

Connecting with Consumers

Using Social Networking to Enhance the Retail Experience

by Elizabeth A. Reid

In August 2009, Disney began to promote the launch of Thinkway's Toy Story toy line by talking straight to the fans via the man who started it all, John Lasseter, creative chief of Pixar Animation Studios and director of the first two *Toy Story* movies. A seven-part YouTube series narrated by Lasseter, called "John Lasseter of Disney•Pixar Talks Toys," gave fans the inside scoop on how he came up with key characters in the movies: Woody, Rex, Buzz, and, most amusingly, Mr. Potato Head. "I thought," said Lasseter to viewers, "if my facial features fell off every day, all the time, I would have a big chip on my shoulder." He then unveiled Thinkway Toys' Mr. Potato Head Action Figure, a part of the Toy Story Collection.

The series was a hit; while fans eagerly awaited the release of *Toy Story 3*, they turned in droves to YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. The series garnered more than one million views and spawned a debate on YouTube about which *Toy Story* character was the best. Sprinkled in between comments about Mr. Potato Head's best line were comments testifying to the greatness of the Thinkway toy.

Strategies like this are why The Walt Disney Company and other kids' brands are on the list of top companies that use social media. A 2010 Flowtown survey named The Walt Disney Company as the No. 4 "most social" Fortune 100 company with the most employees taking advantage of social media. Disney Consumer Products (DCP), under the handle Disney Living, has more than 5,000 followers on Twitter, 180,000 "likes" on Facebook, and 6,500 subscribers on YouTube. "I think a lot of them are really looking for a place, a community to find people like themselves who share that same interest and enthusiasm," says Nidia Tatalovich, director of corporate communications at DCP.

Consumers visit social media websites for a variety of reasons. Some are looking for first-hand, personalized information on a brand that they are really crazy about. Some are looking for a great deal, such as a coupon that is posted exclusively on a social media website. And others love watching exclusive, behind-the-scenes footage, such as Lasseter's explanation of *Toy Story*, all of which can help boost a company's marketing plan.

"It's simply not possible today to have an effective marketing program without a major social media component," says Stephanie Azzarone, president of Child's Play Communications. "Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and other social-networking communities are where people live now and where they turn for product information and purchasing recommendations." For 20 years, Child's Play has used traditional public relations, social media, and word-of-

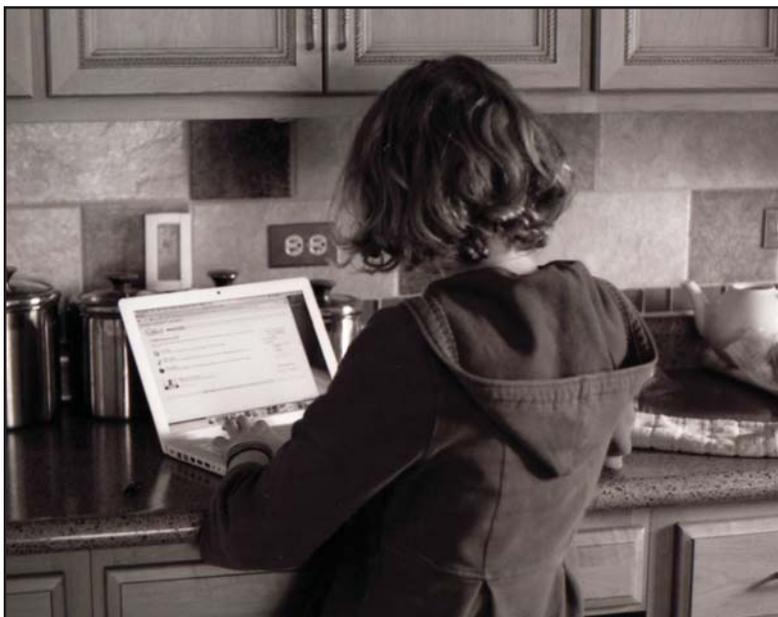


mouth campaigns to help companies reach out to moms. The agency uses a variety of resources, including its Team Mom network of mommy review bloggers, and hosts events including Twitter parties, blogging brunches, and mom networking events to connect brands with mothers.

Azzarone advises that companies should have accounts on all the major social media channels. "Reach one mom blogger or one prolific 'Tweeter'," she says, "and you may

CONTINUED ON PAGE 114

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24



extend your company's message to a thousand of her own readers. Facebook reaches everyone because all consumers are on Facebook. Companies really have to determine upfront what their specific goals are in terms of marketing, and where social media fits into that. They can't just be on social media. They really have to know what they are trying to achieve and then design all their efforts towards that."

