

ANALYTICAL VIEW ON USING WEBLOG AS A TOOL OF MARKETING MANAGEMENT

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the issue of the use of blog as a modern marketing management tool on the selected European virtual market. The paper defines basic concepts and context with the subsequent analysis of major players operating on this market. In the context of findings based on the analysis, recommendations for subjects - organizations and individuals planning to use or using blogs as a modern tool of marketing communication to increase their visibility and improve their reputation on the virtual market - are then drawn.

Keyword: *Buzz marketing, Word of mouth, Blog.*

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Buzz and WOM marketing

Kotler and Keller define noise marketing as a support of opinion leaders and their reasoning to spread information on products within their community (Kotler, Keller, 2007). In literature the word of mouth marketing tends to be described as whispering or giving cues and it basically is sharing of information orally between two people often in the form of a story. Impression of a personal message that shows characteristics of a personal recommendation is typical for this communication scheme. Given the apparent authenticity of a message, this form of promotion maintains a high level of credibility (Kelly, 2007). Based on the literature it is clear, that the concepts of noise marketing and word of mouth marketing have a lot in common. Some authors even argue that it is the same form of communication. Authors Mikeš and

Vysekalová argue that it is possible to give both of these forms of promotion either of the names (Vysekalová, Mikeš, 2010). If we look into history we will find out that neither of these two forms (or one common form) is a matter of modern trends. Although this form of promotion is included among modern, non-traditional, trendy and other forms of promotion in literature, its existence is noted since time immemorial. Without people realizing they disseminated promotional messages by word of mouth to a greater or lesser extent long before the trade developed into its current form. Given its nature, this method of dissemination of messages (even promotional) is one of the best forms of promotion and raising awareness of brands, or individual products. Mark Huges describes this method of marketing as a promotional form that catches the attention of the target audience to such an extent that talking or writing about a product or a brand suddenly becomes fun and fascinating at the same time (for both customers and the media) (Huges, 2006).

In literature as well as in marketing practice various kinds of this type of promotion can be encountered, namely:

- referential programmes
- community marketing
- marketing through opinion leaders (Tertel, 2010).

In the virtual world of the Internet WOM and Buzz marketing can have several forms. For the purpose of this paper we shall draw our attention to one of these forms - Webcast.

Webcast and Weblog

Webcast can be defined as a media presentation distributed over the Internet through a single channel to a number of potential listeners, readers, or viewers. The most common formats include audio blog (podcast), video blog (vlog), or Internet radio stations. For the purpose of this paper, the simplest form of dissemination of marketing messages within webcast - weblog - shall be presented. Blood (2000) defines the weblog or blog, as it is often referred to, as a web application that contains chronically ordered posts. An author of blog is called blogger, blogging community is called blogosphere (Blood, 2000, In: Wikipedia, 2012). The word blog was created in 1990s, but came into use in 2000. Advantages of blog as a form of promotion acknowledge not only Internet users but also organizations. Blogs provide invaluable opportunities for organizations from the perspective of non-violent forms of promotion of their products. According to Byron and Broback (2008), organizations can offer or sell products, promote brands and remain in constant contact with customers via blogs.

Blogging as a form of so-called "e-communication" can be described by the following:

- unconventional source of information
- new phenomenon
- tool for the news reporting balance
- challenge to traditional means of mass communication

Byron and Broback note that almost every major company spends considerable funds on marketing promotions in the form of disseminating positive information about itself or its

products. The more successful ones have been using blog as a very effective means of disseminating positive information of a more complex nature about the organization.

Byron and Broback (2008) further define four types of blogs focused on marketing, in particular:

- weblogs helping companies to achieve better market orientation
- weblogs promoting visibility of companies
- weblogs focusing directly on the sale of goods and services
- weblogs focusing on promotion of business websites

Objectives and methods

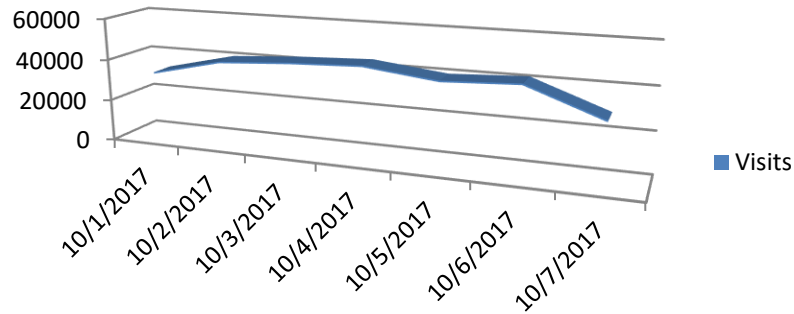
The main aim of the paper is to map the usage of blog as a modern marketing tool on the virtual market of the Slovak Internet. Based on the analysis of main players - blog servers blog.sme.sk and blog.pravda.sk - operating on the selected market, we try formulating basic recommendations for subjects - organizations and individuals planning to or currently using blog as a modern tool of marketing communication to increase their visibility and improve their reputation on the virtual market.

