

**Marketing social networks** by enabling the word-by-mouse.

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## 1. Co-os, 'marketing' a new social network

### 1.1 Purpose & method

The internet has had a profound effect on the way in which individuals interact. With the advent of web 2.0 systems there has been an exponential growth in social networks with Facebook having 350 million users worldwide (Arrington, 2009). This report sets out to identify appropriate 'social media marketing' methods and practises in order to inform the development of a marketing strategy for a new social network, Co-os. It focuses on the power of 'word-by-mouse' (Scott, 2008: 8), where brand advocates spread awareness through their online networks, whilst considering the risk of 'silence', where no participation means no community.

The report starts off with a brief background to Co-os and the key aspects of social media marketing. It summarises key points of reference for its segmentation, targeting, positioning and differentiation and then proposes a 're-mix' of the marketing mix. For the purpose of this report it will focus on 'promotion' in terms of 'communication' and tactics, outlining best-practise cases and identifying opportunities concluding with a summary of key challenges Co-os must consider in developing their future marketing strategy.

The term 'customer' is here synonymous with 'users, producer, contributor and consumer', (of social media), reflective of the changing role of the 'customer' itself in online environments.

### 1.2 About Co-os

Co-os, set to launch in June 2010, is a social network for technologists, digital artists and creatives making ideas happen without the need for cash. Ideas can

be shared, evaluated and developed collaboratively through trading units of time in exchange for skills and resources. By facilitating online exchanges beyond small, localised communities, CO-OS aims to enable users to grow their networks, and support a more equal access to opportunities for innovation, irrelevant of geographical location and cash flow.

Co-os has received funding from British Council for a series of new collaborative arts commissions produced through the network. These commissions will be used as a seeding process to identify and attract the first members, the brand advocates, to the community. This is an integral part of its tactical strategy, with the objective of growing the network's membership base and closely related to the impact of 'word of mouth' discussed further in chapter three.

### **1.3 Social networks and social media marketing**

The success or failure of Co-os lies in its ability to stand out in an 'ocean of social networks' and to attract community members. The strategy for identifying, understanding and securing their buy-in is key. In such online environments based around multiple conversations, relationships, sharing and content generation (Chaffey, *et al.*, 2009: 32), traditional marketing based on a one-way, top-down, push communication model is no longer appropriate. According to eMarketer the number of user-generated content creators in the US will reach 114.5 million in 2013, up from 82.5 million in 2008. That will translate to 51.8% of US Internet users in 2013, up from 42.8% in 2008 (cited in Bazaarvoice, 2010).

In these environments the notion of 'social media marketing' is being used to describing the marketing process of using social media and social networking to achieve set marketing goals (Wikipedia, 2009). One can propose a degree of influence from Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman 1970's definition of 'social

marketing' to be seeking to influence social behaviours (Weinreich, 2006), but is less about the greater social good and more about individual social interactions.

Social media marketing takes advantage of word-by-mouth, user publishing, participation and peer distribution through seeding, creating 'buzz' and viral campaigns. Hayes and Papworth (2008) outline the tactics of a social media campaign in figure 1 below. The challenge according to David Scott, marketing strategist, is to harness the amazing power of 'word-of-mouse' 'the single most empowering tool available to marketers today' (2008: 8).