Tatalovich says that DCP designs a different message specifically for each social media platform to target different audiences. Teens, tweens, young adults, and collectors usually flock to Disney's YouTube channel. Mommy bloggers, Disney enthusiasts, and media outlets follow the company on Twitter. Fans of Disney on Facebook are typically a combination, but mainly young adults, parents, and Disney fanatics. "I think it's important to understand which social media channel [to use], why, and who is there. That really ensures that you are not targeting the wrong demographic," says Tatalovich. "[We think to ourselves] 'is there a following for Disney Princess on Twitter? Probably more so on Facebook. Okay, what about Tron? Tron and Disney Princess are totally different!'"

When DCP launched its new tween fashion line, D-Signed, at Target, the company knew that it would use a social media campaign to announce the news. But instead of posting the same promotional video on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, DCP created different messages for each platform, which all worked together. A fashion music

video featuring the line and set to Demi Lovato's "Me, Myself, and Time" was posted on the Disney Living YouTube channel, after being sent out exclusively to hand-picked tween media outlets that embedded the video on their blogs. On Facebook, Disney posted an advertisement and photo album and on Twitter the company launched a contest that drove fans to check out the video and then to enter to win an outfit or handbag from the collection. On each platform there was a different incentive for fans to visit.

"Some companies think that they can throw up a Facebook page, or open a Twitter account, and the world will come," says Azzarone. "Businesses need to understand that they have to motivate customers to engage with them by offering something they care about, whether it's a personal relationship, a great value, exclusive information, or a fun opportunity."

This summer, Sears Holdings Corporation, the parent company of Sears and Kmart, launched the Sears Shop Your Way Rewards "Billion Points" Contest, in celebration of the first year of its Shop Your Way Rewards Program, which allows customers to earn redeemable points for every qualified dollar that they spend. In the contest, Sears customers uploaded a 45-second video explaining what they would do if they earned one billion points for themselves or for a charity. Individuals could upload a different video each day through October 5, and from October 9 to November 3, the public will vote on the top 20 videos. The eventual winner will take home half of the points in the contest prize pool, and the other half will be given to charity. Julia Fitzgerald, Sears' chief marketing officer of toys and seasonal, says that more than 40,000 people participated in the campaign.

"Social media has been a successful way to get the message out about our Sears Shop Your Way Rewards program," says Fitzgerald. "We have seen incredible ideas and creativity. Individuals submit an idea, then reach out to their own social media network and to their charity to vote for their idea."

Fitzgerald also says social media has helped the



company learn about its customers. For instance, toy collector communities such as Hot Wheels fans are actively looking for news and information about products and collector events, and parents and other caretakers love planning for celebrations. This information has helped the corporation shape collector events and Kmart's Birthday Club, which gives a five-dollar gift certificate and more to birthday boys and girls.

Jaeme Laczkowski, senior community relations manager for LeapFrog, believes the driving force behind a brand's strength is the relationship it has with its customers. In LeapFrog's social media communities, including Facebook, Twitter, and the Parents Community on its website, parents and teachers use the platforms to ask others about their LeapFrog experience so they can make an informed purchase decision. Often the responses from inside the community are more powerful and persuasive than a response from a LeapFrog employee.

Laczkowski tells the story of one mom on LeapFrog's fan page on Facebook that posted about her autistic child's experience with the company's Leapster Explorer mobile

learning device. The mom wasn't sure if the child would be able to figure out the product for use, but now he has learned how to write letters and can sing along with a game. "As a learning toy company, that's music to our ears and far more powerful than any marketing tagline we could create to promote our product," she says.

DCP sees similar brand loyalty within its social media communities. "In threads, people will defend a certain product or brand and take the time to explain their case and why they like it," says Tatalovich. "It's fascinating to see that."

Social media is a powerful marketing tool that can't be ignored. While a consumer's preferred platform may change—a teen on YouTube may decide to take up Tweeting as a young adult, and then become a fervent blogger as a parent—the underlying theme of social media will stay the same: building relationships. An unhappy consumer can spread negativity throughout his or her network with a click of a button, while a satisfied customer can be a loyal fan and influencer for life. "There's nothing automatic about social media," says Azzarone. "It's all about relationships. It's all about developing connections with people." ■



CrossTeaser



Cubigami 7



Icosoku



Bronco



Einstein



Escher



Planets



Wurmm..

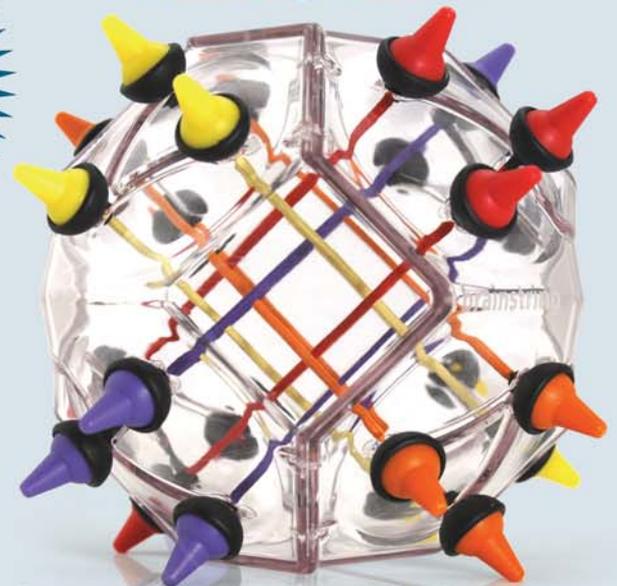


Mind Jewel



Simple concepts - challenging solutions

Brainstring Advanced



T. 512-879-7256
E. brandi@recenttoys.com
I. www.recenttoysusa.com

Free demos available
No minimum opening order
Free freight on all orders

HOW HAS SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACTED YOUR BUSINESS?

