

Full Length Research Paper

Using Facebook for event promotion - implementing change

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Facebook is currently the largest social network site, with over 800 million users worldwide- and over half of its users are in a Facebook group with the average user connected to over 80 community, group, pages, or events. Facebook has made many changes throughout its inception and while this should be viewed as progress and improvements to the system, those who rely heavily on Facebook as a communication tool for their business must quickly learn how to incorporate and understand this evolvement. While the average Facebook user has 130 friends, we interviewed event/club promoters in Taiwan who have at least 5,000 connections and had daily Facebook interaction. We analyzed the qualitative data to summarize the main concerns of this specific group who rely on Facebook for their business. The findings show that Facebook is very important and has been very beneficial for the event/club promotion industry in Taiwan as they utilize a variety of resources and ingenuity to implement change as well as benefit from change. While there may be initial negative feelings towards change, the promoters understand the nature of the business and will continuously adapt to progress. This research is unique because it focuses on the perspective of the business (promoter instead of the individual user) and is useful for those organizations that rely heavily on Facebook as one of their main sources of marketing and communication tools.

Key words: Facebook, communications, marketing, promoters, change.

INTRODUCTION

Facebook

Facebook is the most widely used social networking site (SNS) in the world (Alexa.com, 2011) with over 800 million users worldwide (Facebook.com, 2012) and it is continuously growing in terms of users and features. Facebook is utilized for many different reasons and motivations, encompassing both social and business purposes. Facebook has been beneficial to businesses to reach their intended audiences, expand their breadth, is comparatively cost efficient, and with the increasing amount of time users are spending online, it is a practical medium for advertising (Todi, 2008).

Besides personal Facebook profiles, there are over 900

million objects, which include pages, groups, events and community pages; and the average user is connected to 80 community pages, groups and events (Facebook.com, 2012). At a press conference on July 6, 2011 from Facebook's Palo Alto headquarters, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said that "More than half of Facebook users are using groups which we rolled out less than a year ago." (CNBC.com, 2011).

Facebook groups and Facebook pages

To help users understand and utilize the appropriate object for their purpose, Facebook has a section on its

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website called the *Facebook Blog* and an entry in *Facebook Tips: What's the difference between a Facebook Page and Group?*

Facebook pages

"Like a friend's profile, Facebook pages, enable public figures, businesses, organizations and other entities to create an authentic and public presence on Facebook. Unlike your profile, Facebook pages are visible to everyone on the Internet by default. You, and every person on Facebook, can connect with these pages by becoming a fan and then receive their updates in your News Feed and interact with them."

Facebook groups

"While pages were designed to be the official profiles for entities, such as celebrities, brands or businesses, Facebook groups are the place for small group communication and for people to share their common interests and express their opinion. Groups allow people to come together around a common cause, issue or activity to organize, express objectives, discuss issues, post photos and share related content."

Changes on Facebook

Facebook has been continuously making changes to the site since its inception; examples are layout, privacy settings, additional applications from outside sources, and adding new applications as well as modifying existing functions- including *Facebook Groups*. Starting in 2011, administrators of a *Group* were notified on their group page that *"This group is scheduled to be archived. Over the next few months, Facebook will be archiving all groups created using the old groups format. When this group is archived, its wall posts, photos and discussion threads will move to the new groups format, but group members will need to be re-added."*

The changes that were being made to *Groups* especially affected those users that relied on this object as an important tool for communication in their business; included in those affected were event promoters in Taiwan who used this feature frequently and monitored activity on it daily and had to implement and adapt to the changes that Facebook mandated.

Purpose of study

There have been other studies done and books written on the importance of advertising on social networking sites and how companies can utilize a social network site effectively with their customers and how to advertise and

market effectively on SNSs or Facebook (Jothi et al., 2011; Kaplan and Haemlein, 2009; Lin and Lu, 2011; Powell, 2009; Todi, 2008; Treadaway and Smith, 2010). While other research has focused on understanding the user's psyche (Cheung et al., 2011; Chang and Liu, 1992; Hsu and Wu, 2011; Hsu et al., 2011; Lin and Lu, 2011a, b; Ross et al., 2009; Tokunaga, 2011; Zhang et al., 2011). Many of these studies utilizing college students as their sample group, when in Taiwan only 27% of Facebook users are of typical college age (18 to 24 years) (Socialbakers.com, 2011).

