

Silly season social marketing insights

 By [Kirsty Sharman](#)

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The shops and malls are already filled with Christmas decorations to the hilt, complete with BoneyM in the background and Santa photo stations at every corner. It's obvious that the brick and mortar world is racing away on the festive season bandwagon already, but what are the trends in online marketing around the silly season?

Activity online happens a lot more quickly and intensely than real-world campaigns. That's why online campaigns need to have touch points and repetition across platforms over a short period of time, because people will see your brand often, over just a few days. This is in contrast to real-life campaigns in malls, where festive season décor is in place months in advance, because brands know that you will only walk past their displays once a week - rather than being exposed to them several times a day online.

Searching for specifics

While mall crawlers are either looking for inspiration or a very specific branded product, online shoppers search according to category - and then they get more specific about brand and model after checking in with social media for suggestions, and searching online for peer reviews of products or services.

This is a shift from previous years, when reviews were the go-to point for any online shopping experience. Now, online shoppers Google for a category rather than a product, and then browse to see what grabs their attention. This is why brands who are planning influencer campaigns during the silly season need to think about what categories online shoppers may be searching for. It's no longer sufficient for content to be focused around a product - it's all about anticipating what popular search terms are going to lead consumers to the content that you're putting out there.

Ahead of the festive season, online campaigns need to be carefully timed and carefully targeted - and they need to be planned for when consumers are actually going to be doing their shopping. For example, if you go to www.geeksdoingstuff.com, I've already created a list of great festive season gifts for geeks, because people are already starting to search for gifts that can be delivered well before the holidays start.

Brands should also make sure that their websites are optimised for mobile - as more and more shoppers are turning to the online world for advice and reviews while they're in store. A slow or awkward website is going to chase them on to the next brand who has taken the trouble to remove this simple barrier - and it's going to hurt the ones that haven't taken this into account.

It's also vital that brands play an active role in social media environments, and that they are willing to engage in conversations with prospective and existing customers. Someone wanting to buy a new computer would have a budget in mind, for example, but would then turn to social environments for suggestions and guidance on which device to choose, and which brand offers the best value for money.

The online conversation

Brands need to be proactive about jumping in on conversations, being prepared to offer useful advice without pushing the product too heavily. The online and social space is all about conversations, it's not about hard product selling - and brands that try to use social media platforms to relentlessly punt a product will come short.

While it's tempting to jump on the festive season bandwagon, it's not always the best time for everybody to boost their online advertising spend. An example of this is an insurance client who has shifted its regular December and January advertising ad spend to February - as they have identified that this is the month when consumers struggle the most to recover from festive season overspending, and they're looking for better deals on regular (grudge) expenses.

Similarly, successful online marketing is not necessarily about talking to the obvious target markets, or to the same people that your competitors are talking to - sometimes it's about paying closer attention to seeing where people aren't being spoken to, and to take the gap by being proactive in your communications.

An example is BrightRock insurance, which monitors conversations on Twitter and Facebook, interceding gently in online conversations with relevant content that responds to the life changes that are being discussed.

There's no one-strategy-fits-all solution with online marketing, and brands agencies need to have the insight to customise messaging for different platforms, as much as they need to do so for talking to different customers - at different times of the year. The online arena offers the perfect tools to do that, with greater opportunities for agility, engagement, and influence than any conventional media outlets.

ABOUT KIRSTY SHARMAN

Kirsty Sharman is the Founder and CEO of Aerialscoop, the leading tool for driving growth through data-driven insights. Besides being an entrepreneurial powerhouse, she acts as a growth marketer, product builder and was listed in M&G as one of 200 Young South Africans to watch. She has written for *Venturebeat*, *Huffington Post*, *The Drum*, *The BBC*, *CMS Wire*, *Social Media Today* and more.

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