WHAT NEW PLATFORM SHOULD YOU BE TRIALLING TO GET THE JUMP ON YOUR COMPETITION?



OK, so we're all on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and finally Google+. We've adapted to these platforms and now use them as if they've always been there - we're confident, articulate and comfortable sharing all sorts on information about ourselves that a few years ago would have been deemed an "invasion of privacy".

But perhaps you weren't first to the party with all of these. Perhaps when G+ or Pinterest was announced you thought "oh god, not another one!" Why do I need another Facebook, Twitter of Flickr...particularly when many of these platforms have user bases, bigger in fact than most countries and they can't easily be ousted from their preeminent position.

But it has been proven time and again that the early adopters have a huge advantage. They learn how to use the platform in a (relatively) safe environment - by which I mean if you're going to make a dreadful fax pas it's best not to do it with the whole world watching. They are there when others aren't, which means that rather than just saying that you're a "dynamic and forward looking organisation" you're demonstrating it. Newcomers can then chose you rather than your competition because you're there...and your competitors aren't.

So, there's a good reason to get there first. But there's also a problem. We all have a finite amount of time to spend on social marketing and before we can really use any new network effectively we have to invest our time and thought in trying to grasp how it works (at a strategic level), what we expect it to deliver for us (at a practical level), how we resource it and how we integrate it in to our other marketing activities.

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I personally remain pretty focused with the platforms that I choose to use. Facebook, G+, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube I use every single day. Instagram, Vine, Slideshare, Quora and Pinterest when I have a bit of free time. But the list of possibilities (many of which I've tried) is a long one; Tumblr, Reddit, Technorati, Stumble, Vimeo, Eventbrite, Picassa, Last FM, Hulu, Boxee, Yelp, Bebo, Orkut, Plaxo, Yammer, Digg.....the list is (almost) never ending.

You also need to keep evaluating what's working and what isn't as there are the platforms that have possibly outlived their usefulness (like Plaxo) and many others that will either be killed by one of the bigger players incorporating additional features in to their offering (I think this will be the downfall of Foursquare soon) or by simply being bought - like Instagram was. Arguably we should be ditching these to focus on the platforms that offer greater possibilities (unless of course you have some long-tail strategy which enables you to reap large rewards from a dying platform).

Then, more interestingly of course there are new platforms popping up daily. But how can we possibly identify which platforms we should back now and in the future? Well, that's a difficult question to answer. A good product with good apps support based on a good idea is no guarantee of success... history has taught us that. So how can we get "first mover" advantage without taking risks with our time (and therefore our money). Jumping on to a platform because you 'like' it is no strategy whatsoever - you need to go there because you've identified that your customers and prospects are there and they want you to join them. Who could have predicted the rise of Pinterest and the transformational effect it would have on FAB's sales...very few (except FAB I suspect). The question is how can you find that network that will catapult your business to success.

Well, perhaps the answer is already there for the next big thing, the next big opportunity...perhaps we already know how it works. With "retro" being so cool, a large subscriber base (albeit a lot smaller than it used to be) and a load of money having been spent recently on a new interface, MySpace might be what you're looking for! I predict that MySpace is going to be one of the biggest "new" platforms of the next couple of years.

So, the next time you're planning a social strategy,

