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WILLIAM & MARY

LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 21: CHRISTEN BARBER – SOCIAL MEDIA 101

Ken White

From the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is Leadership & Business. The weekly podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from all across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host Ken White. Thanks for listening. Social media. It has exploded since Facebook was first introduced just over a decade ago. Over two billion people actively use social media. In fact, in the time it takes to listen to today's podcast, 12 million people will log on to Facebook. The best businesses and organizations in the world have embraced social media. They've made it a major part of their outreach and branding strategies, and they've seen results. Still, though social media is somewhat of a mystery to some companies, organizations, and individuals. Christen Barber is a strategist with CreateDigital.com, a social media agency in Richmond, Virginia. She helps businesses and organizations connect with their customers by creating their social media strategies. She joins us today to discuss social media and the effect it can have on customer relationships, the brand, and the bottom line. Here's our conversation with Christen Barber.

Ken White

Christen, thank you for taking the time. It's nice to be here in your office. This is a fantastic facility, but thank you for taking the time to talk with us today about social media and social media strategy.

Christen Barber

Yeah. Thanks so much. Good to be here.

Ken White

So if you met a CEO or a business leader who knew nothing about this space, what would you tell them? Where do you start with them?

Christen Barber

I think with them. I would get started, you know, in terms of starting to do some research. I would start with places like entrepreneur and Ink magazine have specialized blogs that

write about social media all the time. That have some really great perspective, not only from how do you get into it, the nitty gritty, and the tactics but also from a high level on what can social do for your business in terms of return on investment as well as all the different ways that social can be utilized. I would also say that social media can be used in so many ways that businesses probably don't understand it's more than just having a Facebook page. It's more than just getting likes. Social media is a viable marketing channel just as much as any other TV, direct mail. You know, it's social is definitely up there in terms of an actual channel that you want to have in your, you know, tactical armory. So from that perspective, it's really looking into and understanding what are your goals and objectives and figuring out if social media is going to be able to meet those goals and objectives for you. So everything from if you're trying to increase sales if you're a B2C company and you're trying to increase sales of a specific product or if you're in the service industry and you're trying to create a channel for customer feedback. I always say that social is just like any other channel except your customers can talk back. So they're really trying to, but I wouldn't try to. I wouldn't say that to make people get scared or not want to do it. I think it's just understanding that you know to be in social media is to be prepared and open yourself up for that. You know back and forth conversation with your customers.

Ken White

Yeah, I mean, you can't, as a business, open a Facebook page and walk away from it.

Christen Barber

No, no way. And I think you know that's where you know, I always hear it's, you know, everyone says we should be on Facebook, or we need to be on social media, and I always ask, well, who is everyone? And I always say that you know you always have to have a strategy and a plan, and when you're getting into social media, having a strategy which is the why. Why are we doing this? You know, where do we want to be which channels? It's not all of them. You don't just turn them on, and it's not set and forget. It's definitely not turning on, you know, TV commercial, you know your flight, and it's over. It's definitely a daily, you know, almost 24-hour cycle well, not almost it is a 24-hour cycle in terms of it's always on, your customers are awake, they're using it, they're on it all the time 24/7. You just have to look at people standing in line at Starbucks in the morning to see them on their phones to know that they're using it. And you know, understanding that having that plan isn't just how are we going to respond, it's how are we going to keep this active. How are we going to keep our customers engaged? How are we going to keep those likes that we get on our page? And look at continuing to engage with us time over time.

Ken White

A little bit different than, say, traditional print or broadcast, where you just push it out there, and it sort of takes care of itself. This has to be monitored, and you want to take care of this. It's like a child 24 hours a day.

Christen Barber

No, it's very true. Traditional media channels are much more. You know, the broadcast media gets its name for a reason. You know you're broadcasting your message. You have control of it. You created the ad. You created the commercial. You decide on the flight, and you push it out to your audiences. You hope that they receive it and respond and engage with your call to action, whereas social media, in the nature of social, is that it's meant to get various engagements. All of the channels have them, whether it's a like on Facebook or it's a repin on Pinterest. All of them have engagement metrics. All of them do different things better than others, just like print or, you know, TV or radio.

Ken White

Right.

Christen Barber

Or direct mail, but all do different things as well. It's all goes back to your goals and objectives and making sure you understand the strategy of why you're trying to get into social.

