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Guerrilla Sales & Marketing

Social Media Can Be Risky Business

LORI TURNER

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While the upside of social media marketing can be tremendous, it's not without risks. Just ask MAPCO with more than 400 convenience stores across the southeast.

In my last column I mentioned that MAPCO launched a "\$1.10 Gas Giveaway" social media promotion. It posted hints via Facebook and Twitter regarding five secret locations that would sell gas for \$1.10 per gallon on 10/10/2010 for 110 minutes.



Lori Turner

For weeks, MAPCO's social media followers were abuzz with posts and tweets on the locations. Promotion followers expected to have a leg up on other area consumers regarding the location of participating stations.

Then, unexpectedly, on Oct. 8, MAPCO publicly announced the five locations. The move dismayed many who had invested time the weeks prior to research the clues.

While MAPCO no doubt had its reasons for changing strategy mid-promotion, not all of its customers were understanding. Social media posts and tweets voiced frustration with the way the promotion was executed.

One fan posted, "Why a month of clues, just to give the address???"

Others objected to the uneven distribution of locations – with two of the five in Memphis. One fan said, "MAPCO you have failed your employees and customers by not branching the promotion out to more stations. The five stations are all in one area. Someone did not plan this out very well." Another wrote, "267 locations in Tennessee and two out of the five selling the gas for \$1.10 are in Memphis? Great picking there. Not."

Another post complained that a Memphis location ended the promotion before the 110 minutes passed: "What a scam. I got in line @ 1:37 and was told @ 2:35 it was over when I made it to the front of the line. I will never patronize MAPCO stores again."

No matter what the truth is, the negative consumer buzz is out there and perception is reality.

That's social media's downside. While buzz can spread in a hurry, like wildfire it's uncontrollable. In the end, you have to weigh the risk versus reward.

You have to assume that due to the sheer volume of comments and tweets about the promotion, MAPCO significantly increased its fan and follower bases on Facebook and Twitter. They also generated regional and national media attention as a result of the promotion – this column included. Was it worth it? In the end, only time will tell if MAPCO converts the buzz into business.

Regardless, my hat's off to MAPCO for having the corporate courage to leave the negative comments on its Facebook wall. Instead of removing them, which they certainly could have, they opted to publicly respond to many of their customers voicing concerns.

That's what social media is all about. Having the courage to accept praise and criticism – letting the voices of your customers be heard in an effort to improve and connect.

Lori Turner is managing partner of RedRover Sales & Marketing, www.redrovercompany.com. You can follow her on Facebook and Twitter.

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MORTGAGES	92	268	19,773
FORECLOSURE NOTICES	1	57	8,628
BUILDING PERMITS	0	353	34,203
BANKRUPTCIES	74	228	15,733
BUSINESS LICENSES	31	75	4,422
UTILITY CONNECTIONS	77	326	22,832
MARRIAGE LICENSES	19	78	4,733

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