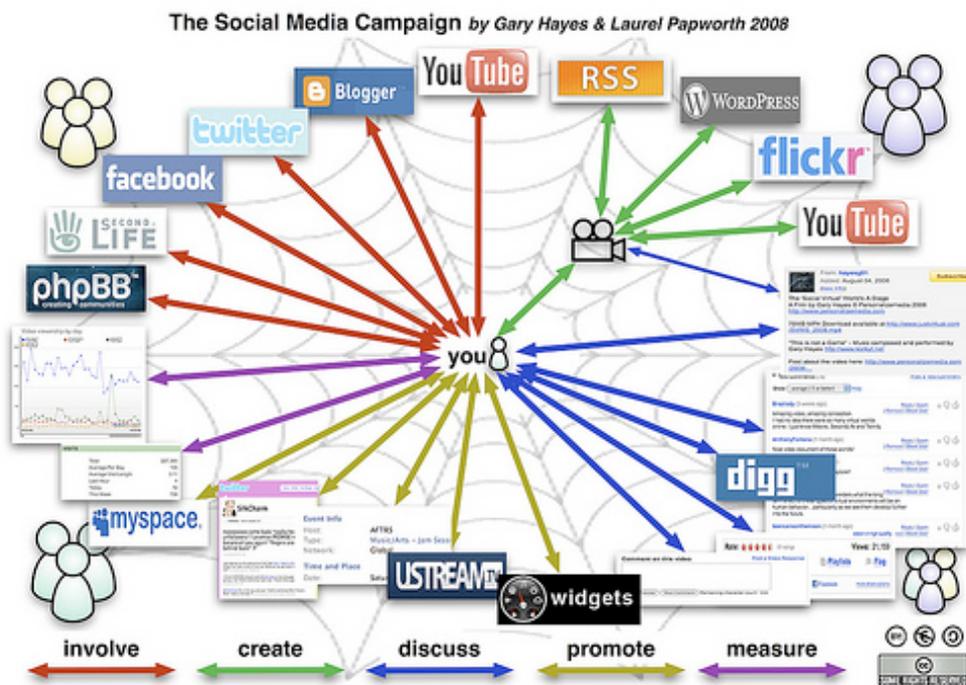


Figure 1, 'The Social Media Campaign (Hayes and Papworth, 2008)

A survey conducted by the Society for New Communications Research in 2007 found that 81% of marketers surveyed stated that their social media spending would meet or exceed their traditional advertising spending within the next 5

years (cited in Bazaarvoice, 2010). Social media marketing is becoming a key strategy for many large brands. When Diageo launched their new campaign enabling the customers to be co-creators of Diageo parties, which were documented and distributed on social media sites, they stated that this was a movement not a ad campaign and that 'brands have to live in consumers' worlds' (Wiggins, 2009). Furthermore, with N.Y.-based Pepsico Inc.'s announcement in November 2009 that it is pulling their multi-decade, multi-million dollar Superbowl opening ad position and trading it in for a \$20 million social campaign (Hepburn, 2010), the impact of social media marketing is a force to be reckoned with.

## 2. Co-os' marketing strategy proposition; Points of reference

The 'transactions' in the Co-os network will take place directly between consumers '(C2C)' (Chaffey, *et al.*,2009: 21). Common C2C interactions include 'transaction exchanges' on sites such as Ebay, financial peer-to-peer services such as those provided by Zopa and social transactions such as on Facebook (Chaffey, *et al.*,2009: 21). C2C is essential in social networks and what the systems are built to enable, so an understanding of customers' needs, characteristics and behaviour is vital.

Research by Microsoft in 2007 on the motivation behind using social networks found that 59% of individuals use these to stay in touch with family and friends, 57% to look at other peoples spaces and 47% to meet people with similar interests (cited in Chaffey, *et al.*,2009). Chris Bennett, the founder of 97th Floor, a leading social media marketing firm, further underlines the importance of choosing a niche and identifying the relevant customers: 'social networkers are already busy on sites like Facebook, MySpace, Digg, and others, so the average person probably won't add a "general" social networking site to their agenda' (2010).

### 2.1 Market segmentation and targeting

The niche market segments of Co-os cross artists, designers, creatives, programmers, researchers, lecturers and students from 'creative industries', which is defined by the Department for Culture Media and Sport (2010) 'as those industries that are based on individual creativity, skill and talent. They are also those that have the potential to create wealth and jobs through developing intellectual property'. These customers are accustomed to use and experiment with digital technologies both for work, research and 'play'.

The market segment is further broken down through a 'needs-based market segmentation approach' (Kotler & Keller, 2009). The customers will have in common the need to grow their niche network for collaboration on projects, to seek skills, to share ideas, to learn, to further solidify their status within the sector and other extrinsic motivations. What they seek to gain from the interaction with Co-os slightly differs and is dependent on their level of experience and establishment within the industry.

The customers will have a familiarity with and integration of social networks to communicate with family, friends and peers. Research by Microsoft in 2007 on the motivation behind using social networks found that 59% of individuals use these to stay in touch with family and friends, 57% to look at other people's spaces and 47% to meet people with similar interests (in Chaffey, *et al.*, 2009).

These can be further defined through a 'psychographic segmentation' approach (Kotler & Keller, 2009: 261) where the common personality traits and values of openness, sharing, collaboration, a degree of idealism and adaptations of social media and networking prevails. The customers are not segmented by factors such as geographical location, wealth, sex, but to a degree the demographics of having unlimited access to the internet and their usage status (Kotler & Keller, 2009). They should be active participants in 'forming' the brand and the experience, which again increases their loyalty and perceived influence over the product, such as achieved by Starbucks' 'My Starbucks Idea'. This website allows customers to actively partake in decisions of improvements, new products and in general 'becoming part' of the company and brand (2010).

