Why Brands Still Belong on Social Media Despite the Changing Landscape (and How They Can Leverage It for Greater Success)



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In the dynamic digital landscape, the role of social media is continually evolving. Today, an estimated 4.9 million people globally are on social media platforms, but the *way* we consume content, plus the content itself, has shifted significantly since the boom of these platforms in the late 2000s and early 2010s.

Today, some argue that with the surge of influencers, brands

may no longer hold their once-celebrated place on platforms like Instagram, Twitter or TikTok. Going a step further, with the substantial increase in advertising and sponsored content, many users have learned to tune out brands selling their products or services through social media.

I've been helping my clients leverage social media for the past 15 years and have seen firsthand the shift in what kind of content performs well and what strategies and metrics actually translate to a higher ROI.

Ultimately, in this multifaceted digital playground, there's no denying that it's becoming harder and harder to capture an audience's attention. However, when brands can understand the platforms and how each user base reacts — and create authentic, relatable content — they can maximize their reach, improve brand awareness and perception, and build a consumer base that not only trusts your content but is excited to see it.

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Metrics that matter: Going beyond follower count

To optimize your content, you first need to understand your objectives and what metrics are important for evaluating the success of your strategy. In the early days of social media, follower count was the main — if not, *only* — metric that brands cared about and agencies tracked consistently. Even just a few years ago, despite the rise of bot followers and purchased likes, a brand's clout could still be relatively gauged by its follower count.

Today, however, this metric is becoming increasingly obsolete. Since TikTok came onto the scene with its personalized approach to user "For You" feeds, other platforms like

Instagram and Snapchat have followed suit, integrating similar features into its platforms and mimicking TikTok's algorithm. With this shift, users no longer needed to be following an account to see its content – instead, the platform itself sorted through millions of posts to present a perfectly curated page of content for each user. These discovery pages often now have the highest user traffic and have ultimately reduced the user's need to "follow" individual pages.

With the rise of these personalized recommended feeds, other metrics like views, engagement and reach have become better measures for audience resonance and brand perception overall. While followers will always be a relatively important measure of a brand's clout, understanding how your users are finding your content will help you tailor your posts for both new and existing followers.

Creating your home base

Consider this: If someone hears about a brand, where's the first place they're likely to look? More often than not, they go to social media. A strong, consistent presence can legitimize a brand, enhancing its credibility. It's where customers come to "window-shop" – to learn more about the brand, its ethos and its offerings.

In a 2021 survey by Sprout Social, they found that 68% of consumers have actually purchased at least one product directly from social media. With the shift to "for you" pages as previously mentioned, social media is also becoming increasingly effective at introducing new products and brands to shoppers who otherwise wouldn't know about it. Plus, with the rise of affiliate marketing and social media shop features, a brand's social media profile has become an *actual* digital storefront, as your audience can purchase products directly through the app.

In essence, social media profiles have become a brand's

digital home base. As such, a poorly managed profile or one with just a few low-quality posts can raise red flags for potential customers and actually de-incentivize a purchase. Ensuring your social media pages are well-branded, consistently managed and polished will improve your chances of attracting and retaining customers long-term.

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The way forward: Authenticity and collaboration

Ultimately, a brand's social media strategy should revolve around developing engaging content that provides a direct value to your target audience. These days, with hundreds of thousands of brands and creators all fighting for views, it can be difficult to know what to post. So, how should brands navigate this transformed landscape?

- **Storytell, don't oversell:** Traditional advertising monologues won't cut it. While you can, of course, have posts about the benefits and details of your products, brands need to foster conversation and go beyond ad posts to build an actual persona that consumers want to connect with. Engage with followers, respond to comments, and be part of conversations that your audience is having.
- **Collaborate authentically:** Partner with influencers who genuinely align with the brand. It's not about getting the creator with the most followers, but about finding those whose audience will genuinely resonate with the brand's message and who will create high-quality content that your audience will love.
- **Diversify content:** Go beyond the up-close, photoshoot-quality product shots. Share genuine behind-the-scenes

glimpses, customer testimonials or even relevant industry news with your brand's perspective. The goal is to offer value and keep the audience engaged with a variety of on-brand content that won't seem repetitive.

- **Harness user-generated content (UGC):** In the same way as word-of-mouth marketing, UGC is a valuable tool to provide credibility for the brand. In fact, a report by Stackla found that consumers were 2.4 times more likely to view UGC as authentic compared to content created by brands. Reposting and encouraging UGC not only provides authentic testimonials but also fosters community and shows customers that they're valued.

While the landscape has shifted, counting brands out of the social media equation would be premature. Instead, the onus is on brands to evolve, re-strategize and leverage the platforms in ways that align with today's digital dynamics. By focusing on authenticity, building genuine collaborations and establishing a consistent digital presence, brands can not only remain relevant on social media but thrive.

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