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First-Person

Company: HRE Performance Wheels, high-end wheels for sports and luxury cars

Source: Chris Lunhow, CEO

Launched Facebook fan page: August 2010

Facebook fans today: 27,000

Facebook strategy: Target younger, aspirational potential customers.

Types of posts: Product and company updates, partner and customer profiles



Chris Lunhow

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When I came to this company in 2006, we were old-school and spent 80 percent of our advertising budget offline, including print ads in specialty lifestyle magazines like *Robb Report*. Traditional print advertising is very expensive, slow moving, and it is hard to figure out if you're getting any ROI. Around that time we realized that people who were buying our products were going online for information.

Facebook allows us to form relationships with new generations of customers. We care more about connecting with younger people than we do our older clientele—folks

with money in their 40s and 50s and 60s already know us, and if they don't know us, they don't care about us. We're speaking to people who might buy a Lexus 3-series when they get their first job and then move up to a 5-, then a 7-series, then a Porsche when they would buy our product. That is the trajectory of our relationship with our customers.

Prior to social media we were viewed as an iconic and unreachable brand. But with social media we are much more connected with our fans, customers and partners. We seem much more accessible.

A lot of strategic insights have come out of our Facebook page. For example, thanks to what we've learned about this aspirational customer, we are now launching a small merchandise store with branded, affordable shirts and keychains. Also, Facebook analytics helped us realize that the No. 1 location for our Facebook fans is Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, which really surprised us, since the HRE dealer there is new to the brand. As a result, we set up meetings with dealers and customers there, and we're strategizing about growing business in that part of the world. In this way, Facebook will help us with our goal to move our international sales from being just 40 percent of total sales today to 75 percent in a few years.

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and new recipes on Fridays. But it is important to stay nimble enough to spontaneously react to relevant headlines and commentary.

Rules of Engagement

Kinks and challenges will no doubt present themselves. A couple guidelines to live by include:

➤ **Embrace customer support issues.** If fans post their complaints on the wall, use it as an opportunity to showcase your service team and commitment to resolving problems. "A negative message dealt with well is better than one not raised at all," Bird says.

➤ **Remove off-the-wall wall posts with care.** Truly offensive or inappropriate comments should be deleted, while those that are simply out of line ought to be responded to professionally. "If they're making a statement of mistake, correct them and disengage," Bird advises, but deleting is a stickier matter. "You potentially break the authentication of your site if you delete a post," he says. A good rule of thumb is that if the comment were made aloud in a town hall meeting, would the police escort the messenger out? "If the answer is yes, deleting is appropriate," Bird says.

Other Brand-Building Facebook Ideas:

Give your CEO a high profile. This person should have his or her own active Facebook page, complete with an updated profile picture, Abernethy says. "Gone are the days of the elusive CEO," she says. "People want to meet the people behind the company."

Worried your business is too boring for Facebook? Profile your employees, customers or partners. Post a video of your team or manufacturing facility.

If you post a poll to select your next product, actually launch that product.



Jennifer Abernethy

When it comes to coupons, post only the killer deals. "This is not where you post coupons with all the asterisks and exceptions," Bird says. "This is where you make people say, 'That's insane—how do they do that?' It's a great way to get people to hit the 'like' button." **S**

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