



2017 Social Media Awards



CSD presents its fifth annual review of social media trends, best practices for the new year and c-store retailers succeeding on social platforms.

By Erin Rigik Del Conte, Senior Editor

FOR THE FIFTH STRAIGHT year, *Convenience Store Decisions* reviewed the Facebook (FB) and Twitter pages of more than 60 c-store chains and is recognizing those going above and beyond in creativity and connection with their fans and followers.

Heading into 2017, if your c-store chain isn't active on social media, "you need to be." That's advice straight from Brienna Pinnow, director of product marketing for targeting, Experian Marketing Services, a global information services company providing analytical tools and data—including social media data.

"That social media is exploding and has the skill and reach to truly influence people is an understatement at this point," Pinnow said.

Convenience store chains that are not on social media or that merely keep a profile and respond to a few questions are missing a huge opportunity to be an influencer. The key to social influence in 2017 will be to create content, and develop your brand voice and personality.

Now that social media has been around for years, the bar has been raised. It's time to go beyond focusing on basic metrics of likes, shares and retweets.

"Those are great indicators, but they're just that. They're one ingredient in the recipe for a successful social media presence and engagement strategy," Pinnow said.

ACTIVE LISTENING

The top best practice going into 2017 is to not only post and engage but also listen. But it's important to listen to your specific audience and learn how to separate it from the "noise" composed of many competing viewpoints on social media.

Pinnow used an example that occurred several years ago with Cracker Barrel to illustrate the point. After a controversy surrounding remarks by the star of *Duck Dynasty*, Cracker Barrel reacted to the outrage on social media and quickly pulled *Duck Dynasty* products from its shelves.

Cracker Barrel customers, however, were not happy with

that move, and the chain reversed course, putting the products back on shelves. Pinnow pointed out that originally, the chain was hearing the overall noise on social media, but when it listened to its specific customers it realized they still wanted the products despite the controversy.

Using data can help you separate the noise from your audience's message. Data can reveal who your social fans are and what else they are interested in, which can help your chain better target its messaging.

"Heading into 2017, we're seeing more companies opt to use third party data to extend their reach on social media," Pinnow said.

BEYOND MR. CHATTY

In moving beyond retweets and likes, consider that many of your followers may take a more passive approach to social media. Pinnow noted more than half of social media users fall into that category.

"By using data, you can understand who they are even if they're passive. You can see, that, for example, 88% of my audience is female and married and they have children and they also follow (XYZ Pizza Co.)," Pinnow said. Then you can use that information to your advantage—for example, maybe a pizza promotion or partnership is in order.

The lifestyles and values of even your more silent fans should inspire your content on social media and beyond.

Data can also help you see valuable partnerships, such as in the above pizza example. Observe who your fans are following and the overlapping opportunities that might exist for partnerships.

INFLUENCERS MATTER

Social media is often thought of as earned media, built through online word of mouth. But paid media—paying to advertise or to boost a post—can help you extend your reach. Data can help you identify the influencers that spread posts. While they may be different from your target customer, you'll also want to attract more influencers using paid media to better extend your message.

Data can also help you learn what social media platform your base uses, so you can target your customer base on the platform where they spend the most time.

"Many marketers think 'I'll create one message and then I'll just blast it across all of my different accounts.' That's a big no no," Pinnow said. How you present on Instagram needs to be different from your approach to Twitter, etc. in order to be successful.

Once you determine the platform where your base spends time, encouraging your fans to engage with trivia and either/or questions is a great way to gain fan participation, but Pinnow advised retailers to ensure content is meaningful. Share with your audience how you're going to

use the information they provide, she said. If, for example, you're asking customers which candy bar they like best, let them know there will be an in-store promotion or in-app coupon for the winner. Now that they know why their information is needed they may be more invested and respond.

"Help them understand how what they say just changed your business—that's when it's meaningful to both sides of the equation," Pinnow said.

DON'T FORGET CREATIVITY

It's easy for marketers to get caught up in the execution and overlook the most important part—creativity. Most people want to skip to the metrics of how many posts, like, shares, retweets occurred—but that's only a small piece of the overall story.

Creativity is a key component to every social media platform regardless of whether your following is big or small today—after all, you're preparing for tomorrow's numbers.

"Creativity is the one place where you can stand out and organically begin to grow a larger following and differentiate yourself," Pinnow said.