## 2.2 Brand positioning

Within each of CO-os' identified segments the targeted sub-segments, with the commonalities outlined above, will be offered product specialisation through its

'online value proposition (OVP)' (Chaffey, *et al.*, 2009: 16) and social networking niche. This value proposition promises a social network with the expected functionalities of contemporaries, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, e-lance, Zopa, but with a particular niche focus on creative collaborations through the trading of time. The success of the network is closely linked to matching the OVP to the identified expectations and needs of these sub-segments appropriately (Agrawal *et al.*, 2001).

A brand should signal credibility and trustworthiness, and help generate perceived customer value (Erdem *et al.*, 2002). According to Chaffey *et al.* (2009) a brand's perceived value is influenced by the 'value-added characteristics' of the product, with consumers becoming 'active co-producers' of value through feedback and discussion groups (2002:289). Gabbott (cited in Chaffey, 2000) argues that in such online environments the customer can interact with the brand much more frequently and in depth, thus building customer trust. Dayal *et al.* (2000) suggest that to ensure an online brand succeeds one should ensure the proposition is built on assisting customers in achieving their goals, enabling self-expression and personalisation and becoming members of a community.

The customer has limited physical cues to form an opinion of an online brand such as Co-os. According to (Schroeder, 2008: 163) 'visual experience dominates the information technologies of the Internet, as they navigate through a computer mediated environment almost entirely dependent upon their sense of sight.' It is therefore important to consider all visual elements as well as their 'stickiness factor' in terms of the attachment to perceived attributes such as excellence, uniqueness, aesthetics, associations, engagement, expressiveness and functional value (Chaffey, *et al.*, 2009: 287). According to Chernatony (cited in Chaffey *et al.*, 2009: 387) the customer's perceived 'success' of the product is dependant on the promised experience, emotional values and rational values, as illustrated in figure 2 below.

