

Social Media: The Metrics That *Really* Matter

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When it comes to social media, are you all *thumbs up*?

It's true. We all like a good *thumbs up* validation every now and then, whether it's online or offline. It's considered *good response* from our viewers and, after spending lots of time thinking about how to craft your content, you're probably happy for *any* noise that lets you know they're watching and listening, and that you didn't dream up all those followers on your pages. But wait.... there's more to it.

The thumb's up makes me laugh

For a little opening context, I can't help but think about all the times in which I'm either the thumbs up *giver* or the thumbs up *receiver*, both of which give me a chuckle. In real life (you know, because it's assumed that social media isn't *real life*), a thumbs up takes me back to high school sports when, from the other side of the field, pool, or court a coach would give me a thumb up. Then, as it is now, it was one the quickest forms of praise a coach could offer from an inaudible, but viewable distance. It serves as a type of seal of approval to a previously formed pact to confirm the expected "good" or "right" behavior. But there was always more behind it. There's still an actual critique coming, right? Yes. And that more meaningful post practice conversation very quickly changes the meaning of the thumbs up from "you did it right" to "you simply just did it, now let's talk improvement." Bottom line: don't take the thumbs up as a sign that everything is whole-heartedly perfect or right.

Now that I'm a mom, I've offered my daughter the obligatory *thumbs up* from across the pool when I heard my name yelled to me (which by the way is "Moooooommmmm!!!!").

But let's face it: I wasn't at all looking at that great dive or flip but I thumbed it up an approval and congratulations anyways. I watered down it's meaning, pun intended. And, since the thumb is so easy to give, I'm pretty sure I've given a *thumbs up* to the offspring of other moms nearby who also weren't looking, because I noticed no one else was and it had to be done.

My thumbs up (and yours too) has become a recognizable symbol of "YES!" and "GREAT!" and can go anywhere I go and be given to anyone I chose. If it were possible to do online, I'd give many things *both* thumbs up. But I don't. As a responsible social media user (ha ha ha) I've learned the power of my words and my contributions. I'm "adulting" now, and doing so with conscience. I can articulate why I like things and people like that. And I've come to appreciate (and also expect and hope for) the same reciprocal behavior on my posts. It's my new end game for my own social media, and it should be yours, too.

What do cocktail parties and social media have in common?

What if I told you that social media was nothing but a giant, online cocktail party? Well, I just sorta did. **The bottom line: You have to be social on social media.**

Imagine if you were being told an intelligent, meaningful story by an intelligent, well-meaning guest at a cocktail party and all you could muster up as a response was a thumbs up? That thumbs up is, at times, the equivalent of "good" or "great" or even "nice one" and it won't get you too much acknowledgment around those who can actually speak with substance and specificity. There's no *real* content to communication that just involves this one symbol but the more we live online and communicate regularly with people online, social media specifically, the more we are going to focus on and heavily rely on the interactions that happen there. So we've got to do better. Since content is king (and queen), we've got to want more than a mindless count of how many times that thumb symbol has been clicked on our own pages for our knowledge (and sanity).

So, what can we do?

We've been told all our lives we should be active listeners. You know, the people who are *really* great at listening to what's being said and using all 5 senses to think about how to

help you, address you, and to actually pick up on some component of meaningful data, something specific you said, in order to use it in a constructive and engaging way and fully comprehend. Active listeners are not, for example, just thinking of their own agenda or ready to give you a parallel story because everything in the universe is parallel. News flash: all things are not parallel. There's a whole world of things that are incongruent and it makes for interesting conversation, too. People ask questions. People have concerns and point out differences. It makes the world go around. On and off camera, I like your thumbs up, but I like your comments and questions more. They're specific. And many companies pay good money for really specific intel about their customers and their interaction and how to harvest it from clicks and comments, whichever way those comments sway.

So, how will I know if they “like” me?

The number of shares on a post

The number of comments on a post

The number of URL clicks

The number of followers

Reviews/Recommendations

Direct messages

How many people have bookmarked your post to come back to later

The post's total audience reach

Focus on these metrics rather than “likes” of your page or your content. Just like that cocktail party or social gathering, when people converse and engage, these actions comprise *real* social engagement.

