

## Social Media Marketing in India

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#### Are businesses using Social Media for marketing?

The four founders of 'Yolkshire', an egg specialty restaurant launched in Pune on 8th June 2010 were struggling with their menu till 3rd June- not sure whether to incorporate Indian dishes or to stick to the originally agreed Continental fare. There were experts insisting that Indian spicy fare was an absolutely essential component to make customers keep coming back. On the evening of 7th, there were still differences on whether to open at 8am or at 9am and whether to close at 10 pm or at 11 pm. Whether to stick to the self-service model or to provide partial service was also being hotly debated even as the sign announcing 'Self Service' was being put up!

Almost everything at 'Yolkshire' changed either within the first week itself or over the next six months; be it their menu which now includes a decent amount of Indian fare or their timing which was dictated more by the customers than by the founders themselves. The 'Self Service' sign was pulled down by the beginning of July as the kitchen staff started doubling-up as service staff.

If there was one thing on which there was absolutely no ambiguity or difference of opinion, it was Yolkshire's marketing strategy- all the four founders had agreed upon leveraging the social media to the hilt. The two platforms identified were the usual suspects, Facebook and Twitter. And to this date, apart from the founding team, probably the only other thing that remains unchanged at 'Yolkshire' is their Marketing strategy. 'Yolkshire' is not the only start-up in India betting big on social media to take them to the market.

#### Why so much noise over Social Media?

Why there is so much noise about and expectation from social media marketing is anybody's guess. The sheer social media audience would make any marketer drool over it. The following recent statistics would give some idea of the magnitude of this medium:

Social Network	Size	Page Views
Facebook	17 million	3,945 million
LinkedIn	8 million	72 million
Twitter	4.5 million	16.4 million

Add to this the simple fact that there is no direct cost of reaching these millions unless you are paying someone to specifically do that job and it is not surprising that more and more start-ups, whether in the B2B segment or in the B2C segment, are betting big on social media marketing.

#### Who all are using Social Media for marketing?

Ask Devendra Deshmukh, the Founder Director of Pune-based e-Zest Solutions Ltd., a product engineering and software development/enterprise software development company and he swears by the

social networking phenomenon. 'Any professional today needs to spend a minimum of one hour daily on social networking', says Devendra. Ajay Sanghani, Founder & CEO at ITVidya.com and CEOMAG.IN concurs with Devendra except that he spends a lot more time on social networking than Devendra recommends! Ajay says "Social Media gives a level playing field to all individuals; in fact it is the most powerful zero-cost marketing vehicle individuals and startups can exploit. Additionally, it allows precision targeting, you can exactly know who you are talking to, who is talking about you and who is spreading good or bad words about you".

Jaydeep Barman, Founder & CEO of Faaso's, a fast food chain that boasts of 'feast on the run', joined the social media bandwagon a bit late but is fast catching-up and has used it to a great marketing advantage by accepting orders on Twitter. Apurva Sancheti, Founder Director of 'Krostini', another fast-food player from Pune has recently started reposing faith in Facebook to engage and to keep in touch with his customers. It is making a lot of business sense announcing loyalty rewards to customers on Facebook. As hundreds of other fans know about it, they aspire for their own rewards and keep coming back to the Facebook page and Apurva happily keeps them engaged in the hope that they would also drop-in at the outlet. And they do eventually drop-in one fine Sunday morning.

### **Is Social Media here to stay?**

Be it Devendra and Ajay from the B2B segment or Jaydeep and Apurva from the B2C segment, everyone seems to be completely convinced about the role social media is playing in helping businesses occupy the customer's mind space. As more and more entrepreneurs and professionals discover the magic of social media for marketing, the question comes to one's mind is whether it is just a flash in the pan or is the phenomenon here to stay.

If recent cover stories of leading Indian entrepreneurship magazines DARE and INTELLIGENT ENTREPRENEUR are any indication, social media has changed the way you do business. While this might border on exaggeration, the fact remains that those who are not on social networks might lose out at least in the short run. Or those who are on it are likely to benefit from it at least in the short run.

While DARE (June 2010) quoted Arvind Narayan, Founder of PureTech India, a coolant recovery manufacturing company as saying, "Social networking sites don't suit our products", in the same Article, they also quoted Gaurav Mishra of 20:20 Socialas saying, " While B2C businesses will continue to look at Social Networking Sites as marketing mix, B2B businesses will start generating revenues very soon."

### **What do the numbers say?**

If the statistics is anything to go by, then the answer seems very encouraging for the marketers who swear by it. Sahil Shah, Account Manager at WATConsult.com and a firm believer of the social media phenomenon shares some very interesting statistics in his presentation on Social Media Marketing Trends in India- 2010-11:

- While the highest social networking traffic currently comes from the city of Mumbai, 60% of traffic comes from non-metro cities, so it is not a phenomenon restricted to certain geographical area.
- The highest number of active users of social media belong to the age group 15-24, giving enough hope that they will remain engaged over a longer period with a fair chance of getting converted into customers in the due course of time.

- Add to this the fact that social media in India reaches out to 60% of the online audience in India.
- While Facebook and Orkut together cater to 90% of the Indian social media audience, Facebook is the only social network in India that has seen tremendous growth, almost doubling in the last six months. No wonder new start-ups are trying to live on Facebook.
- To add more muscle to its growth, Facebook users visit their Profiles more than three times a day.

All these numbers- and more- are indicative enough that social media networking can be leveraged to social media marketing if one plays the cards right and can keep the audience engaged.

Sahil Khan, co-founder of 'Yolkshire' is another social media believer and also a Social Media Consultant in his own right. He is using social media not just for his own ventures but is also making money by consulting. He has helped start-ups like 'Krostini' and established players like Fasso's to fine-tune their social media strategies. He is the one who succeeded in convincing the entire Yolkshire team about the virtues of going the social media way. And Yolkshire seems to be reaping the benefits with a fan following of over a thousand on Facebook in just six months. "Many of these fans are regulars at the outlet and also help in increasing the fan following through recommendations", says a beaming Sahil.

### **Should you spend on Social Media marketing?**

INTELLIGENT ENTREPRENEUR (November 2010) has quoted Sridhar Seshadri, Head, Online Sales & Operations of Google as saying, "Your digital marketing should be 40% paid, 40% free and 20% others like Web & mobile applications, e-mail marketing etc." So yes, if you choose to seriously go digital, you should spare a budget for it. The budget could of course depend upon whether you actually hope to substantially increase revenues or just to keep your network engaged with you.

Moreover, with Social Media professionals making their entry into the market, there would be their own marketing efforts making businesses loosen their purse strings. As more stories and numbers on the ROI on social media start trickling in the picture would be clearer on whether and how much to spend on it.

### **Do we have a choice?**

If one were to go by what Eric Qualman, the American author of 'Socialnomics: How Social Media Transforms the Way We Live and Do Business', says, "We don't have choice on whether we do Social Media- the question is how well we do it."