

The Building Blocks for Social Media

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LEGO is very successful in social media which any search on Youtube or Flickr clearly shows.

The building blocks that we all grew up with have themselves grown up. LEGO has become noted as a smart user of social media. Crowd-sourcing ideas, allowing enthusiasts to design their own kits with Design by Me are all in a day's work for this iconic Danish brand.

Despite this success, the 9,000-strong company clearly feels it can do more. Earlier this year LEGO raided the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR – the country's public service broadcaster – to recruit Lars Silberbauer as its first Global Social Media Strategist. In his new role, he sees himself driving the LEGO brand's corporate social media strategy and ensuring that it is connected with the overall strategy of the world's fourth largest manufacturer of toy materials.

Silberbauer believes that brands need to consider themselves as social media enablers. “On social media, you should think of brands as the creators of a stage from where the consumer can shine and look good to their network and friends. It is far more important to create an environment than to simply state the brand is fantastic,” he says.

In a conversation with Ivan Fernandes, MediaCom’s Global Director for Social Media Technology, Silberbauer gives his perspective on the challenges and benefits of social media.

Ivan Fernandes (IF): LEGO is a global company working across different markets. What do you think are the main challenges for a global brand in social media?

Lars Silberbauer (LS): I think that all global brands find it challenging to align their global presence while creating local social media engagement. You need to be as close to the consumers as possible to create engagement and build relations with the users, but at the same time your engagement and your brand must be consistent on a global level.

IF: So where do you start in solving this dilemma? Do you focus on global strategy first with local implementations or do you do it the other way around?

LS : I actually think we do it in a third way. To get social media right you need to be dynamic and flexible and this is our strategy. We are dynamic and flexible with a global goal and we are continuously listening and adapting to the local markets. The old way of doing strategy simply does not work anymore. You cannot sit in an office for six months and come up with a good social media strategy. In my opinion, you should simply redefine your way of thinking about strategizing. Your strategizing should happen while you are engaging with the consumers. Each country should be individually thought through. Technologies, platforms and consumers are very different from market to market. As an example, in Italy we have 200,000 fans on Facebook and 80,000 of them are located in Rome. This gives us tremendous opportunities to do highly targeted messages and events. On the other hand, we are not very strong on social media in Spain for some reason. This creates a challenge in creating the optimal strategy. Should we use the Italian country-based model?

Or should we instead target Spanish-speaking people in general? It is important not to use the same strategy across all markets. Even very mature markets like Germany, the UK and the US vary. It is the local culture that will determine the best way to use your resources. What platform you use depends on your target audience and the product you are marketing. On top of that, the global nature of social media makes it challenging to localize individual markets and consumers.

IF: An important feature of social media is listening to conversations and sentiment. What are the key topics, the volume of mentions and so on? How do you address listening?

LS : We certainly listen and we are very fortunate that thousands of engaged fans post pictures, comment and interact with us every single day. In my opinion, social media is very suitable for listening to the dialogue that is going on naturally among consumers. LEGO's overwhelming amount of consumer engagement, however, also means that we of course cannot listen to the entire dialogue going on about the LEGO brand. But we do listen carefully of any signs of crisis and we have a comprehensive crisis management system set up.

IF: Why is social media important to LEGO? What is social media adding to the brand in terms of understanding behavior and attitudes?

LS : There is no single answer to that. Social media is a way to get to know what consumers are doing with our products and our brand. LEGO is a very creative brand. You have a simple LEGO brick that you can build to fit your imagination and consumers have a massive need to show the world what they have created. Social media is the perfect platform to display and interact with your peers. Social media is continuously broadening the LEGO brand and we learn a lot from listening to the conversations. We also have a direct dialogue through social media. We answer questions and we let the fans know about new products, but we make sure to do it as a service and not as an invasive message.

IF: How does LEGO view social commerce? And how is LEGO using social commerce to interact with your consumers?

LS : Like many companies we are trying to figure that one out. We are testing various ways of using social commerce and finding the best way for us and our users. We don't have a complete answer yet. Social commerce is an important development right now if you create the models and get the right products out in places such as Facebook. I believe the companies that get social commerce right first will be hugely successful.

IF: What other developments are you keeping an eye on?

LS : I see two important trends that are impacting social media: The massive development of mobile and social gaming. Social gaming is an interesting challenge because we have a clear and ethical policy at LEGO that states that we do not want to interact with kids less than 13 years of age old on social media. However, social gaming is only going one way and that way is growth. IF: Yes, social gaming is one of the biggest activities on Facebook and I think more and more brands will leverage this opportunity to engage consumers. What is most important when you as a brand want to enter the world of social media? LS : For us, it is extremely important that we do not let our consumers down once we have engaged with them on social media. If you decide to engage with consumers on social media you cannot stop the conversation just because some marketing campaign has ended. You need to show commitment. So for us, what is most important is that we are committed every time we create something on social media. You should never commit to more on social media than you can actually live up to. Make sure you don't promise something you can't deliver. If a company wants to enter social media, I think crisis management is another important subject to be aware of – at least it has been a focus for us.

IF: Has the need to be always-on changed the way LEGO deals with social media?

LS: LEGO is a global brand, so there are always consumers in a daytime zone and we are used to accommodating to a 24/7 setup. But, of course, this is more extreme on social media and it requires the right organizational setup. We are still in the process of enabling the company to do social media in the right way and develop the social media organization. Again for us, this is about trying a lot of different stuff out and feeding it back to the strategy. It is an on-going process and the challenge is to do it fast enough to keep of with

the users. IF: In every aspect of marketing, measure is growing in importance. How do you measure success on social media? LS : It depends on what social media is part of. If it is part of a crisis management strategy then you need to measure sentiment and the development of dialogue. It is different if it is a product launch on social media. The measurement also depends on your goals and how you want to proceed. We do not work with just one single KPI for social media We have many different KPIs. It is about reaching out to the consumers and getting a closer relationship and then driving sales. I think engagement will always somehow reflect on sale and ROI.

IF: From a practical perspective, how do you manage social media content? Do you handle it yourself or is it outsourced?

LS: Our goal is to create a genuine and authentic relationship between the user and the LEGO brand and that is why we do not outsource our conversations with our consumers to agencies. You don't want to have a stranger to call of one of your friends and that is why it is always a LEGO employee that is doing the conversation on social media. You cannot outsource it to others to build a emotional relationship, that must be done by employees inside the company.

IF: How do you keep the strategy fresh and relevant to your target audience?

LS: We always try to develop our strategy as we engage the consumers and as we enable the company. We have a three tier model of developing the social media strategy. The social media architecture is the basic layer in our social media strategy. The next layer is our social media enabling within the company. And the third tier is the engagement strategy. These three tiers make for a continuous process that enables our social media handling. What I think most brands need to understand is that on social media you shouldn't focus so much on your brand and think that the brand should be the centre of attention. Instead you should focus on helping the user to build his or her own personal brand and let your brand be a part of that process. It's all about the user and social media, I think, has answered a basic human need: A need to be in the centre of your own life and a need to create a world of information and communication around yourself. On social media, you should think of brands as creators of a stage from where the consumer can shine and show off to their

network and friends. That is far more important than saying that telling the consumer that the brand is fantastic. It is necessary for a brand to be humble and acknowledge that we are in a social media space where we have to earn our rights to be. In my opinion, brands have to redefine their way of thinking about brand marketing when engaging on social media, as social media should never be seen as yet another one-way channel for pushing out marketing messages and traditional campaigns. It's not just a new platform; it's a mind shift.

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