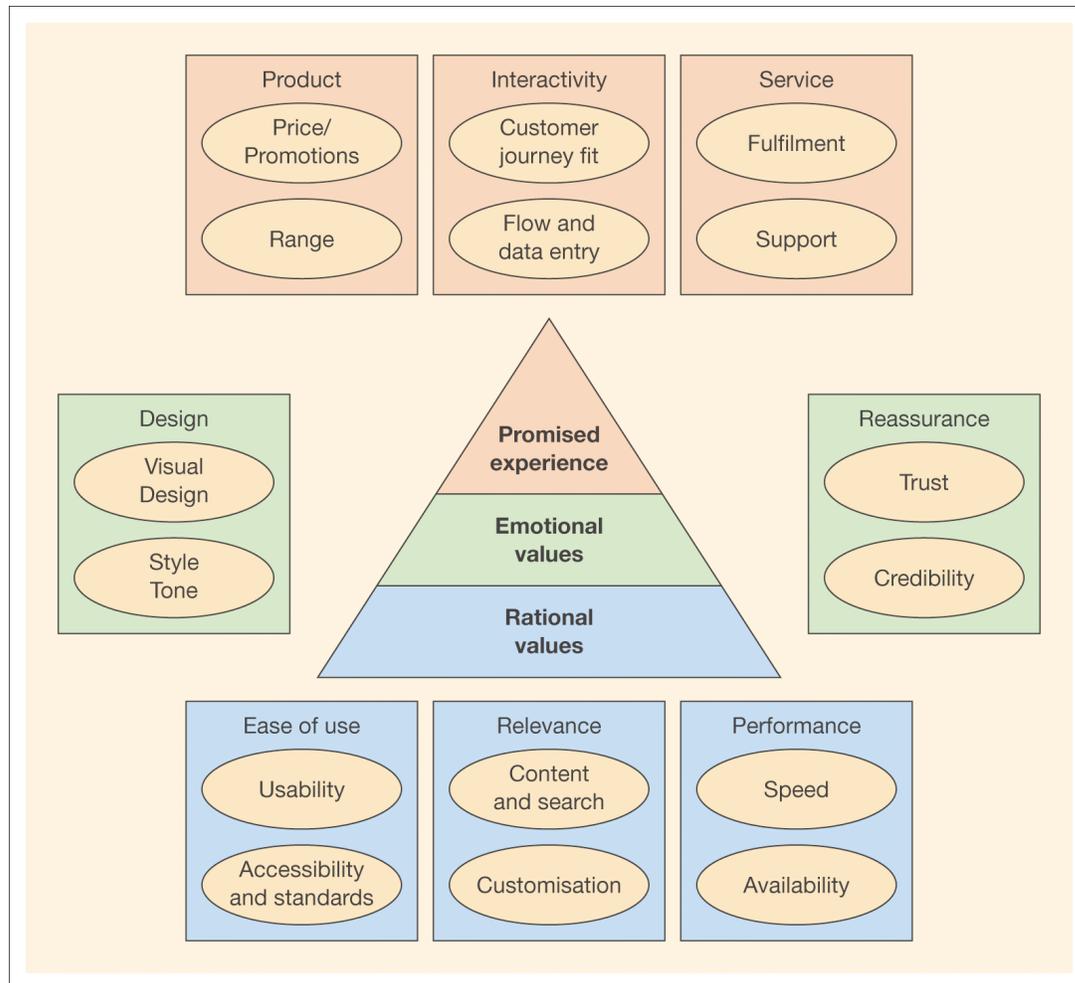


Figure 2. The online customer experience pyramid – success factors, (Chernatony cited in Chaffey *et al.*, 2009: 387)

Co-os' brand equity, the value provided to its customers, can be measured through factors such as 'online brand experience, interactivity, customisation, site design, quality of brand relationships and communities' (Chaffey *et al.*, 2009: 290). The brand positioning is situated around relationship building (Chaffey, 2009: 245) with customers' perceptions of the product being relative to the perception of those of competitors (Chaffey, *et al.*, 2009). The members' loyalty of such communities will grow as long as the community attracts new members and grows, until it reaches a critical mass, when the key factors become the retention of members (Chaffey, *et al.*, 2009).

## 2.3 Differentiation

According to Shaw and Ivens (2005) the customer experience is the future 'sustainable differentiator' rather than factors such as 'price, quality and delivery'. They state that it is the 'meaningful things that the customer remembers over and above the product, such as the feel and perception of your organisation and your brand' which are delivered through such experiences (2005). This is in particular essential for a social network like Co-os, where the product and service itself is the experience of its customers and the emotional connections they make through the network over an extended period of time. The customer's experience becomes a blend of an organisation's 'physical performance' and the senses stimulated and emotions evoked' (Shaw and Ivens, 2005).

To differentiate itself from other similar offerings Co-os must not only have a well-designed site with high usability, for a niche market (what Shaw and Ivens (2005) would have termed the 'physical elements' of the customer experience), but it must also ensure it understands its customers Shaw and Ivens (2005) propose the 'Seven Philosophies for building Great Customer Experiences' based on a focus around succeeding customer experiences as a competitive advantage, design process and the 'embodiment of the brand' itself.

### 3 The marketing (re-)mix and the power of word-of-mouth

Chaffey and Smith (2008: 50) states that the marketing mix changes in online environments as 'products become services, services become customer driven, and customers create communities that extend the brand into new online experiences'. The '4 Ps' product, place, price and promotion, of the marketing mix, introduced by Jerome McCarthy in 1960, is a useful starting point, but is also indicative of 'push' marketing which tends to have more of a 'product' rather than a 'customer orientation' (Chaffey and Smith, 2008).

To mitigate this Lautenborn (1990) proposed a customer-centric reinterpretation, the '4 Cs', 'customer needs and wants, cost to the customer, convenience and communication' (Chaffey and Smith, 2008: 55), where the customer can be seen to be in an 'active comparison mode rather than a passive media consumption mode' (Chaffey, *et al.*, 2009: 277). In terms of understanding the marketing mix for Co-os, a 're-mix' of these aspects are appropriate. For the purpose of this report the focus here will be on 'promotion' in terms of 'word-of-mouth' but Co-os should also consider the other aspects of the marketing mix and consider tactics such as email campaigns, search optimisation, social bookmarking and the use of Widgets.