The Toy Book spoke with toy companies, retailers, and marketing execs to get their take on how social media has changed and benefited their business.

How does your company use social media?



by brand including Bakugan, Air Hogs, and Mighty Beanz



Twitter.com/SpinMasterToys
900+ followers

“**Spin Master** has been increasing our [social media] presence through our own websites for brands such as Liv and Bakugan, while also spreading our message on sites like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. We do not feel social media marketing is appropriate for every toy brand, but where we can use it for an open, two-way dialogue with our consumer, we will.”

—Rachel Griffin, director of global communications



Facebook.com/
LearningExpressInc
2,600+ likes



Twitter.com/LEToysInc
250+ followers

also by store location

“**Learning Express** launched our Facebook fan page, operated by the home office, just over a year ago. It was followed by our blog, Learning Expressions. Now, more than 80 of our stores have their own fan pages. They send out local updates about product availability and events, but look to the corporate page to provide a baseline of content. We also have a small presence on Twitter, YouTube, and some of our stores participate in FourSquare.”

—Sharon DiMinico, CEO and founder

How does social media benefit your company?



®



Facebook.com/
Bandai.America
600+ friends



Twitter.com/BandaiAmerica
2,400+ followers

“**Bandai** now has a direct line of communication with our consumers and fans. So while consumers don't want to hear a sales pitch on social networks, they do want to interact with their favorite brands and will become more loyal consumers. It's important for our followers to see that 'toy culture' is a way of life, and we love every minute of it! Social media enables us to celebrate our fans.”

—Mark Schaffner, executive vice president of toys



Facebook.com/AlexToys
1,500+ likes



Twitter.com/AlexToys
1,300+ followers

“By engaging with our fans on a personal level, [through] Facebook and Twitter, we are strengthening brand loyalty and integrity. **Alex** also uses the platforms to promote new products, share information on awards, media placements, retailer news, and international growth. Facebook allows for exponential brand awareness—when one fan interacts with us, his entire friend list sees it in their News Feed. This allows us to reach more customers, both future and current.”

—Nurit Amdur, CEO

How has social media changed the way you interact with customers?



 **Facebook.com/DisneyLiving**
200,000+ likes

 **Twitter.com/DisneyLiving**
5,300+ followers

“Social media has made it possible for **Disney Consumer Products** to take a ‘real time’ pulse of what customers, fans, and consumers are saying about our brand or products. We turn to these channels often when developing products, marketing campaigns, retail promotions, and more. Your social community will tell you immediately if they don’t agree with something.”

—Nidia Tatalovich, director of corporate communications



Twitter.com/ChildsPlayComm
1,900+ followers



Facebook.com/ChildsPlayCommunications
160+ likes

“The impact has been seismic. Companies now realize that they must communicate with consumers directly; [it] is an expected part of doing business, not an option. They are also beginning to understand that this interaction must include several components, including listening carefully to what consumers are saying, engaging them in ongoing conversations, and providing immediate response to issues. Opinions once voiced to each other one-on-one on a park bench are now magnified globally.”

—Stephanie Azzarone, president and founder

How has social media changed the way you view marketing?

Sears

**K
Kmart**



Facebook.com/Sears
160,000+ likes

Facebook.com/Kmart
69,000+ likes



Twitter.com/SearsDeals
23,000+ followers

Twitter.com/KmartDealsnNews
27,000+ followers

“Social media has changed everything. It is the newest form of PR and it is continually evolving. Corporate messaging is no longer a one-way conversation where we tell consumers what to think via a television commercial or a print ad. Consumers can now take a message, share it with their community, add to it, challenge it, or even help us invent it. With the advent of YouTube, and the ease of posting video online, **Sears Holdings** has seen consumers make their own visual stories that endorse our products and our programs.”

—Julia Fitzgerald, CMO, toys and seasonal



Facebook.com/LeapFrog
34,000+ likes



Twitter.com/LeapFrog
5,400+ followers

“Social media has put customers in control. They tell us about their product experiences and engage with other parents to help them make informed purchasing decisions. Those parent and teacher recommendations are powerful word-of-mouth marketing, and although they can create waves, if you’re a brand like **LeapFrog** that listens to its customers and responds publicly with solutions or acknowledgement, they become the driving force behind a brand’s strength.”

—Jaeme Laczowski, senior community relations manager