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Bachelor Thesis

The importance of Social Media in the architecture market

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CDP: Cologne Design Partner

e.g.: For Example

SEO: Search Engine Optimization

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1 Indroduction

According to a Bitcom study from the year 2012, Internet users spend approximately one quarter of their browsing time on social networks, such as Facebook, XING, and Google+[1]. It has been found that three out of four Internet users are registered with at least one social network; the figure among those aged between 14 and 29 reaches 92%[2]. This pattern applies not only to the personal realm, but to the business sector as well. By maintaining a presence on these platforms, businesses can find unique opportunities to offer their goods and services. The issue of social networks is to facilitate building relationships among its members, with special tools; they can share any interest and idea they want to[3]. For companies matters the fact that they can share information about their product or service in a manner that lends credibility to this. Means consumers will become promoters of a product or service - the advantage, they push the product or the service based on their free will[4]. However, we tend to receive the most reliable recommendations from people who are close to us, and from individuals who trust the company unconditionally. As a result of the shear number of purchase options made available globally through the Internet, the consumer can always get what he or she wants in a short period of time. A purchase recommendation seems to be very helpful in this case. Interestingly, it has been observed that traditional methods of advertising are having an ever decreasing impact on potential consumers[5]. This indicates that the new media have radically changed the consumer market. Previously, a product or service was promoted by traditional forms of advertising, such as print, radio, or television. This paradigm has since changed as a result of the Internet, more specifically social networks. The consumer is now free to decide which products or services he or she finds valuable[6]. The abundance of information causes the consumer to seek recommendations in order to find direction in this vast sea of products and services. This gives the consumer a sense of assurance, rendering the decision-making process simpler[7]. The following graph (Table 1) indicates the degree to which the consumer relies on the recommendations of friends and other media. It is thus seen that over 30%

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[1] Cp. Bitkom, (2012), p. 3.
[2] Cp. Bitkom, (2012), p. 3.
[3] Cp. Woessner, S. (2011), p. 26.
[4] Cp. Woessner, S. (2011), p. 27.
[5] Cp. Fleing, E., Evers, M. (2008), p. 19.
[6] Cp. Ceyp, M, Scupin, J.-P., (2013), p. 7.
[7] Cp. Schüller, A.-M. (2009), pp. 10-11.

individuals with similar interests who share their knowledge in confidence and who influence one another to form a mutual identity[29].

Facebook was started in February of 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and a few of his fellow students at Harvard University[30]. Facebook currently has over 1 billion active users [31]."Active user" indicates a member who has logged in at least once in the last 30 days. Furthermore, there are 618 million users who visit the site daily.

The number of members in Germany is seven times as high as it was four years ago. In July, 2009 there were nearly 3.5 million users [32] by April, 2013 that number had risen to nearly 25 million[33]. A Facebook user spends on average 15.5 hours on the site each month[34]. In Germany, Facebook is most frequented by individuals between the ages of 25 and 34 (see Table 3). The next most significant age group is 18-24. In third place is the 35-44 age group with over two million users. This is followed by the 13-17 age group with over 1.5 million users. In fifth place one finds the 45-54 age group with nearly 1.5 million users, followed by the 55+ group with nearly 1 million users. The graph also distinguishes between male and female. Men, it seems, have a greater affinity for Facebook compared to women[35].
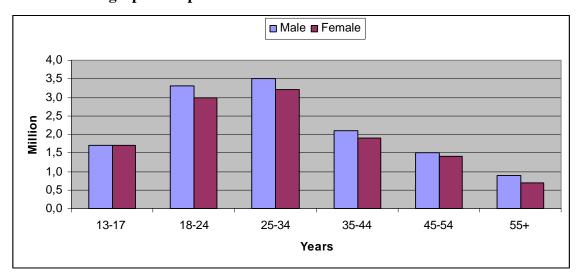
Table 4: Demographic Dispersion in German

Source: cf. Roth, P. (2013), p. 1.

[29] Cp. Schüller, A.-M. (2009), p. 106.
[30] Cp. Lindner, R. (2012), p. 1.
[31] Cp. Facebook Press (2013), p. 1.
[32] Cp. Facebook Press (2013), p. 1.
[33] Cp. Roth, P. (2013), p. 1.
[34] Cp. Hutter, T. (2011), p. 1.
[35] Cp. Roth, P. (2013), p. 1.

depends on many factors--without the necessary financial resources and time commitment, especially at the beginning, it is difficult to reap significant benefits[74].