In Taiwan 51.5% of its population uses Facebook (Internetworldstats.com, 2012) which is on par to many other developed countries and/or cities (Socialbakers.com, 2012), thus making Taiwan a relevant example and comparison for similar countries and/or cities, such as the United States which has 52.7% of its population using Facebook (Socialbakers.com, 2012)

Our study focused not on the individual personal users' perspective, but rather on the perspective of business (promoter), specifically on event promoters because of their frequent Facebook usage and how changes Facebook made affected them. This study showed how and why event promoters utilized Facebook for marketing, the challenges they faced, how they worked through them and recommendations for those organizations and individuals who are utilizing Facebook for such or similar purposes.

METHOD

Participants

The nightlife in Taiwan is very active with a variety of events going on simultaneously throughout the island and promoters must work diligently to attract people to their events; because of the competitive nature of the industry some promoters wished to remain anonymous and published data on companies were difficult to obtain. We interviewed eight promoters in Taiwan who own an event promotion company or work for as in house event promoters for nightclubs, with the majority of these promoters being linked but not completely limited to a specific venue.

The Princeton Review describes the career and characteristics of a promoter- "It takes a particular type of person to become a promoter-confidence and flamboyance help immeasurably. Understanding demographics, business, and publicity is important, but the two most valuable traits mentioned by our respondents are creativity and an ability to be in touch with your audience. Promoters need listening and organizational skills, charm, and style. In many cases the difference between a financial bloodbath and a smash hit is solely the ability of the promoter."

"In few other careers is such a premium placed on creative thinking. Traditional advertising and marketing strategies can often prove too expensive to utilize to diffuse a medium for the standard entertainment event... A successful promoter has an unlimited imagination that outmatches the most limited budget."

Every promoter interviewed had access to more than 5,000 unique contacts through their own friends, group or page or a combination of these sources and was verified on Facebook (as of December 2011). This number was significant in such that Facebook only allows 5,000 friends per person, therefore these promoters had to go beyond a friend list and implement a

Facebook page and/or group, and all were familiar with using all functions.

Five companies had 5,000 to 10,000 contacts, one company had 10,000-50,000 contacts, and two companies had 50,000+ contacts (as of December 2011).

While the average Facebook user has only 130 friends, these promoters are able to reach a much larger breadth of reach than the average Facebook user. We interviewed the person within the organization responsible for marketing and maintaining the Facebook group or page and/or utilizing their friend list to promote events within Taiwan.

Procedure- interview

We conducted interviews on phone or in-person with the event promoters and/or Facebook groups or page administrators. The interview followed a semi-structured format, where questions were adapted to fit the organization's timeframe, size and purpose.

We then continued with a series of open-ended questions that allowed the interviewee to express their insight and experiences from the perspective of a promoter or club owner and how they used Facebook for their business.

Data analysis

The nightclub and event promotion industries are extremely competitive and the market is volatile for the longevity of a venue and promoters. Their marketing communication channels must allow for open-minded flexibility and awareness of customer preferences and technology.

In keeping with the fast paced nature of the industry, we wanted to gauge the participants' insights while currently dealing with the issues and used one on one interviews to gather data because of their efficiency in retaining a more accurate assessment of reactions instead of a post-cursory look back at the situation with the prejudice of hindsight.

We used a qualitative analysis because of its flexibility and timeliness in extracting data (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003) and we organized the findings in a meaningful manner as a basis for minimal insight into a closely guarded industry and for further research studies and topics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initial response - Importance of Facebook

All participants agreed that Facebook was important for their business, however no one relied solely on Facebook for all their communication and marketing needs, they all maintained websites and in house advertisements- where applicable, as well as using traditional means of advertising such as posters and flyers, email lists, and Google placement. Although all participants acknowledged the importance of Facebook, everyone agreed that they would still have a business without it.

When asked to state their feelings or opinions about Facebook pertaining to their business use, every participant immediately launched into the positive aspects of Facebook. The most consistent response that participants gave was that Facebook made it easier to connect with more people- participants can provide information to

their existing clientele and fans quickly and efficiently and they are able to gain more access to potential clients and to secure them as new group members or for users to "like" their page (Figure 1).

All participants gave their opinion that Facebook is the number one social networking site used within Taiwan, surpassing all previously popular and competing social networking sites on the island, such as Wretch and BBS. Besides the ease of communication, these groups and pages have created a community for people and businesses with the same interests, especially in music in this case, to discuss and advertise artists they would be promoting and news within the industry. And six promoters also stressed the importance of photo albums, as they have gained many new fans or group members by having active photo albums from every event: people will go on to their page to see themselves in photos and tag themselves and their friends who in turn become fans of the business.