It's pretty awesome when you see that you've got 189 likes and 210 follows on your business page. It's pretty awesome when 4 people likes a post, but 10 others commented on it. (I'll focus on your comments, thanks!). And you've posted content with a call to action that no one engaged with online but 2 people actually picked up the phone and called you about. (I'll take the offline actions because that's what I was aiming for!). I think you get it.

How can I get the conversation going?

Request feedback, literally.

Ask for opinions and feedback, and request help if it merits.

Work to evoke an emotion.

Offer interesting content that merits emotional response and reaction from your audience.

Cite industry specifics, news stories, and events.

Content that is more local, regional, national, or global and goes outside of your smaller world while still relating to you and your offerings is interesting to others.

Offer an unexpected photo.

Is it unusual, highly inventive, unique? These are the things entertainment is made of and often bring both comments *and* questions— - win win.

Offer infographics and useful guides.

These are highly shareable and if they don't solicit a comment directly on your page, if others share your content, you're still getting out there.

Show before and after images.

Shock factor? Awe-inspiring? Jaw-dropping? Got any of that?

Provide useful tips and information.

A lot like an info graphic or something practical- these get shared quite often because we can actually *use* them; they have purpose.

Offer a fill in the blank.

With or without a comedic flair, these partially completed ideas create an open invitation for people to create content. They also tend to build audience interaction and relationships through commentary. And you can jump in. And when you can reveal the answer at a later

time, it builds anticipation and follows. Make this fill in the blank, and/or the comments you offer relevant to you. (After all, you're hosting it for a reason).

Revive a favorite memories (or past content).

Include a request for your audience to share some of their favorite memories, too— and maybe their memories include you, your work, your services. Old news made new. We don't always have to be completely new or original, just inventive and purposeful.

Ask a random question.

But don't forget to circle it back to you/your art when you reply to comments... yes, build a parallel or a contrasting story! Either can be interesting!

Thank a fan, new follower, current or former client, collaborator.

In media, pieces about the life of others for the point of glorifying them are known as "vanity pieces" and while they're all about the other person and highlighting them...you guessed it... their relationship to you is also a piece of your story. Choose wisely and with intention, and tag. And whenever possible, let them know ahead of time so they can be on the lookout for your post and you can acquire approval along with any quoted material or images to accompany the post.

Don't Let the Thumb Rule You

As social media goes, we've got people who don't "thumbs up"... or interact at all. They're called "silent observers" and they're really valuable, people. They're really valuable people (this time, no comma). They're out there watching, listening, reading and thinking about you and your content but they're just not making it publicly known. They can be quiet for a variety of reasons— that's perhaps the least important part of this. Or maybe they're treating your content like a commercial on TV. Those of us who still watch commercials... you don't talk back to your TV during commercials do you? Well, neither do silent observers. If you're an ad, they're observing. They may be roused by what they saw, consciously or subconsciously, and it plants a seed for later...or not. For this and many many many other reasons, we shouldn't judge ourselves by how few or many thumbs we get. It's just illogical in this world of logical social media life.

Thumbarize this post, please

Just the other day on a social media site I posted something I thought was engaging, *good for people*, and attractive, as I'd done so many times that week. The sound of crickets was deafening. Actually, the crickets had left the building, too. But I did get a call, within moments, from a colleague who said "I just saw your post and want to invite you to speak at an event." They understood my post. There wasn't a call to action made in the post itself, but it generated one for this person. I didn't have my contact info in that post, but they found it. Yay, post. Yay, "about" section.

Thinking now *I don't need your thumbs, I'm doing just fine?*

Some of my biggest promoters who are also clients could work with me for months, write great reviews of my services on business page, and then lastly either I or they realize that they've never actually liked the business page. See how irrelevant of a metric a "like" can be- even a like of a whole page? And things like this will happen to me again and again. And they'll happen to you too, if they're not already. I'm not exactly saying we should all put our thumbs away for good, but let's tidy up our thoughts a bit and consider that a thumbs up isn't as glorious and telling as it used to be. There's more. When, in summary, we understand that:

- 1) there are people out there who are observing and not engaging online and
- 2) we shouldn't be as obsessed with thumbs up "likes" and
- 3) there are more dimensions of social media and facets of engagement to concern ourselves with and even to aim for

.....we can focus on content that's going to engage and enliven our audience. And I've got info for you on that, too. Lots of it. (Inserts thumbs up). (Sorry, couldn't help myself).

Cheers,

Thea Howell

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