2.2 Regulatory framework and Privacy Protection

Anyone active on social networks ought to have an understanding of privacy and terms of use. It is best to only use trustworthy networks. Users can learn about a particular network's privacy regulations through articles in the media as well as consumer protection organizations (e.g. Federal League for Privacy and Freedom of Information, the website: http://www.bfdi.bund.de or www.datenschutz.de). One is of course advised to read the terms relating to privacy before registering with any social network. The user should review his or her privacy settings immediately after registration and make any changes if necessary. It is also important to avoid selecting the same password used for an email account, as social networks are theoretically able to analyze email content, gather information on a user's correspondence partners, and give this information to third parties. Users who publish photos and other posts should adjust his or privacy settings so that only desired individuals can view the content. In making these adjustments, one should be careful not to allow information to be transmitted unintentionally to third parties. Privacy settings should be monitored regularly. Photos and videos not owned by the user require the permission of the owner. A user who is unsure as to whether certain content may be posted is advised to consult the terms of use [75].

Facebook explicitly allows commercial use. Twitter users concede the right to distribute and use their posts worldwide. Otherwise, policies are roughly the same across all social networks: Pornography, copyright violations, the sale of accounts, and posts using third party names are not permitted[76].

"XING must receive personal data from its users, and the company realizes how important it is to its users that these data be dealt with in a sensitive manner. XING therefore observes all relevant legal stipulations relating to privacy (German Privacy Codes and European Privacy Guidelines), and all other applicable privacy laws. Most

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[74] Cp. Mutschler, B. (2012), p. 1.
[75] Cp. Unabhängiges Landeszentrum für Datenschutz (2010), pp. 10-12.
[76] Cp. Solmecke, C. (2011), p. 1.

importantly, XING will not give users' personal data to any third party, directly or indirectly. Details regarding the ways in which users' data are processed can be found in XING's terms of privacy, which are accessible from any of XING's websites"[77]. Privacy still has room for improvement in the world of social networks. According to a study by the Product Testing Foundation, the American platforms Facebook and LinkedIn are "severely lacking", while XING is "noticeably lacking" in this respect[78].

2.3 Best Practice Example of Social Media

Facebook & Co is still used by large corporations. Smaller and mid-sized businesses have been slow to adopt social networks. There have, however, already been some cases of remarkable success[79]. Whereas the World Wide Web used to be a mere information service, it is slowly evolving into a realm of exchange and networking among users. Many companies wonder why they should be active in social networks. It will be examined some best-practice examples showing the benefits of utilizing social networks. In the standard literature there are no best-practice examples to be found relating to architecture. For this reason examples of companies from other sectors will be considered that can be applied to smaller businesses such as architecture firms. In sum, an overview is give of how other industries deal with social media.

2.3.1   betabrand.com

betabrand.com is a small American clothing company. Having learned through the microblog Twitter[80] that many people in the local area were biking to work, the company came upon the idea to develop biking pants with built-in reflectors. They named the product "bike-to-work pants". They advertised the new development on

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[77] Cp. XING (2013), p. 1.
[78] Cp. Stiftung Warentest (2010), pp. 40-42.
[79] Cp. Giesen, T. (2012), p. 13.
[80] Cp. Betabrand, (2013), p. 1.

Kirstin Walther: It really depends on the type of person you are. If this sort of communication is not your thing, you should steer clear. You see, there are people that have a hard time breaking into a conversation on the World Wide Web. I would of course be delighted if any of my co-workers were to take an interest, but you can't force anyone to do so. That would defeat the purpose. But I am hopeful that I won't always be the only one.

t3n Magazin: How much time do you spend each day on these communication platforms?

Kirstin Walther: The obligatory question, of course (laughs). I have never measured that, because for me it's not relevant. It's time that I spend with people I am interested in, and vice-versa. It's give and take. That's why you actually can never spend too much time doing it. There is nothing more important. But to give a simple answer: I think on average it is no more than an hour per day. Sometimes more, sometimes less.

t3n Magazin: What advice would you give to other social media or marketing representatives?