Evaluation and discussion

Internet users perceive blogging as a non-violent form of content distribution. It is often difficult to detect commercial purpose of a presented message, provided that this form of presentation is implemented correctly. The analysis includes the possibilities offered by virtual Slovak market. Blogging is so widespread on the analysed market as it is in the developed world, but over time blogging is becoming more and more popular. Blog portals of Slovak dailies Pravda.sk and sme.sk. are the most well known in Slovakia. Blogging systems on the portals of the dailies Pravda and SME are almost identical in terms of functionality. In terms of coding they are pre-built and include only a few modifiable options (in terms of personalization) comparing to global platforms.

However, the biggest advantage is relative simplicity and accessibility of the whole solution. Also, comparing to the global blogging platforms (e.g. blogger.com) there is a higher chance that content will be easily accessible to the community of Slovak users. From the perspective of tradition blogging portal SME is more successful on the selected market for it is operating most than 10 years on the Internet. Thanks to tens of thousands of bloggers and a broad community of readers it ranks number one in Slovakia. The following graph shows the actual number of visits of blogs on the online version of the daily SME between 1st and 7th October 2017:

Chart 1: Visits of blog.sme.sk

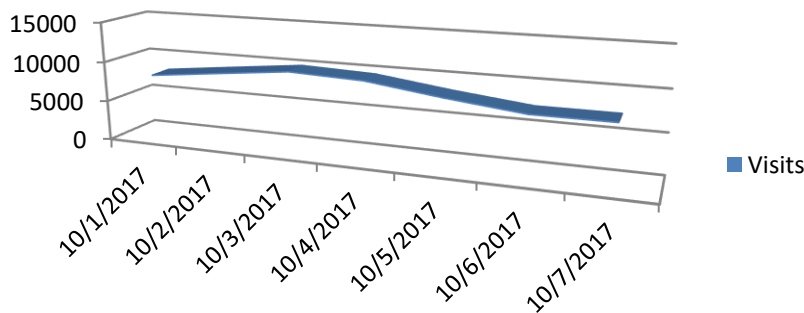


Source: AIMmonitor, 2017

Based on the graph, the number of visits of blogs on the SME.sk portal during an average week averaged to 40,000 per day. Taking into account that this is a free service (if it is a prima facie non-commercial message), only the sheer number of visits encourages to use this platform.

In terms of a direct competitor blog.pravda.sk, the situation is a little different: Pravda launched its blogs in 2010. They have a more intimate atmosphere, less authors and readers, however, this can be an advantage. A new author can succeed faster on blogs of Pravda portal. The following graph shows the actual number of visits of blogs on the online version of the daily Pravda between 1st and 7th October 2017:

Chart 2: Visits of blog.pravda.sk



Source: AIMmonitor, 2017

Based on the graph, the number of visits of blogs on the Pravda portal during an average week averaged to 8,000 per day. Compared with 40,000 daily visits of its competitor, blog.sme.sk, it represents only a fraction of the visitors. As mentioned above, this may not

necessarily be a disadvantage, as with a lower number of contributors and readers the opportunity for a newly registered contributor to succeed is theoretically much greater.

Evaluation and discussion

Users perceive weblogs, or blogs, in short, as an authentic way of communicating. Nevertheless, they are not particularly used by the organizations on the analysed market. We consider creating a blog to be a unique opportunity to differentiate from competitors. Non-violently served information with the essence of added value for readers is something that can help to build the already mentioned "online" customer-organization relationship. An excellent example of such a blogging is an online airline ticket seller www.pelikan.sk. By creating a blog and regular publication of witty observations and experiences from trips around Europe's capital cities, the website operator ensured sufficient awareness of its products among its target audience represented by web users / readers of the blog. Based on the conducted researches, it is clear that more than half of the readers trust the information presented through "commercial" blogging. Furthermore, it is clear that more than half of these readers will be influenced by the discussion arising from a published blog. Blog readers will perceive the content in a more positive way, if the blog will regularly feature new articles. Therefore, quality blogs should regularly bring new content so that the blog give the impression of activity. Posts within the blog should be clear and concise, as readers find extensive contributions less attractive. An important part of promotion through blogging is feedback. We consider comments to form an essential part of a blog. Readers / customers (potential / actual) can complement blog with immensely valuable information through discussion. By dealing with the reactions of their actual or potential customers, their target audience, organizations and individuals will gain an extremely valuable source of primary information in the form of feedback.

Summary

Slovak market is specific, whether in relation to external markets within Europe and the world, or within the internal markets. There are considerable regional differences between the West and the East of the republic (area of less than 500 kilometres). Companies active on the market are confronted with a relatively low purchasing power on the part of potential customers, while on the supply side (represented by potential competitors) the companies find themselves in a hyper-competitive environment. Analysed market on the supply side can be characterised by a high number of small businesses. Given their limitations, especially due to limited resources (human, financial, time ...), they must operate as efficiently as possible, if they want to maintain their presence on the turbulent and hyper-competitive market. The issue of the use of e-marketing instruments in business is relatively little known in our geographical area. Organizations and individuals are only gradually beginning to use the Internet and to profit from the opportunities it offers. Whereas this is a relatively little studied issue, we found important looking for answers to basic questions formulated within the framework of the conducted analysis as one of the subsets of selected links related to e-marketing and online reputation management as a whole.

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