

The Social Media Challenge for Small Firms

Written by Australian Business



New features and a rather special free offer



(PRLEAP.COM) A small UK instruments company has risen to the challenge of Social Media Marketing and decided it's actually all about traditional retail values.

CMR-Direct , a spin-out from the university town of Cambridge, sells laboratory essentials direct to its customers across the world in the low-temperature physics and condensed matter research communities. When, early in 2012, they had the opportunity to upgrade their webstore they jumped at the chance to add some new social media features to their offering. But, as Dr Kurt Haselwimmer, CEO recounts what started as an evolution rapidly threatened to become a revolution:

"We thought we'd first add on a Facebook page, for commenting on topical research, with AddThis for integration with our webstore, but the more we read around the subject the more there was to learn - Twitter, Facebook Apps, Google +1 not to mention research specific Social Media groups such as Research Gate. Pretty soon it became a flood - no wonder many small firms find it hard to face up to the Social Media challenge."

The tipping point came, surprisingly, not by looking at what future technologies could do, but by looking back and analysing their experience of the previous decade. By going through thousands of contacts the firm discovered that over 50% of customer calls were to find out current stock levels or check prices - "that was an awful lot of extra customer effort that we could save", commented Dr Haselwimmer.

Adding live stock levels to the webstore was then the logical next step for the firm to take, but in doing so they were reminded about previous developments that they had rolled out in their first generation stores of the early noughties - multicurrency pricing, credit card payment and integrated shipment tracking - all of which had been in response to genuine customer need. Once the firm's focus was put back on the customer experience it was a simpler task to establish a coherent Social Media Marketing strategy.

Dr Haselwimmer summarised it thus:

"The avalanche of information available about Social Media Marketing made it impossible to find a way forward so we were forced to look back at our own experience to help improve our customer experience. But we've not forgotten about Social Media - we now realise that its job is to help us find those improvements that we can make. You could really see it as just a return to the traditional values of retail - when retailers were based locally they could get to know their communities and respond accordingly - now that we're all selling globally we need to use Social Media to provide that connection."

CMR-Direct launches its third generation webstore at www.cmr-direct.com , June 6th 2012.