Dealing with changes: From Facebook group to Facebook page

When Facebook started changing their Facebook Group formats and added the "Pages" function, these participants who relied on Facebook as part of their marketing and advertising had no choice but to adapt to the mandatory changes implemented by Facebook.

Two of the participants were new businesses and had always established their business as a page, but the other 6 participants had to make the changes and switch their group members to people who "like" their page or to establish themselves as a group.

Frustration

All the participants expressed varying levels of frustration over the changes that Facebook made or working with some of their functions, yet all accepted the changes as part of the framework of using a free service and resolved their problems accordingly.

Communicating with Facebook

Every promoter cited the need for better communication from Facebook with specific examples being a way to contact Facebook directly, a help forum from Facebook, and/or answers to why changes were being made. Because of the lack of "help" from Facebook directly, users have had to seek alternative methods for solving their problems, which have resulted in timely trial and error methods, online unauthorized Facebook forums, and networking or employing experts in the fields of programming.

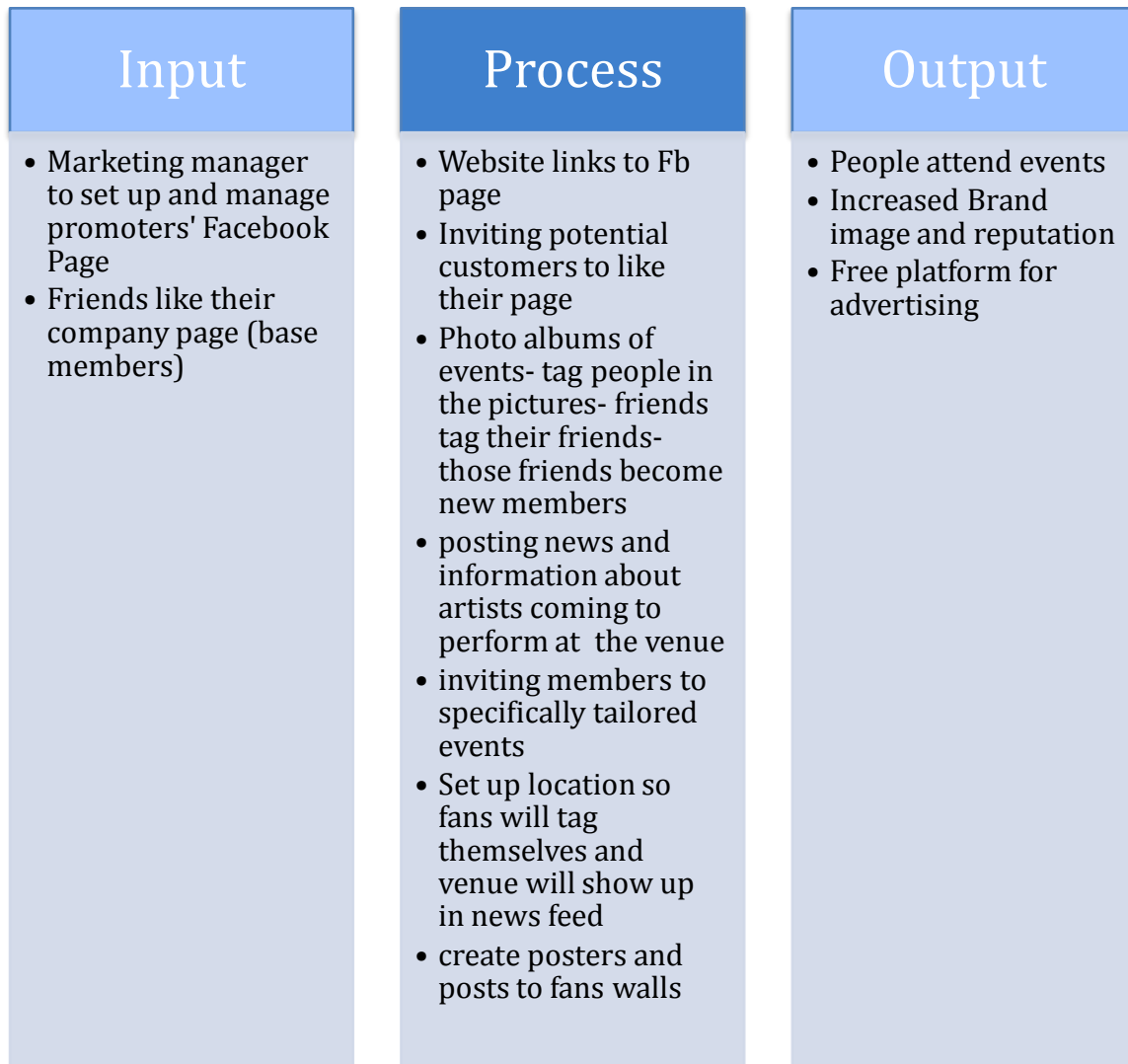


Figure 1. Procedural activities for utilizing Facebook for event promoters.

