

## Q & A with Annual Meeting Keynote Speaker, Brian Reich



Brian is well known for his expertise in new media, web 2.0, social networks, mobile, community, ecommerce, brand marketing, cause branding, and more. Previously, he was a principal at EchoDitto, one of the nation's most successful online communications agencies. He spent two years as the Briefing Director for Vice President Al Gore and currently teaches a consumer behavior course at his Alma Mater, Columbia University. He is an active blogger at <http://thinkingaboutmedia.com> and works as an expert contributor for Fast Company magazine.

### How often do you have to tweet/blog/update your status in order to retain interest?

I tweet, blog, update my status whenever I (think I) have something interesting to say - something that provides value to my audience. Sometimes I have an update to share every day, or even twenty times that day. Other times I won't post anything for a week or even once a month. The key is that I (try) never to post something if it doesn't add value to my audience. There are lots of ways to define value, and each audience is different. But if you flood your audience with information that isn't valuable (to them) they will tune out and move on. Each organization needs to understand what its audience wants, what your customers expect from you, and how you can use your updates and posts to help serve those interests. If there is enough relevant, timely, compelling information to offer to your audience to support twenty tweets, a dozen blog posts, or similar every day -- great. But resist the urge to update because you think you need to put something out. Always remember the key is to offer something your audience will want to read/listen to/watch, etc.

### How can a company leverage its website to build fans/followers?

Your website is the foundation from which all your communications, education, engagement and mobilization efforts will emerge -- but it's also a destination. By relying on your website to build

fans/followers you are also inviting the challenge of compelling your fans/followers to visit your site, and stick around. You should have all the information about your organization, your products, your people available on your site. You should present the information in ways that meet your audience's needs, or provide answers to questions that people might have, present a personality for the organization and the people who work that invites people to communicate and build a relationship with you, etc. Your site should be designed to help people find the information they are looking for, learn more about your products and services, get support for the problems they are trying to solve. In other words, by the time someone has come to your site you have already convinced them (or something has motivated them) to visit you. The opportunity for your site is to satisfy their need or curiosity so they think there is a good reason to visit again, sign up for more, etc.

And that is exactly the reason why you should spend far more energy trying to take the information about your company/organization, as well as the personalities that your organization offers, and put them in places, and situations, where your audience will find them. Don't spend your energy building your website. Use your time and resources to get information to your customers that will help them lead their lives. You want to tap into what people are already doing, how they are already spending their time, not trying to convince them that they should go to visit your site. That is why social networks and other tools are so powerful -- people are already spending their time on those channels, connecting with their friends, sharing information and the like. If you are able to deliver information, experiences or stuff to people in a way that they can use without having to do significant extra work you will increase the likelihood of them doing so.

## **Do you recommend streamlining your postings across all social media channels, or using different messages for different audiences?**

Every audience is different. Every community is different. Every platform and channel has a different vibe, set of practices, or social norms to consider. In an ideal world you will create content and experiences that are uniquely suited to the people you are talking to and are customized to fit each different environment where your audience is spending time. Depending on how many different groups you are trying to reach, or platforms you are utilizing, that could mean dozens even hundreds of different applications of a message or conversations to manage. For most organizations that is not a sustainable

approach to communications and engagement. Three things to consider: 1) make smart choices about how much you can do. You will do more harm to your company if you don't spend enough time or energy talking with a particular audience or using a particular channel or platform appropriately than you will if you are not doing anything at all to reach them. In other words, only do things that you can do well. 2) It is not that difficult, in most cases, to adapt a marketing message or a conversation to a particular platform or audience. But, you have to start with an understanding that your messages are going to be more flexible than they were in the past, that more people and different voices may be needed to communicate your brand or your attributes effectively. If you embrace that opportunity then making those adjustments is mostly a tactical challenge. If you don't, you will find yourself trying to force your message into a situation where it might not resonate, and that will present you with a whole different set of problems. 3) Let the audience do some of the work. The whole idea of social media is that you can tap into a community of people who believe in your work, like your products, will advocate on your behalf and similar. Don't try to control and manage conversations in every audience or across every platform. Seed conversation. Provide tools to help your supporters share information and demonstrate their support on their terms. Look at how your audience is already using the tools and platforms out there and offer support and guidance, then stand back and let them do your bidding. It's a lot easier than trying to manage everything... and when successful, will achieve far more than you could do on your own.