One reason creativity is sometimes brushed over is because it's not easy to constantly create original content.

"When you commit to original creative pieces, they have the ability to live on, go viral and cement your unique brand. This is one piece completely in your control and it can differentiate you," Pinnow said.

Pinnow's advice for 2017 is to focus not only on who is seeing your posts, but on what they see.

One recommendation for c-stores is to encourage your fans to create and submit original content, which leading chains like Maverik are doing. From encouraging fans to post photos and videos of themselves in your stores to offering other contests for creative submissions that tie in your voice and branding—it's a great way to involve your fans.

"When you encourage your fans to create content for you, they feel like they are truly becoming part of your brand," Pinnow said. It can also be helpful for chains that lack the resources to regularly create unique content.

THE AWARDS

FAN-BASED GROWTH AWARDS

Most overall growth on FB and Twitter combined. This award calculates the number of new FB fans and Twitter followers between Dec. 3, 2015 and Dec. 2, 2016.

Winner: Speedway grew 314,347 new FB Fans and 61,514 new Twitter followers in 2016 for a total of 375,861 new fans/follower.

Runner Up: Corner Store grew 207,060 new FB fans and 3,295 new Twitter followers for a total of 210,355 new fans/followers in 2016.

MOST FACEBOOK FAN GROWTH IN 2016

This award recognizes the chain with the most fan percentage growth between Dec. 3, 2015 and Dec. 1, 2016. To be considered chains needed a minimum of 10,000 FB fans.

Winner: CST Brand's Corner Store grew from 96,404 fans in 2015 to 303,464 in 2016, (215% growth).

Runner Up: Rutter's grew from 32,488 fans in 2015 to 45,868 in 2016, (41% growth).

"Increasing our FB page likes has been a goal this year," said Jared Sturtevant, supervisor of digital marketing for San Antonio-based CST Brands, who oversees digital marketing along with Kristin Putman, digital marketing analyst. "We grew our fan base by using a mix of engaging content and targeted advertising to reach our core customers. Comprehensive research conducted by CST Brands helped us select our most valuable customers and allowed us to customize our content strategy and advertising to reach them on social media."

MOST TWITTER FOLLOWER GROWTH IN 2015

This award recognizes the chain with the most follower percentage growth between Dec. 3, 2015 and Dec. 2, 2016. To be considered, chains needed a minimum of 5,000 followers on Twitter.

Winner: CST Brand's Corner Store grew its Twitter followers from 2,303 in 2015 to 5,598 in 2016, (143% growth).

Runner Up: Speedway grew from 54,486 followers in 2015 to 116,000 in 2016, (113% growth).

Sturtevant noted that CST Brand's primary focus this year has been on growing its FB audience, which is more engaged than its Twitter fan base. "We do utilize a similar content strategy on Twitter, but with more content overall and lower advertising spend," Sturtevant said.

EMERGING FACEBOOK USERS WITH MOST GROWTH

This award recognizes emerging FB users with the highest growth percentage of FB fans between Dec. 3, 2015 and Dec. 1, 2016. To be considered chains needed more than 50 and fewer than 5,000 fans on FB.

Winner: Cenex Zip Trip grew from 1,151 fans in 2015 to 1,995 in 2016 (73% growth).

Runner Up: Crosby's grew from 2,745 fans in 2015 to 4,174 in 2016 (52% growth).

EMERGING TWITTER USERS WITH MOST GROWTH

This award recognizes chains with the most Twitter follower growth percentage among chains with more than 50 but fewer than 1,000 followers. Results were tallied between Dec. 3, 2015 and Dec. 2, 2016.

Winner: The Hub Convenience Stores grew from 81 to 230 followers (184% growth).

Runner Up: Enmarket, grew from 123 Twitter followers in 2015 to 236 in 2016 (92% growth).

While The Hub is primarily focused on FB where its primary customers—professionals and blue collar oil field

workers—frequent, it had a strong year for Twitter as well.

"Twitter reaches a slightly younger audience, so we follow brands and others on Twitter while keeping that in mind," said Jared Scheeler, managing director for The Hub Convenience Stores based in Dickinson, N.D.

"We also have a strategy of posting and retweeting interesting and relevant things to that particular target market in an effort to build brand awareness and sales. About 40% of our team is in the 'Twitter generation,' and we encourage them to retweet our info whenever relevant. We're selective with our use of hashtags and tweeting at other companies to increase our reach," Scheeler added.

