

Case Study: Social Media and PLN

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Social Media: PLN

PLN is an essential part of any brand. Butler and Weisgerber (2020) point out, “PLNs are deliberately formed networks of people and resources capable of guiding our independent learning goals and professional development needs. (18). In other words, and when it comes to social media, having an effective PLN (Personal learning Network) will help build the trust the audience will have in any given brand. This will bring influencers (experts) in the brand as well as advocates to the brand’s ‘doorstep’. It will all be about the knowledge that others take to the brand and how they collaborate with the brand’s identity; thus, making the brand more successful.

The Walt Disney Company

The Walt Disney Company was chosen for this case study not only because it counts with one of the most diverse and effective social media presences but also because it is a company that has evolved beyond anyone’s wildest dreams. The Company -originally conceived as a cartoon studio in 1920 by Walt Disney and his brother Roy- has evolved to a conglomerate consisting of several dozen different companies. These companies range from the aforementioned cartoon studio to sports, other Hollywood studios and of course to theme parks and cruise lines as well. Right now, The Walt Disney Company counts with entertainment divisions such as: 20th Century Fox, ESPN, ABC, Freeform, National Geographic, Hulu, FX, Pixar, Marvel Studios, LucasFilm Studios, and obviously a variety of international theme parks celebrating the movie studios. (<https://thewaltdisneycompany.com/about/#our-businesses>).

With a widely recognized mascot in Mickey Mouse (who does not know who he is?), the company has truly become a media giant with no signs of slowing down. This brand has been expanding into so many other areas and is now one of the most popular and powerful ones in

history. In addition to everything that was mentioned, the company stands at a \$239 billion market cap; it continues to innovate and push the boundaries of both animation and entertainment in general. (<https://www.investopedia.com/articles/financial-theory/11/walt-disney-entertainment-to-empire.asp>). Selecting this company was a no brainer when it comes to dissecting a brand that counts with a wide array of influencers and advocates that in turn form an effective PLN.

Analysis

In evaluating the brand's social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and their official blog), it was easy to see the strategic thinking behind the handling of such accounts. Plenty of the brand's posts across all channels target customers (families included) but also strive to make an impact in their fan base, including of course their influencers and advocates. Their posts are highly interactive no matter the channel, as well as inviting. Some of them are even borderline 'daring' their fans to show their commitment to the brand by dressing up or participating in challenges that will showcase their love for all things Disney. The brand seems to pride itself in connecting with their regular audience but also with their experts.

There is an actual term that continues to float in many of the brand's social media channels. The brand often cites the act of dressing up as a Disney character as being called: 'Disneybounding.' While it is highly encouraged to dress up to attend events or just to pose for pictures to then share to social media, the brand makes it a point to explain that full costumes are not allowed in the parks. In fact, 'Disneybounding' is more inclined towards dressing up as inspired by a Disney character rather than using an actual costume. This ends up appealing to the influencers and advocates' sense of originality as they have to be creative regarding these outfits (<https://www.momrewritten.com/disneyboundingrules/>). Thousands of influencers and

advocates often dress up and pose on their own social media channels as their favorite Disney characters; they interact with their own followers guiding them to Disney's (the brand) official pages. In doing so, demand and awareness for the brand are created. Then, these influencers and advocates proceed to tag the official Disney social media channel (whichever social media page they are on) and the brand usually likes those posts or even promotes them by re-sharing or featuring in their stories. The brand definitely knows what they are doing regarding incorporating those advocates and influencers into their social media pages. Basically, these experts end up promoting the brand by showcasing everything related to The Walt Disney Company.

Not only does the brand feature them all over their social media pages, but the company also interacts on the influencers' posts by commenting on their pictures thus giving them more credibility within the Disney community. That is not all the brand does to engage these influencers and advocates though. The brand also features contests (especially around Halloween and other holidays) where they give free perks to the advocates and influencers who do a better job when representing the company. The Walt Disney Company goes as far as providing free park tickets or other perks such as free subscriptions to certain services (such as Hulu and Disney Plus) for their advocates and influencers to give to their own fan base. What this does is basically give incentives to their influencers and advocates to further their promotion of the brand on their own channels. This ends up making their influencers and advocates a very credible source of information when it comes to the brand towards all the other fans out there.