Technological difficulties

One interesting case, that all promoters with an actual venue had, was trouble defining their location with "Places"- which is a tool that lets friends know where the user is and who they are with, which in turn advertises the venue and let's others click on the "Place" and it sends them to the venue's Page on Facebook. Challenges that occurred were that venues could not always claim their rightful address and when Facebook users try to tag themselves in a specific place they were creating a new "place" and not linking to the venue's actual page.

Example of change- Event invites

The biggest change that all the affected users noted was the ability to invite people to their events, as "user's

acceptance of Facebook Events can influence their actual intentions to attend an event" (Paris et al., 2010). Therefore the 'attending invitees' are used as a gauge for promoters to know how many people will attend the event. Since these promoter's main goal is to get people to attend their events- this is the most crucial tool in Facebook.

Previously, administrators were able to invite everyone in the group to an event, and the change to Pages made it more difficult to send out mass invites to everyone in the group.

Four of the participants admitted to using an unauthorized java script to overwrite this function and once again sent out mass invites. However, one promoter found this to be a helpful function to put into perspective that too many invites were being sent out to people in the group who would not be interested in certain types of events and began tailoring events to certain groups of

people, another promoter adhered to this restriction by having the individual public relations staff create their own group lists from their friend list and customize invitee list for specific events, while another promoter kept their business a group and did not have to deal with this change.

Implementing change

Change is inevitable and how businesses implemented change and recognize the different options that they have can affect their success and sustainability (Burnes, 1996). In the book *"The World is Flat"*, author Thomas L. Friedman (2005) says to thrive or at least survive "This requires not only a new level of technical skills but also a certain mental flexibility, self-motivation, and psychological mobility... be capable not only of constantly adapting but also of constantly learning and growing." The business of being a promoter in Taiwan is competitive and to stay relevant and successful, they utilize their networks, ingenuity, and are ready to adapt and manipulate changes to benefit them including making improvements and being innovators themselves (<http://www.princetonreview.com/careers.aspx>); as one promoter commented, "We don't care if things change, we've always been able to handle change, and change benefits people who are putting a lot of work and effort to use the Facebook website to their advantage."

Conclusion

The research conducted was to provide insight from the perspective of the business or organizations instead of the user, specifically focusing on promotion companies in Taipei for nightlife activities and how they dealt with changes to the format of Facebook including their perceptivity into the perpetual changes that Facebook applies. Using interviews and a qualitative content analysis of the results, we are able to summarize the data into cohesive topics of frustration, communication, and technology that each promoter experienced when faced with a mandatory implemented change.

The clear example of change that every promoter faced was the "event invite" which was crucial to an event promotion company and night club. Each promoter was faced with the dilemma of how to adapt to the change and they worked through the differences with their own ingenuity and continuing with the usage of Facebook as a platform for communicating and marketing.

There can be considerable barriers to launching into the promotion and night club business, with an unforgiving turnover rate that quickly dismisses unpromising or unprofitable ventures and there has been little academic research into this industry, therefore these findings reveal the capabilities through a real life scenario of dealing with Facebook.

However, even with the excitement of new accessibility into this industry, there were many limitations into the information that the promoters would divulge and the topic and interview questions were formatted in respect to what the promoters would be willing to talk about. Although some of the promoters' skills and talent can not be easily taught, many of them wished to protect the aspects of their company that could be replicated.

Facebook is an important tool for event promoters in Taiwan and successful promoters have implemented change efficiently and creatively for the success of their business, regardless of limitations.

Future research

Because of the special nature of the participants and their access to a large amount of Facebook users, further research could be performed on various topics as influential users of Facebook (Weimann, 1994) including but not limited to utilizing Facebook as a marketing strategy, delving further into the psyche of the promoter, and doing more experimental research and/or actual case studies of what factors will influence users to actually attend events and create a more profitable business. If access can be further granted, going deeper into facets of promotion as in industry would be new territory for academic research.

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