

How Brands Using Social Media Ignite Marketing and Drive Growth

Measurement of Paid Social Media Appears Solid But Are the Metrics for Organic Social Overstated?

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Editors' Note: Warc, the London-based publisher of the Journal of the Advertising Research (JAR), annually selects a panel of marketing experts to review case-study submissions for its Warc Prize for Social Strategy.¹ Gian Fulgoni, co-founder and chairman emeritus of comScore, Inc. (and JAR columnist) was one of the 2015 Warc judges.² In the pages that follow, Fulgoni shares the insights he gained as a judge reviewing 33 finalist case studies³ submitted by firms around the world in competition for the Warc Prize for Social Strategy. Winners were announced in June.

The 2015 Warc Prize for Social Strategy is a competition that asks marketers to demonstrate how effectively they had used social media in their marketing efforts. Each case was judged using five percentage-weighted criteria:

- Insight and strategic thinking (20 percent)
- Implementation (10 percent)
- Social effects (15 percent)
- Business effects (45 percent)
- Can other marketers learn from this case study? (10 percent)

The shortlisted entries came from 11 different markets around the world—a mix of creative agencies, media networks, digital, and social specialists. The United Kingdom supplied the largest number of shortlisted entries (10), ahead of the United States (7) and Australia (5).

As a judge, I was struck by the creative use of social media and the positive impact it had on many business results. My thoughts can be crystalized into five dimensions—what I call the “Five S’s of Social Marketing”:

- Social as a **Supplement** to media spend

- Social as a **Substitute** for media spend
- Social as a **Savior**
- Social as a **Soft Metric** of effectiveness
- Social as a **Sales Driver**.

SOCIAL AS A SUPPLEMENT TO MEDIA SPEND

There are two types of branded social media communications: “organic” and “paid.” Organic social media consists of brand communications that are created by the advertiser on a social platform. The advertiser/sponsor doesn’t pay for it, and it can lead to “earned” media where the consumer shares the communication with others—either online or via word of mouth. “Paid” content is as it sounds: The advertiser pays for the content. Both of these types of social communications are used as supplements to existing media programs, and this is probably the most common way that social marketing is used today. In part, this reflects the reality that building high reach on social media using organic alone has become increasingly difficult due to algorithmic changes to social newsfeeds that favor paid over organic brand communications.

Research published by Facebook⁴ in late 2014 showed that consumers wanted to see more stories from friends and from the Facebook brand pages they cared about. They also reported that they desired less promotional content. It is interesting to

¹ “The Warc Prize for Social Strategy,” Warc 2015. <http://www.warc.com/Topics/WarcSocialPrize2015.topic>

² “The Warc Prize for Social Strategy — Judges,” Warc 2015. <http://www.warc.com/Awards/WarcSocialPrize2015/judges.info>

³ “The Warc Prize for Social Strategy — Shortlist,” Warc 2015. <http://warc.me/PrF9u3>

⁴ “An Update to News Feed: What it Means for Businesses.” (2014, November 14). Retrieved from Facebook for Business website: <https://www.facebook.com/business/news/update-to-facebook-news-feed>

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note, however, that Facebook reported that much of the content people identified as “too promotional” were organic posts from brands that they have “Liked” rather than separately placed paid advertisements.

Facebook long has had controls both for the number of paid advertisements a person sees on a “newsfeed”—the area on a user’s home page where new posts from friends or brands they have “liked” are posted—and also to manage the quality of those advertisements (based on engagement, hiding advertisements, etc.). But those same controls weren’t as closely monitored for promotional posts (*i.e.*, organic communications from a brand). Therefore, Facebook introduced new volume and content controls for promotional posts that would allow consumers to see more of what they wanted from brands. This meant that brands would have to rely more on paid social than previously had been the case.

It is interesting that in all the case-studies finalists in the 2015 Warc Prize for Social Strategy competition, brand managers used two diametrically different types of supplemental social strategies: campaigns that supported television and campaigns that were amplified by television.