TWITTER TWEETER AWARD

This award recognizes the retailer with the highest number of Tweets overall. Numbers were compiled on Dec. 2, 2016.

Winner: Sheetz with 36,100 total tweets.

Runner Up: 7-Eleven with 28,000 tweets.

SHOUT OUTS!

As Pinnow pointed out, there's more to social media than basic metrics. In the shout out awards, CSD gives a 'shout out' to a few creative posts and campaigns that caught our eye. Thank you to everyone who submitted a nomination!

BEST ENGAGEMENT WITH A SINGLE POST OR PROMOTION

Winner: Speedway

On Sept. 14, Speedway posted to FB its take on a meme about life stages.

It read: "Friend 1: Promoted, Friend 2: Engaged and Friend 3: Expecting! Me: One more club gets me a free Speedy Freeze!"

The post was simple, but effective, resonating with fans to the tune of 8,200 likes, 493 comments and 9,584 shares.

CSD is giving a shoutout to this post because it did several things right. It brought in a comic and creative element,



SPECIAL REPORT

tied back to the store by incorporating a product, educated about the existence of the chain's club program, all while also being "meaningful" by resonating with the universal life pressures and social expectations Millennials are confronting at this stage in their lives and to which older generations can also relate.

BEST ENGAGEMENT WITH AN ONGOING CAMPAIGN

Winner: Stewart Shops for #StewartsFamous

Stewart's #StewartsFamous campaign involved fans in content creation in a simple yet creative way, embraced the selfie trend and tied back to the physical c-stores.

From May 9 to Sept. 26, Stewart Shops encouraged fans to upload selfies with Stewart products. Fans could post and tag the selfie #stewarts-famous or email it.

Using the hashtag allowed fans' friends to see the post and participate as well. An email address was provided to include the less social media savvy.

Winners became "Stewart's Famous" by being featured as "Fan of the Week" on Stewart's FB, Twitter and Instagram pages, as well as its website and on TVs in the c-stores.

"The popularity of selfies has shown us that people like to take pictures of themselves doing something fun. So why not take a picture when you're the happiest: eating ice cream?! And from ice cream, to iced coffee, refreshers and chips —our customers really guided how this campaign evolved," said Maria D 'Amelia, public relations specialist of Stewart's Shops, which is based in Ballston Spa, N.Y.

She credited the simplicity of the campaign along with the possibility to become "Stewart's Famous," and timing of the selfie trend for why it resonated so well with customers.

BEST HOLIDAY PROMOTION

Winner: CEFCO, 12 Days of Coupons

This creative holiday promotion let fans know about products at CEFCO Stores, encouraged customers to join the SMS (text) Club, drove them into the stores for one-cent deals and encouraged them to try products.

2016 is the second year the chain has held the 12 Days of Coupons campaign, noted Kessler Tormey, social media manager for CEFCO, based in Temple, Texas. With the 2015 promotion, the main goal was to grow FB fans. In 2016, "our goal was to grow our connection with customers using 'CEF Club,' our new SMS program for customers to receive weekly deals."

The promotion ran Dec. 1-12. Fans texted "cefcosanta" to 55123 to receive a coupon for a one-cent deal of the day. The

promotion was announced Nov. 28 on FB, Twitter, Instagram and Google+, and holiday-themed posts continued throughout the campaign.

Discounted items included a mix of "big name" brands and products new to CEFCO stores.

Another goal of the promotion was to increase loyalty through the brand. "We think of it as a holiday gift to our customers and a way to show our appreciation," Tormey said.

By texting the keyword 'cefcosanta,' the customer received two texts—one with their coupon, and one noting they'd been signed up for CEF Club with the option to opt out. As of day eight of 12, CEFCO had 1,798 new CEF CLUB SMS subscribers and over 11,000 coupon redemptions. Meanwhile CEFCO's FB page likes increased 128% and page engagements increased 52% between Dec. 2-8 compared to the previous week.

BEST COMMUNITY SPECIFIC ENGAGEMENT

Winner: Seasons, "Kicks 4 Kids" charitable fundraiser

Throughout the NFL season (Sept. 2016-January) the Seasons Corner Market convenience chain raised money at all of its stores for local Hasbro Children's Hospital in Providence, R.I.

