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Leveraging "Like" into Loyalty

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APRIL 26, 2011 08:00:00 AM

A guy walks into a bar.

The place is teeming with beautiful women and he's looking to make a connection. After he's shown off some of his best moves on the dance floor, one particularly attractive lady approaches him. She purrs, "I like you," hands him a piece of paper with her phone number on it and walks away. The guy high-fives the DJ but then throws her number away and starts looking around for someone else to impress.

Sound ridiculous? Of course it is! No available guy who gets that kind of response from a desirable woman is going to waste such a golden opportunity. And yet, that's exactly what many companies are doing these days on Facebook.

Lately there's been so much emphasis on accumulating "likes," but so little attention to following up after you've gotten them. Companies that don't have a plan for converting "fans" into customers, and customers into brand lovers, are wasting a prime opportunity to foster a deeper relationship - just like the foolish guy at the bar.

The reality is, when someone "likes" something or becomes your "fan" on Facebook, it doesn't necessarily mean they feel any real affinity for your brand. A "like" is simply a click of a mouse, and fans can be bought for less than a dime a dozen (yes, snarky companies out there enable companies to purchase fans.)

What you really need and want are **brand lovers** - people who feel an emotional attachment to your brand and are engaged in a rewarding relationship with it. This kind of loyalty isn't created by bribing people with rewards if they "like" you on Facebook and it isn't reflected in the number of fans you have. **Quality of engagement is a better measure of brand strength than quantity of followers** - and it can be fostered with an integrated approach to cultivating customer relationships:

Get to know your MVPs. Your Most Valuable Prospects are those people who highly value what you offer and will be profitable long-term customers. By analyzing your existing customer base, you can create a profile of your MVPs and then use advertising and outreach campaigns on Facebook and other media to reach them. Also friends of existing customers usually make excellent prospects, so provide ways for your customers to spread the word about your brand, e.g., run special invite-a-friend promos or create fun brand content that's easy to share.

Demonstrate your loyalty first. Silicon Valley luminary Guy Kawasaki says, "Trust is a sequence... trust others before you expect them to trust you." The same can be said about loyalty. Before you expect customers to be loyal to you, show your loyalty to them. That might mean not taking a price increase when your costs go up, or making your return policy more lenient, or offering discounts to your existing customers to thank them for their patronage instead of closing them out of deals normally reserved for enticing prospects.

Develop targeted efforts. Not all customers are the same, so don't treat them as if they are. Use email addresses, mobile numbers, and Facebook "likes" to develop a customer database that you can use to target specific groups. Tailor your messages and offerings to what people are interested in, e.g., specific product lines, bundles of related selections, new products from their favorite brands, etc.

Share what your customers care about. People want to know companies care about more than making profits. Your actions and messages shouldn't always be about you. Getting involved in causes that your customers are involved with demonstrates your commitment to them and to making a difference. Business guru and author Jim Collins says it best when he explains, "It's more important to be interested, than to be interesting."

Reward your best customers. Let your most valuable customers know how much you appreciate their business by creating special offers just for them. Importantly, the rewards don't have to be discounts. Your best customers might value advance access to new products, a

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Come to think of it, these recommendations are not unlike the next steps that would have been right for that guy in the bar. Get to know your love interest by doing some research. Make the first move to show you're interested. Make your communication personal. Establish common ground. And, "Dance with the one that brought you."

These are the steps that lead to great relationships - especially valuable customer relationships.

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