## **How can a small company with limited staff (2-20 employees) use social media?**

Let me answer that in three parts:

1) It's very important for any organization, no matter the size or focus (for-profit, non-profit, virtual, brick and mortar, etc), to understand that our society has changed - dramatically - over the past few decades. We often talk about these changes in the context of business (flattening), government and politics (opening) and community (connecting). But changes are being seen everywhere, in every community and every sector of our society, and they are being felt by all of us. Technology and the Internet, and their role in our lives, has changed how we communicate, get and share information, the media we consume, and the reasons we engage with each other - online and offline. Information moves faster, people are more closely connected, and the expectations we all have for what we want to see and hear, where we donate, who we trust, and what kind of relationship and support we want from an organization, is also

changing. The available tools make it possible for everyone to have a platform from which to speak, and anyone to spark a bottom-up, grassroots-fueled revolution that has power no individual or entity could generate. And as a result of these massive, disruptive changes to our society, how organizations operate, organize, and communicate must be re-imagined. This is not just a shift in how we market. This is not just a new set of tools. Everything is changing.

2) Once you recognize the fundamental shifts that are taking place in our society -- and figure out how your organization/company needs to adapt its thinking, approach, product offerings, communications techniques, and more -- you can start to plan your communications, marketing and related efforts. The mistake most organizations make is jumping right to a set of tactics -- falling prey to 'shiny object syndrome' if you will. No single set of tools will help an organization to accomplish all its goals. Effective use of social media is about more than just logging on, signing up, or posting -- and its not dependent on the size of the company. You need to have goals -- an understanding of what you want to achieve as an organization and a way to measure/determine whether you have been successful (e.g. you might focus on raising awareness about your products, deepening relationships with customers or partners, driving people to take action such as attend an event or make a purchase, etc.). You need to have a clear strategy for how to use the tools and channels that are available today, online and offline, to meet your goals (you might think about creating new information about something to demonstrate your relevancy as an organization, aggregating interesting materials to help your audience view you as a credible source who will help them understand an issue better, being responsive to your customers to demonstrate your commitment to customer service, etc. And then you can start to look at the tools and resources that are available, or required, to be successful. Depending on what you are trying to achieve and what you believe is the best way to meet those goals, your usage of different social media tools and channels will vary.

3) There are lots of things you need to be successful in communicating today - and especially online. First and foremost, you need to have buy-in across your company. Effective communications online and the use of social media is not the responsibility of one department or one employee. How the audience gets and share information impacts everyone and everything about a company, so everyone and every part of the company must consider what its role and contribution will be in terms of successful engagement. Complete and seamless integration is critical to success. Second, you need to bring something to the table: offer relevant, timely and compelling information that your audience will find valuable... meaningful, interesting, or exciting experiences that your audience will want to spend time with (and talk to their friends about)... and/or stuff that people want or find valuable. Third, you need to

experiment, see what you are comfortable with, figure out what your audience wants and who among your employees is the most capable or credible when using these tools. Finally, you need to be committed -- it takes time to create a community, build trust, and compel people to spend their time and energy showing support for your work. There are lots of pieces and parts to consider. You will make mistakes and have to learn how to adapt and make changes that continue to advance you towards your goals.

To sum up, I encourage companies - no matter the size - to embrace the idea that technology and the internet are changing how you have to do business, that there are tools available to help you generate attention, educate and engage people, and ultimately mobilize and monetize activity. You have to commit. You have to invest some time and energy (and in some cases other resources). You have to be coordinated, open, and genuinely interested in building relationships and establishing a community of people around your organization. If you can do that, you will be successful.