

Case: “Linking In”

Case submitted by Kelly Grant, Tulane University

LinkedIn has become an important online social media networking resource for not only those seeking employment, but also for businesses seeking new customer contacts. In a recent article on Forbes.com, author Michael Arruda noted,

Companies that have a greater proportion of their employees on LinkedIn have more followers on their company pages. In fact, 9 out of the top 10 brands with the most followers on LinkedIn have at least 60% of their employees on LinkedIn. (*Forbes.com, 2014*)

Here are some additional facts from the site, Factbrowser.com about LinkedIn rise in users:

- LinkedIn reports 135 million registered users worldwide with 7,610 LinkedIn searches conducted per minute
- The average age of LinkedIn users is 44.2 years old
- 51% of online business to customer marketers use LinkedIn with 83% of business to business marketers using LinkedIn
- 43% of US marketers have found a new customer through LinkedIn (*Factbrowser.com, 2014*)

Case Scenario:

You are the director of operations at a large online sales company called, Officegadgetsexpress.com. The company markets products mainly to businesses (business to business accounts) but also to individual customers who maintain home offices. Your products range from large copiers to coffee makers and everything in between. The company is specifically known for its customized storage systems and high-end office chairs.

You employ 200+ sales and customer support representatives. These representatives are the only personal contact customers have with your company, and they are responsible for taking special orders, resolving product issues, and selling additional specialty items not listed on the website. They are the front line of your business and are largely responsible for maintaining the reputation of your brand. In a recent meeting with the CFO, Megan Duffy, she gave you some disturbing news, “because of an influx of customer-returned inventory, we did not make our expected numbers in the fourth quarter - despite robust sales - and the first quarter doesn’t look good. We might have to tighten our belts if we don’t find a way to increase revenue.” She added, “we need an increase in sales, which means expanding our customer base – ASAP.” You know that means developing some creative strategies to reach new customers.

At a recent sales meeting, before Megan Duffy shared the bad news with you, you talked to the employees about adopting social media in their day-to-day job responsibilities – and they resisted. In fact, they just said a flat out “no” stating that they believed social media was just a passing fad and that it would take too much time to learn and take them away from their customers. One long-timer said, “I don’t even have a smart phone – if I could go back to not having a cell phone at all, I would.”

Many of the employees started with the company when it was just a catalog company that filled phone orders. Leaping to the '.com' side was a struggle for many of the service representatives who needed extensive training on the internet-based ordering/inventory system. You know that your competitors are already actively using social media like Twitter and Instagram to introduce new products to the market. You decide that to get your employees started in the social media world, you would require that each of them develop a LinkedIn profile. LinkedIn will be a new way for them to network with existing contacts as well as branch out to new customers. It seems like the perfect way to get everyone comfortable with social media.

You now have to deliver the news to the employees. In a memo, you must announce the LinkedIn initiative that will begin immediately and convince them that this is a good idea for them and the company. The deadline for all employees to have an active LinkedIn page will be April 28. In the memo, be sure to provide simple directions to the LinkedIn website. You can encourage the employees to work together in small teams to help each other get started. You can also offer incentives for employees who reach the 'All Star' profile strength level. Incorporate any other creative strategies to get this initiative off to a good start.

Case note: Customer Representative Demographic Profile

Of the 200+ sales and customer support representatives, 62 percent are over the age of 45 with a median age of 53. Fifty four percent of the customer service reps are male, with an age range of 24 to 62. The 46% female employees have an average age of 38. Fifteen percent of the customer representatives are under the age of 35 with a median age of 26 and of these employees, 34 percent are enrolled in college and work in the office only in the evenings and on weekends. Over 65 percent of the 200+ employees have been employed at Offiegadgetsexpress.com since the company went public in 2006. The average wage is \$22.75 per hour, and the benefit package includes health and dental insurance and a small match contribution to a retirement account. In its history, the company only had a single lay-off of 15 employees in 2009 as a result of the financial crash when the company saw a loss of 21 percent of revenue at the year end of 2008.

The Assignment Deliverable

Write a memo in which you announce the LinkedIn initiative. Your memo can include a new incentive program or other creative solutions for employees to get online. Feel free to use the research or any of the information provided in this assignment. Keep the memo brief, but be thorough.

Important Note

At the end of your response, please include the following information:

I give permission for Association for Business Communication and C. R. Anderson Foundation to use my name and document for educational or publicity purposes.

Student Name

Date