Traditional media spend quickly was used to seed a campaign, often supporting the notion that nothing yet beats television for generating high reach in a very short period of time. And, social amplification was implemented to further build reach and frequency beyond television alone. A variation on the same strategy involved the use of paid social media to fuel earned and owned social communications. One brand

entry put it well: “Start a fire and then rely on our social tribes to fan the flames.”

The second supplemental approach turned the first on its head: It called for the use of paid, owned, and earned social media to build awareness of the campaign to a level where “earned” television coverage (*i.e.*, television coverage not paid for by the brand) brought further value to the brand. This worked well for a number of campaigns in the Warc challenge—for example, those that used humor and/or celebrities and, therefore, were entertaining for television to cover, or those that focused on reducing crime in society and, therefore, worthy of being included in television news coverage. A strong case in point: The use of Tinder, the dating app, by the Immigrant Council of Ireland for its campaign to raise awareness about sex-trafficking (See “Social as a Savior”, right).

SOCIAL AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR MEDIA SPEND

In some situations—especially where the brand was struggling financially—social media could substitute for media spend. SPC, an Australian fruit processor, found itself in such a perilous position that it was just months away from closure. The company was able to use influencers, Tweets, direct messages, and Facebook posts quickly to rally sympathetic support from Australians across the country to purchase its products and save a 100-year-old brand.

The power of social media also helped the U.S. Navy—faced with government spending cuts—recruit 1,291 cryptologists without a media budget. In a brilliant adaptation of the movie “The Imitation

Game” (released after the campaign) the Navy first found that its target segment—what the Navy referred to as the “brightest cryptology minds”—could not “resist the aroma of a nearly impossible puzzle.”

With this as a foundation, the Navy designed an alternative reality game to connect with its target. It used posts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr to initiate and propagate a digital puzzle by sending out a series of coded clues, tips, and updates. Earned media amplified the campaign.

The results were impressive. According to Facebook Analytics, the campaign reached 113,494 unique individuals—that’s 87 prospects for every cryptologist enlistment needed. And, without the support of any paid media, the Navy met its recruiting objective ahead of schedule.

It was a popular case study with the Warc judges as well, as the effort took home best-in-show gold-prize honors in the 2015 Prize for Social Strategy

SOCIAL AS A SAVIOR

On a surprising number of occasions, social was the centerpiece of an effort to breathe life into a failing—or even dying—brand. In some cases, it was clear that the brand’s prior marketing strategies had failed abysmally. In others, it appeared that the brand essentially had been abandoned by its owners. In such instances, necessity became the mother of invention, and impressive creative tactics involving social were implemented (leaving me to wonder why it took being on the brink of disaster to unleash creative social juices). Perhaps, because social is still unproven at many companies, it took precisely that kind of a situation to persuade senior management to invest in social marketing. Clearly, all else had failed.

Also intriguing were the cases that featured global-marketing strategies that completely failed to be effective in some

individual countries, leaving the brand in a very vulnerable position in those markets. In such instances, social marketing became especially relevant in a brand's rebuilding efforts because it essentially demanded that brand managers understand the nuances of a particular local market and tailor their communications appropriately.

In an age of globalization, it's important that marketers think global but act local. And social can be used in a very cost-effective manner as a key part of the local marketing approach.

In some cases, the brand was believed to lack an affinity with millennials, and social understandably was as a key tactic to use to reengage that target audience with the brand. My takeaway was that some marketers somehow ignore millennials—or, at a minimum, fail to realize how different their behavior and communication patterns are—until it's almost too late. With disaster at hand, some of the marketers in the Warc group of 33 finalists came up with imaginatively creative ways in which to establish the relevance of the brand among this important demo segment.

"Social as a savior" is a particularly apt descriptor of how some not-for-profit organizations have been able to use social marketing to achieve their goals. The following are two examples from the Warc list of finalists:

- **Immigrant Council of Ireland**

The campaign objective was to raise awareness of sex trafficking by utilizing Tinder, the dating/social mobile app. The campaign was the brainchild of the Irish ad agency, eightytwenty, and involved creating a number of fake profiles of women on Tinder. The first profile picture began looking normal (enticing men to match or click further), and the subsequent photos proceeded to tell a story of an abused woman. Three weeks after the campaign ended,

the Irish Government published a new Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses) Bill.