It partnered with New England Patriots Kicker Stephen Gostkowski, of Kick 4 Kids Foundation, who donated \$500 for each successful field goal he kicked.

"We've used our Facebook page to create a call-to-action for customers to donate at our stores, and to spread awareness of the programs offered by the local children's hospital," said Michael Schiemer, digital marketing manager for Colbea Enterprises, which operates Seasons.

The FB campaign included videos, photos and giveaways. FB posts gained more than 400 Likes, 100+ Shares, 5,000+ video views, and a total reach of 23,000+ customers.

"Most importantly, these FB campaigns are generating thousands of dollars in additional customer donations. By the end of the NFL regular season we also estimate reaching an additional 5,000-10,000 local customers with these FB posts," said Schiemer. Considering the chain has 23 stores, the reach was impressive, but more importantly, it resonated with the local community. The campaign also used Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram.

"We feel that this is an excellent example of using social media for good and giving back to the local community," Schiemer said.





BEST OMNI CHANNEL CAMPAIGN

Winner: CST Brands' for Fresh & Friendly Check-In Campaign

In June 2016, CST Brands ran a “check-in” promotion. “The customer had to be at a Corner Store or Nice N Easy location with their mobile phone and our app installed. They selected ‘Check-In’ on the app, which created a social media post on either FB, Twitter or Foursquare that was pre-populated with our social handle, the address of the store and a clickable link to our website,” Sturtevant explained.

If the customer added the words “Fresh & Friendly”—the CST Brands’ promise—into the comment of that post, they were entered to win a \$50 gift card. CST Brands gave away one \$50 gift card for Nice N Easy and one for Corner Store.

This campaign succeeded in getting social media fans to assist in content creation, spread awareness of the brand promise, connected the app with social media and in-store visits and also tied to the company’s website.

Sturtevant called the omni-channel campaign “the perfect storm of digital marketing.”

It brought more than 8,000 social media posts in just four weeks and nearly 4,000 included the words “Fresh & Friendly.” After the sweepstakes was over, some 222 fans still checked-in and mentioned “Fresh & Friendly” during July.

CREATIVITY AWARD

Winner: Country Mart: Comic video series on FB.

Beginning in May 2016, Moon Mahmood—whose father Tariq Mahmood runs Country Mart with two locations in Westfield, Mass.—and his two brothers began combining their passion for film making with c-store marketing.

Each week they act in and produce a video set in the c-store and post on YouTube and the company FB page—the videos feature comedic



sketches. “Our customers love the show and no one else does anything like this in our area for their stores,” said Moon Mahmood, marketing officer.

The primary goal, he said, is to entertain customers. Despite having around 400 FB fans, their videos have received as many as 1,400 views with help from FB boosting to expand the reach.

Country Mart is a prime example of how small chains with limited resources can still find creative ways to engage customers on social media. Country Mart sometimes even lets customers participate in the video making.

BEST AT ENCOURAGING FAN ENGAGEMENT CREATIVELY & CONSISTENTLY

Winner: Phillips 66

Phillips 66 used a number of creative ways to engage fans in 2016. Here are three:

In honor of the 2016 Phillips 66 Big 12 Conference Basketball Championship, it called for fans to make a ‘Great Assist’ passing or sharing a FB post; for each share it donated \$1 to Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Kansas City.

As the long-standing sponsor for the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta it shared beautiful, high-quality videos of the event that saw 1.1 million impressions, 434,000+ engagements, and a 40.35% engagement rate on FB alone.

Phillips 66 developed a series of Slo-Mo videos that ran from September to November 2016 across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The slow motion videos featured such activities as a dog drinking water, and combined amassed over 3.73 million impressions and 1.33 million+ video views and engagements. The Slo-Mo Campaign highlighted the beauty of everyday life.

Kathleen O’Brien, social media coordinator for Phillips 66 focused on engaging consumers by building “social-at-the-core executions that make our brands part of the conversations our consumers are having in social.”

Phillips 66 joined social media in mid-2014. In 2016, Phillips 66 leveraged new tools to co-create content with fans and followers, such as Twitter Moments and SnapChat.

“For Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, we realized our consumers had an appetite for behind-the-scenes and exclusive content from the event,” she said. We leveraged our brand presence and unique access to bring the event directly to our consumers’ social feeds.” **CSD**

