

Should Small Cooperatives Adopt Social Media?

Social media is making use of internet-based technologies like blogs, social networking sites, virtual gaming, and social tagging sites in order to share ideas, information, videos, photos, and other contents to virtual communities. Some of the most common social media tools are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google Plus, YouTube, and other blogging sites. Originally, social media was used as a tool for personal interaction but was later utilized by enterprises to reach out to customers in view of its rising popularity medium among potential customers.

The early adopters of social media as part of their marketing strategies are large companies including big cooperatives. When used effectively, social media can provide various advantages to these organizations. One of these benefits is being able to engage and interact with their customers, suppliers and other stakeholders at relatively low cost compared to traditional tv, radio, and print advertising. Other benefits include improving brand reach and visibility, attracting new customers, enhancing product awareness, increasing revenue, and building loyal customers. More importantly, social media becomes an avenue for enterprises to personify their brands that customers can emotionally relate to and develop relationships with. This is because customers prefer to do business with real and live people than deal with impersonal relationships of companies.

Nowadays, social media is massively being adopted by organizations to improve communication, information sharing, and manage relationships not just with customers but also with suppliers, and other parties inside and outside the organizations. Beyond the beneficial impact of social media on marketing, it can also be used by cooperatives to disseminate information to their members. This addresses one of the biggest challenges of small cooperatives, which is to effectively reach out to their members. Given their limited resources, most of them rely on word-of-mouth as a means to inform their members about the plans and programs of the organization but this oftentimes result in poor dissemination and low membership involvement.

Considering the potential benefits to cooperatives, the important question to ask is whether these advantages would be compelling enough to encourage small cooperatives to jump on the bandwagon of social media. While it is true that setting up the social media like Facebook pages and other social accounts in

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Twitter and YouTube is low, the real challenge lies in the maintenance of these accounts. This includes the investment of assigning someone to manage these sites who must take care of creating interactive and engaging contents for their customers, keeping information up-to-date, and answering queries and feedbacks. These tasks involve remarkable amount of time and effort that assigning it randomly to someone may not be a wise decision. It must be recognized that only a dedicated staff who has been trained on managing these sites must be considered for the job. If an unskilled person poorly deals with customer complaints, for example, this might potentially cause detrimental effect on the organization's reputation and might even lead to customer loss and decline in revenue. Another consideration for small cooperatives in adopting social media is their ability to be able to track and measure the return of this investment. They must go beyond the simple recording of the number and likes and shares because what is important is the conversion of these numbers to actual sales or the creation of real customers and loyal members.

Lastly, small cooperatives who plan to resort to social media must also consider whether the target customers, members and partners that they want to reach are actively present in social media. The profile of these customers should trigger the type of content, engagement, and social networking sites to choose since different sites have their own characteristics and target audience. All these factors must be considered by small cooperatives before deciding to adopt social media in their plans.



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