- **Check One Two (United Kingdom)**

Testicular cancer is the most common cancer in men ages 25–49 years. But, if diagnosed at an early stage, it has the highest cure rate of all cancers. Check One Two's mission was to promote awareness and prevention of testicular cancer through a comedy campaign it called #FeelingNuts developed by the digital agency, Jam. The effort initially targeted online influencers, such as Alpha M (a leading influencer for men's health, style, and grooming advice) and Daz Black (a top "Vineographer"—*i.e.*, heavily-followed user on Vine, the video-sharing site owned by Twitter). YouTube, Vine, and Instagram subsequently helped spread the message to a wider community. Awareness surged—with the added benefit that no media budget was required.

SOCIAL AS A SOFT METRIC OF EFFECTIVENESS

The use of social media can produce a dizzying array of metrics, such as "Likes," re-Tweets, posts, shares, impressions (*i.e.*, the number of times a communication was seen), etc.

But it can be challenging to relate these "soft" metrics to hard measures of brand impact (*i.e.*, sales lift), and, thereby, fully evaluate the true impact of social marketing. Of course, if no other tactics were used in the marketing mix, then it would be a simple matter to assign all credit for any positive brand impact to social. And, indeed, there were a number of Warc case-study submissions in which social marketing was used exclusively and the power of social was evident.

In the majority of cases, however, social was used as a supplement to paid media, and it required analytical work to isolate

its specific impact from that of the other elements of the marketing mix. It would appear that this was not easy to accomplish, largely because many of the case studies failed to cite a rigorous approach. When analytics were used, some form of attribution modeling was preferred. It appeared that most of this was not based on models built at the individual person or household level but, rather, on the use of an aggregate approach.

The accurate measurement of the impact of organic social communications is far more challenging than it is for paid social. It became clear, for example, in many of the 2015 Prize for Social Strategy case studies, that social's organic reach was being grossly overestimated. This occurred because the reach of an organic post or Tweet was being computed as the simple aggregate of the number of followers or friends. This is a problem in that it cannot be assumed that an organic communication is ever "in view" to all followers or friends. Moreover, there's no deduplication of the same person across followers. It's very likely, in fact, that the true reach of an organic post is far lower than the simple aggregation of followers.

The impact of paid social, by contrast, can be assessed more accurately because a social-media platform is able to identify all of the consumers who were exposed (or not exposed) to a paid piece of social communications. An effective way to measure the impact of paid social is to use an A/B design, where the in-store buying behavior of the exposed consumers is compared to that of a balanced unexposed group. Behaviorally tracked research panels—those that use a sample of consumers—originally were used in such analyses.⁵ Current practices, however, tend to prefer "cookie matching"

⁵ "The Power of Like2: How Social Marketing Works," comScore, June 12, 2012. Retrieved on July 27, 2015, from <http://www.comscore.com/Insights/Presentations-and-Whitepapers/2012/The-Power-of-Like-2-How-Social-Marketing-Works>

The 2015 Warc Price for Social Strategy

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over research panels. In this analytical approach, many of the consumers who are exposed to paid social communications have their “social cookies” anonymously linked to the cookies used to identify their in-store buying through retailer loyalty-card data. No research panel is needed with this approach. Another advantage: Cookie-matching provides the benefit of data-sample sizes that can be as many as 1,000-times larger than one would obtain with a research panel.

SOCIAL DRIVING SALES SUCCESS

Putting aside the specific contribution of social marketing to a brand’s performance, it was clear that the 2015 Warc Prize for Social Strategy case studies contained many examples of campaigns that

- included social, and
- lifted brand sales with the combined effort of an overall campaign.

Among the programs I ranked the highest:

• Chobani Yogurt: “#PlainInspiring”

In the Australian yogurt market, Chobani was the premium-price brand, but its media budget had been reduced to a level of just 4 percent of previous campaigns. By introducing a social media campaign that promoted yogurt-eating occasions beyond breakfast (created by the agency Weber Shandwick), the brand was able to grow its sales significantly and, also important, to maintain its premium-price position.

