To date, the 2007 show has had more than 42,000 visitors. The 2008 show, which is still viewed regularly online, is averaging 30% more viewers a month than 2007’s, with less promotion. What’s more, in 2007 Goodwill of Greater Washington converted 15% of its fashion show viewers into online shoppers. Its eBay store had 95,090 visitors for the two-week online auction in 2007—compared to 1,700 in the two weeks prior—and it saw a 16% increase in clothing sold in retail stores during the auction period, as well as a similar spike in 2008.

Last year, Goodwill of Greater Washington redesigned the fashion site for its second virtual fashion show. It added new online elements as a Fashion of Goodwill e-newsletter to provide subscribers with fashion information. Goodwill shopping bargains and details on Goodwill special events like its Travelin’ Trunk Shows. In addition all of its web sites now naturally link to other Goodwill of Greater Washington social media sites, including a fashion blog and its Facebook page.

Hurley credits the Goodwill of Greater Washington’s social media strategies for these successes, specifically its blog. “Integrated social media has allowed us to engage and influence fashion shoppers who otherwise may not have considered Goodwill as a shopping option,” he says. “Social media allows us to reach fashion influencers on their terms, develop a personal, two-way dialogue with them through the use of entertaining and informative content, and then use these relationships to feed an online viral marketing campaign that reaches far beyond the often limited scope of traditional media.”

‘Goodwill Rocs!’

Another Goodwill affiliate that’s had great success using social media strategies is Goodwill Industries of Greater Rochester. “We have a blog called ‘Goodwill Rocs!’, which has links to our MySpace and Facebook pages, while offering a link to follow us on Twitter,” says Tim Gleason, Rochester’s director of marketing and community relations.

These initiatives were designed to drive the organization to younger shoppers and donors. “We’re trying to get people to understand that this is not your grandmother’s thrift store,” Gleason says. “That is a very real stereotype that we continue to go up against and continue to break down.”

He shares that the organization is getting the most volume on Facebook and MySpace, because it has the most friends on those sites. The Goodwill Rocs site also has links to the Goodwill Industries of Greater Rochester’s YouTube videos, which it began producing in September 2008. Videos include “man on the street” interviews with shoppers as they’re leaving Rochester-area Goodwill stores discussing their recently purchase merchandise. They also showcase merchandise for Halloween, prom season and back-to-school season when Goodwill wants to drive additional business to the stores.

A primary responsibility of one staff member at the organization is to oversee all of its social media activities, including updating the Facebook fan page, sending tweets and managing videos. He and two other staffers regularly blog and

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keep the site fresh. "We always try to be consistent," Gleason says, "There's nothing less interesting than a blog that hasn't been updated in weeks or months." An intern at the organization also actively works to find new friends on Facebook and drive more people to its fan page.

Beyond social media, last July the Rochester Goodwill launched a monthly e-mail newsletter, sending it to several thousand opted-in subscribers. It contains news and information about the organization, as well as members-only discounts, such as an occasional coupon good for \$5 off any purchase more than \$10. Run on Constant Contact's email platform, the newsletter costs the organization only a few hundred dollars a year. The organization is receiving a 4% redemption rate on the coupons on average, which is very good.

"If nonprofits are not engaging in social media today, they need to find someone who has a passion within their organization and start doing it," Gleason says. "It's a train that's moving fast, and if you don't hop on, you're going to be left behind."

Social Media Tips for NonProfits

Here are some tips offered by Goodwill Industries marketers:

- 1) Be committed. Experimenting for just a few months or failing to develop a comprehensive strategy will only lead to failure. "Social networks take time to build," Hurley says. "and you have to be consistent in your efforts and make sure you provide valuable content."
- 2) Don't use social media purely as a promotional tool. "This will turn visitors off," he says. "The content has to provide value to your visitors, not just to you."
- 3) Provide valuable blog content. For a strong blog, Hurley says, you only need two things: someone who's passionate about your products or services, and someone who writes well.
- 4) Don't eliminate traditional media from your marketing mix. "By integrating social media and traditional media, you make them both more effective."
- 5) Recognize that social media may not be right for your organization. Not every organization's business model, product or service makes sense for social media. "Don't just rush to jump on the social media bandwagon simply because everyone else is," he says.

We can all learn from Goodwill Industries proactive social media marketing, whether you are a non-profit or a business for profit. Enhancing or marketing your current image, or changing your image can be a challenge. Social media routes, whether it is microblogging on other's blogs or social media pages, blogging on your own site, e-newsletters or e-mail blasts, building your own social media pages on Facebook or Twitter, can make you meet your marketing goals quicker, less expensively, and more effectively.

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Information provided for you by ~

Marilyn K. Dayton, Business/Marketing Specialist

<http://www.marketingandbizpro.com> ~ marilyn@marketingandbizpro.com

860-389-2521