Kirstin Walther: The use of social media is today a normal part of many peoples' routine, much like drinking a morning cup of coffee. It just happens! I doesn't matter if you are acting on behalf of a company or not. That's why I think it is best observe it for a while with a critical eye before taking part. There is an enormous potential there. If any dangers do exist, they are there whether or not one takes part. So I say: Go for it! Your customers are waiting!"[89].

As one can clearly see, this is another example of how social media has been able to contribute to the success of a company. By "reaching out" to customers, the company was able to attain positive results. Having assumed an active role in the social networks, the business was able to present itself in a trustworthy manner[90].

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[89] Cp. Christe, J. (Interview 6.08.2010), p. 1.
[90] Cp. Weinberg, T. (2012), p. 117.

target group is not defined, it is nearly impossible to identify potential customers. If the architect simply tries to please everyone, this can ultimately lead to an unstructured campaign. Unfortunately most architects are unaware of the significance of a target group, despite the fact that such a focus leads to much quicker success[137]. The best-practice examples presented in chapter 2 have shown that it makes sense to start small, so to speak. It is best to determine initially how the company is viewed and discussed among the public, and what the target group generally talks about. It is not until the next step that one should attempt to make headway into the actual communication[138]. The example of betabrand.com shows the effectiveness of first "listening" and then later responding to the target group.

5.2 Analysis of the current state

After defining the goals, a situation analysis should be carried out. This means that the architect should consider what his or her strengths and selling points are[139]. In advertising, one also speaks of the USP (Unique Selling Proposition)[140].

It is also important to consider the company's position and its goals for future development[141]. The question of why the customer even needs an architect must be answered. Many architects do not even take the time to consider which advantages their company presents in relation to their competition. It may be worth considering whether the architect identifies with a particular building style or tradition, or whether he or she has any special qualifications or focal points. Or perhaps the architect brings a wealth of experience to the table or as certain connections that may be of value. There are, for example, architects who specialize in fire protection or energy efficiency. Strengths are core competencies that can be sold. However, if the individual is unaware of his or her own selling points, it will be quite difficult to hash out a structured approach. One should try to find out which services have been recommended the most by clients, which will give a clearer idea of the company's strengths, allowing one to better focus

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[137] Cp. Eich, V. (2007), p. 7.
[138] Cp. Lauby, S. (2009), p. 1.
[139] Cp. Eich, V. (2007), p. 5.
[140] Cp. Kotler, P.; Lane-Keller, K. (2007), p. 143.
[141] Cp. Gmeiner, A. (2010), p. 35.

the company's efforts in the future[142]. On a corporate level, one often hears of SWOT analysis, one of the most commonly used management tools in Germany for strategic analysis of businesses. The anagram stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. One's strengths on a personal level are known as "soft skills". These include qualities such as initiative, stress-management, perseverance, and leadership abilities. For businesspeople it is also advisable to highlight such qualities as honesty, reliability, transparency, genuineness, etc.[143]. Especially the emotional factor plays a critical role in recommendation marketing.

5.3 Strategy Decision

As soon as the company's situation has been analyzed, a decision must be taken regarding the strategy to be pursued. This must take into account time, costs, reliability, and location. Costs may include, for example, the production of a video or website content, as well as administration and maintenance of a social media page. Costs can of course vary, depending on which platforms are used. The video site Youtube is more costly than a Facebook page when it comes to releasing videos. One must also factor in the monitoring of social media activities. This is generally very time-consuming, and thus expensive[144]. The time factor applies to all social media activities: One must set up, maintain, and monitor the various platforms. It must be ensured that implementation is possible--that is, whether content can be posted to the individual channels. Otherwise the company runs the risk of losing followers if a website is not updated one to two times per week[145]. Above all, one must ensure that the content published is reliable. One should also make sure that any content published cannot easily be modified or deleted[146]. The technology in place today allows content to be published to all configured platforms in a matter of seconds. Pertaining to location, companies must consider which specific platforms are to be used, that is, which countries or regions best align with their strategy[147].

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[142] Cp. Schüller, A.-M. (2009), p. 80.
[143] Cp. Pastuschka, B. (2013), p. 80.
[144] Cp. Ceyp, M.; Scupin, J.-P. (2013), p. 60.
[145] Cp. Ceyp, M.; Scupin, J.-P. (2013), p. 61.
[146] Cp. Ceyp, M.; Scupin, J.-P. (2013), p. 65.
[147] Cp. Schüller, A.-M. (2009), p. 81.