The role of paid and earned social was critical. It began with well-known food bloggers sharing their creations, thereby helping build awareness and providing inspiration. Then, a carefully selected consumer segment was targeted and asked to “create, snap, and share” its own creations on social platforms. Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter were the three main social channels. The results were impressive.

• Oscar Mayer: “Wake Up and Smell the Bacon”

In one of the most creative entries, the agency 360i built a digital experience for Oscar Mayer around the unmistakable sensory experience of cooking bacon by blending a custom bacon scent, prototyping a device to deliver it, and developing an accompanying alarm-clock app.

The device was promoted by a video that parodied contemporary fragrance advertisements, and fans were encouraged to apply to win a limited-edition clock. The alarm also was seeded with reporters and influencers, but only 5,000 were offered to “bacon enthusiasts” through a sweepstake on the Oscar Mayer site. Even so, the app was at the center of the brand’s social communications that involved both paid and earned media.

Not surprisingly, the campaign became a viral sensation and also garnered earned television coverage. “Wake Up and Smell the Bacon”—a campaign with social at its core—exceeded all past

Oscar Mayer campaign benchmarks and successfully put the brand at the center of the bacon phenomenon by creating, as *USA Today* observed, “The best invention since whatever came before sliced bread.”⁶

• Coca-Cola: “Share-a-Coke US”

One of the key aspects of social is sharing, and Coca-Cola provided teenagers with something very personal to share. The Coca-Cola brand name was taken off of 20-ounce bottles and replaced with 250 of the most common teen names. The campaign originally was created by Ogilvy in Australia. Coca-Cola knew from running the Share-a-Coke campaign in various countries that a teenager could be persuaded to buy a bottle of Coke with her or her own name on it. But in this U.S. campaign, the soft-drink marketer added a new dimension: encouraging the teen target audience also to purchase and share bottles with their friends’ names on them.

The campaign intentionally was launched small in scale, allowing teens to discover the campaign on their own terms and take ownership of it. Custom 20-ounce packaging with 250 popular teen names generated instant interest as word of mouth spread through the social sphere. The only paid media, at that point, was search, which was used to react to organic interest and drive traffic to ShareaCoke.com.

Television and online video followed the initial soft launch. The company then initiated mass “digital takeovers” — which use large digital advertisements to obtain virtually 100 percent share of voice on participating sites’ home pages.

⁶ “Wake up with a whiff of bacon,” *USA Today*, March 5, 2014. Retrieved July 27, 2015, from <http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/columnist/2014/03/05/oscar-mayer-bacon-alarm-gadget-and-app-tech-now/6072297/>

It's especially impressive to see the creative applications of social and how it can be used to amplify the impact of traditional media.

In addition, a creative digital outdoor plan featured interactive human-sized Coke bottles on bus shelters where teens could type in their names, take a photo, and share it with their friends.

Social came back into the mix with significant paid support behind organic content across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr. Endorsements from teens' favorite online personalities further ignited sharing. All in all, social-centric effort delivered outstanding results, with U.S. sales increasing by 11 percent versus the prior year. And the Share-a-Coke campaign in North America was more successful in driving sales than in any other country where the campaign had been launched.

SUMMARY

If ever I had any doubt, the 2015 Prize for Social Strategy case studies demonstrated that social media has become central to the marketing efforts of many brands and organizations. And, in turn, the palette of tools that a marketer can use has been enhanced dramatically by social.

It's especially impressive to see the creative applications of social and how it can be used to amplify the impact of traditional media. I would venture to say that social can bring marketing creativity to life, especially even in those instances where media budgets are limited or nonexistent.

The only current shortcoming I see is that the specific isolation on business results of the impact of social—especially

organic efforts—needs further development. Because social generates so many intervening metrics, it's easy to rely on them as evidence of success. It's clear, however, that some of the metrics being used to evaluate organic social marketing are overstated.

In the case of paid social media, more and more tools are becoming available to allow marketers to more definitively understand its impact. This especially is important because recent changes in the ranking algorithms of some social platforms have had the effect of favoring paid versus organic communications in terms of reach and frequency. **JAR**

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