#### 3.1 Promotion; the 'word-of-mouth'

The required promotional methods for a social network such as Co-os employs alternative tactical strategies compared to traditional marketing: 'online medium and networked environment the customers are engaged in a dialogue, which is relationship based and intimate' (Scott, 2008). There are several methods available, but firstly one must consider the ways to get the community to interact with each other. An active community does, according to Bennett (2010), create a 'network effect' of word-of-mouth securing more users. Dye

(2000: 139) states that the 'word-of-mouth promotion has become an increasingly potent force, capable of catapulting products from obscurity into runaway commercial successes.' She further suggests that the objective of such a marketing approach is to encourage customers to talk about and use a product so it gets noticed by their peers (2000).

Scott (2008: 8) states that:

'One of the coolest things about the Web is that when an idea takes off, it can propel a brand or company to seemingly instant fame and fortune. *For free*. Whatever you call it—viral, buzz, word-of-mouth, or word-of-blog marketing—having other people tell your story drives action. One person sends it to another, then that person sends it to yet another, and on and on.'

In particular the notion of word-of-mouth, or as coined by Scott (2008) 'word-of-mouth', buzz and viral methods are relevant to Co-os. He further states that this is the 'single most empowering tool available to marketers today' creating '...the triggers that get millions of people to tell your stories and spread your ideas' (2008:8). The best word-of-mouth efforts according to Scott (2008), promote an organization and its products and services 'by delivering great online content' selling 'your ideas in a creative way that people want to share with their friends, colleagues, and family members' (Scott, 2008: 30).

Other social networks such StumbleUpon, Facebook, Twitter or MySpace can be used as extensions of a product or service by aggregating content leading to increased traffic. The success of this method is dependent on the ability to connect and engage individuals in these communities and build up followers (Bennett, 2010). Lego has just launched a new online community called Lego Click, along with an iPhone app to generate buzz around its brand. They have also distributed a short viral film promoting the new online community, mixing

buzz and viral tactics. The community itself will be closely tied with Facebook and Twitter by aggregating content and using the #legoclick hashtag allowing users to feedback or submit their ideas using those links (Lego, 2010).

Le Blévenec (2010), the president of the digital communication agency Emakina, defines word-of-mouth as the 'sharing of an opinion about a product or service between two or more consumers', making customers become natural brand advocates. The founders of Hotmail used their first customers as advocates by adding the line "Get your free e-mail at Hotmail" to the outgoing emails of its users and signed up 12 million people in the first 18 months of business (Dye, 2000).

### **3.2 The viral and the buzz of 'word-of-mouth'**

The terms 'buzz' and 'viral' are often synonymous or seen as types of word-of-mouth-related marketing. Buzz marketing is a type of PR whereby one 'engages in either publicity stunts or plant content (Blogs, articles, message board postings) hoping to get a "buzz" generated about your brand' (Le Blévenec, 2010). Buzz marketing is often used as part of the 'seeding' campaign to help get the word out about a new viral ad (Le Blévenec, 2010).

Viral marketing encourage 'consumers to pass along company-developed products and services or audio, video, or written information to others online' (Kotler & Keller, 2009: 586), in the best-case scenario, spreading like a virus. Whereas buzz marketing is focused on the brand, most viral ad campaigns aren't focused on the brand itself, but on the creative content. Le Blévenec (2010) states that 'People don't spread the ad because they love your brand, they spread it because they can't help but adore your content. They're not evangelists serving you, they are self-serving.' An example of this is the Burger King's 'Subservient Chicken' launched in 2004 which secured 46 million views in the first week, and the series of "mockumentaries" produced by IBM, 'humanizing' the brand in the process (Scott, 2008: 20).

### 3.3 Brand advocates

To successfully capitalise on social media marketing and in particular the impact of the word-of mouth tactics discussed above, Co-os must identify and cultivate 'brand advocates', who have a favourable perception of the brand and who will distribute this to their networks generating awareness and influence (Chaffey, *et al.*,2009). This should inform the design and content of the network itself to ensure such advocates are attracted and become participants and co-creators of content, which again will attract return visits.

Members of social networks differ in the extent to which they are connected, with the most influential members being highly connected (Chaffey, *et al.*,2009). These 'connectors' are often opinion leaders and trusted members with the ability to spread opinions by word-of-mouth and therefore generally believed to be key targets in influencing marketplace perceptions.

A study by Econsultancy in 2009 found that 90% of consumers online trust recommendations from people they know; 70% trust opinions of unknown users. (cited in Bazaarvoice, 2010). JupiterResearch found that online social network users were three times more likely to trust their peers' opinions over advertising when making purchase decisions (cited in Bazaarvoice, 2010). It is important to cultivate a meaningful relationship with those who can become brand advocates.