In fact, it is easy to find these influencers and advocates all over social media and some of them truly make a living by unofficially working for the brand. There are many that have their own YouTube channels, blogs, and other media through which they continue to promote their

profiles with the use of ads and promotions, making plenty of money in what technically could be considered an unpaid partnership with the brand. There are many people out there who end up becoming influencers and advocates for The Walt Disney Company by promoting their content and partnering with other brands or companies in order to effectively bring more revenue to the brand itself. (<https://www.theguardian.com/global/2019/oct/13/mouse-whisperers-meet-the-disney-influencers-making-a-living-at-the-magic-kingdom>). The brand seems to know the game they are playing at this point in regard to influencers and advocate usage.

Finally, it is easy to see why these advocates and influencers are so loyal to the company. Many of them are making a living by doing something one could only dream of: By living their dream career. Basically, they spend time in the parks using the company's merchandise and while enjoying themselves also bring revenue for the company they love. These people are an incredibly effective tool for the company; a tool that probably does not cost them a lot of money since they do not get paid, yet they get enough benefits from the company itself to continue cultivating that relationship with them. (<https://www.facebook.com/Disney>).

Results/ Evaluation

The company is doing quite an effective job at identifying both their influencers and advocates. It goes as far as to try to help its advocates become influencers too. It promotes interaction and engagement within the parks or with the merchandise. There are so many different kinds of influencers and advocates connected to the company. While some of them focus on the parks, others focus on the merchandise, and some others focus on the physical media (movies) or on toys and collectibles. The company makes sure to build relationships with all of their players (influencers and advocates) in order to use them to its advantage. It is beyond obvious the brand is being successful at what they are doing with their fan base. Contests, likes,

reshares and comments are more than present all across their social media pages. This truly shows the success of the brand's collaboration with these key players. These influencers and advocates engage the audience in such ways that the brand does not have to do much with public relations. These two sources of loyalty are always there to help the brand even during trouble such as during this COVID crisis. They have been known to help cast and community members with crises. (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/04/us/disney-bloggers-food-bank-fundraiser-trnd/index.html>).

The Walt Disney Company has a balanced handle on their loyal influencers and advocates. They do not have to do much except keep them in mind when it comes to some free perks and to promoting on their own social media pages. In exchange for that consideration, the influencers and advocates forming this PLN help the company promote, market their content and also with any sort of public relations scenario where the brand or company needs their most loyal fan base in action.

In all honesty, the company seems to be doing an excellent job when it comes with how they engage their audience. All across their social media pages - especially the four considered for this study-, the brand considers the needs of their audience and uses those influencers and advocates to not just meet those audience's expectations but to increase the demand and awareness of their product (call it a park, service, or merchandise).

Discussion/ Conclusion

The brand is no strange to success and in this instance, they are doing a better job than many of the similar companies out there. The Walt Disney Company takes their most valuable resource (their most loyal fans) and collaborates with them in order to not only make them happy but also to meet the expectations of the other fans who want a bit of that magic Disney has to

offer. Having a loyal fan base will do wonders for a brand and The Walt Disney Company excels at both recognizing that fan base and at collaborating with them to be even more successful. It would be difficult to pinpoint any recommendations for the company/ brand to follow moving forward. If anything, just to keep doing what they are doing and continue to collaborate as they have done with their influencers and advocates. Maybe one suggestion that could be given to the brand is to feature more of their cross promotional efforts in other social media pages too. They could feature their influencers and advocates on some of their shows or parks perhaps. But overall, The Walt Disney Company has an impressive PLN based on successful collaboration with influencers and advocates of their brand.

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