The influence of customer advocates and brand loyalists is not a new factor in marketing (Chaffey, *et al.*,2009), but the impact of such individuals and groups becomes more apparent in online environments with its increased connectivity and reach. Godin (2001) uses the term 'ideavirus' to describe the process of seeding ideas which then get spread around by advocates 'infecting' anyone it encounters. He underlines the importance of the idea being worthwhile and unique. Malcom Gladwell (2000), author of the Tipping Point, uses the analogy of an epidemic in terms of describing how one can spread an idea by word-of-mouth. With an epidemic just a little input is enough to get it started, and it can

spread very quickly. This is particularly useful for creating change with limited resources, and is made possible through online networks.

Online influencers or advocates should be engaged early on in the development of a new online product or service. Such individuals can be found through popular blogs that focus on the relevant target segments and niche, as well as notifying influential blogs like [techcrunch.com](http://techcrunch.com), [mashable.com](http://mashable.com), and [killerstartups.com](http://killerstartups.com) (Bennett, 2010).

Co-os should actively use its own development blog to communicate with its community, making network developments and updates transparent whilst empowering its customers to influence improvements and upgrades. The tone and style used is key to engaging the customer and breaking down any perceived 'us – them' barriers, and should be intimate and informal. A good example of creating intimacy and a personal relationship with your customer is delivered through the Twitter (2010) or the Johnson & Johnson (2010) blogs.

## 4 The risk of silence

The influence of opinion leaders in online networks has been widely discussed, with some arguing that the collective interaction between 'typical network member (known as the 'moderately connected majority') being equally important (Chaffey, *et al.*,2009: 87). Watts and Dodds (2007) claim that 'most social change is driven not by influential's, but easily influenced individuals, influencing other easily influenced individuals' (Chaffey, *et al.*,2009: 87)

Usability expert Jakob Nielsen claims that only a relatively small proportion will actively participate in 'online community engagement', therefore possibly limiting the use of brand advocates. Nielsen further underlines that on Wikipedia just 0.2% of visitors are active, and that on Amazon, less than 1% post reviews (Chaffey, *et al.*,2009: 87) with up to 90% passively consuming community content. This can be seen as being very much linked to the wider appeal of Wikipedia. It's seen less as a communication network, and more of a shared knowledge generating tool and therefore the user's behaviour is very different.

It's vital to offer products and 'service specialisation' (Kotler & Keller, 2009) for a target market segment. One must also give up control making the content free for people to access, and according to Scott (2009:9) 'with absolutely no virtual strings attached: no electronic gates, no registration requirements, and no email address checking necessary'.

The 'community' itself is the network's equity. It's on the basis of this that a potential advertisement's revenue can be drawn and commercial profit generated, but this must be carefully balanced so as not to damage the network's reputation and customer relationship.

The pressure, according to Kent Lindstrom, president of Friendster, the 'one-time red-hot' social network in the USA, is on to scale up revenue and show a profit (USA Today (2008)). The key lies in creating the perception of ownership and value residing with the community members and not exploited for commercial

gain. The ad tolerance from consumers within such social network sites such as Facebook is not particularly high (USA Today (2008)).

There are several risks with social media marketing. It requires a new mindset by giving up control of a brand image and placing trust in the customer. It's widely used, but yet there are not any formal set rules attached to it in terms of conduct. Used wisely it is a powerful tool. The greatest risk is not that the brand will attract negative attention, but that it will not attract any attention at all. The social media marketing agency Social Signal (2010) states that to avoid this fate one has to have:

'A compelling reason to participate... thinking about your audience before you think about your technology... staffing up to encourage participation and put out fires... and both knowing and pushing the limits of your organization... these can all help. But nothing works quite as well as knowing social media in your bones, and that means diving in yourself.'

The biggest risk to Co-os is that it will be draped in 'silence' with no participants, no advocates, no buzz and therefore no community.

Therefore the recommendations for Co-os' future marketing strategy is that it must understand and befriend its customers and give away control to allow its community to seed and grow. It must proactively identify key brand advocates through its launch commissions of new collaborative art, but also develop a clear strategy for continued and sustainable growth beyond these. Through a social media marketing approach Co-os can succeed, but its success is dependent on its proliferation and loyalty of its customer base.

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