Ken White

So if you have your strategy, you know what you want to do in your business, and you're looking at these various outlets, Facebook, for example, why would somebody want to be there? What does that do? What does that offer?

Christen Barber

Well, Facebook is the largest social media network. That's where everyone is. So everyone from the teens, although a lot of people want to say teens aren't on Facebook, they just don't want to tell you they're on Facebook anymore. All the way up to a fastest-growing segment on Facebook right now is the seniors. So your retirees that over 65 age group, they're trying to connect and see pictures of grandkids and keep in touch with people that they've, you know, fallen out of touch with. That makes it a little easier. And so Facebook is your I've heard people talk about it as like your ongoing scrapbook. That's how people use it. They're talking about what's happening in their day. They're sharing photos and videos. That's where people are most often in terms of spending the most time from a social media network perspective. Facebook, from a business perspective, it has a lot of marketing options for companies who decide to create a page. So if you create a page

and you want organic reach, which organic means that you put a message up and you hope your fans and followers will you know Facebook will serve it up to them. You can expect a 1 to 3 percent engagement rate which means that they'll like, comment, share it, et cetera. If you want more than that, you have to pay for it. So Facebook, as we all know and most people who are using Facebook, it's definitely turning into a pay-to-play model. Facebook decided a long time ago that they want businesses to pay their shareholders.

Ken White

Sure.

Christen Barber

So putting the onness on businesses to do that. So they have a paid ad model to be able to reach fans and followers as well as other people, and because they have so much data on the users, you can get a very granular advertising, you know, targeting together so you can you know target say for instance you're in the bridal market, and you're trying to reach at this time of year is when everyone's getting engaged and say you're a venue well you can target people who are engaged because guess what they click that relationship status with their ring photo the minute that they get it. So there's lots of opportunities. You can, you know, target men women, you can target specific age groups, you can target geo-location down to the zip code, so you can get really specific with your targeting. So Facebook is a pretty general platform. It's where most people are, and you can pretty most anybody can find their demographic on Facebook.

Ken White

What are some of the others? Is Twitter number two? I say that because I'm on Twitter. I like Twitter, but I mean, is there a number two, so to speak?

Christen Barber

It's hard. I mean, I think Twitter, in terms of size and user base, is still, you know, considered the number two social network. Twitter is more of a. I would say, a niche community of where you'll find everything from, you know, people who are into digital marketing, you know, people like myself. Twitter is a great medium for that. I've also seen niche markets of crafters and hobbyists. I've also seen niche groups of you know human resource managers and you know that whole group, technology groups, companies those types of things so people the way that Twitter works obviously you only have a hundred and forty characters it's super quick and there's a metric out there right now that your tweet only lasts about eight seconds. In terms of its pushed down in the feed, and you've lost it forever. So it's a right now engagement option. It's definitely one where a lot of brands and companies, as well as individuals, get themselves into trouble because they quickly fire off that quick tweet and kind of don't stop to think about it. So Twitter is really a great place if you're looking for a niche kind of conversations. It's also a great customer

relationship tool if you're, you know, if you have a call center and you are currently managing a high volume of calls using Twitter can be a great place for customer relationship management and responding to inquiries and helping customers resolve issues. So we've seen a lot of companies and one of our past clients, that's how we managed it for them. Instagram is a big one that's growing popularity, especially in the, I would say, you know, younger, you know, 20s up until, you know, mid-30s and especially the stay-at-home mom, you know, realm sharing a photo visual medium is really growing a lot lately especially on all the other social networks as well. Pinterest happens to be one of my favorite. I happen to be in their main demographic. It's 85 percent of their user base is women, which makes men the fastest grow at target just because men aren't using it as much.

Ken White

Right.

Christen Barber

But Pinterest is really great in the fact that it is set up to push you out to a company's website. So it's a visual pinning platform where you're pinning the user is pinning content from visual websites. Whether it's products, so you're do it yourself weddings, food, recipes, those are the most popular categories. And so Pinterest is really great because you can actually measure purchase intent. So if someone's pinning your content and you know you're into their boards, you can measure the referrals back to your company's website and ultimately purchases. So those are kind of the top ones that we look at here. There's others. There's Snapchat that we know is really popular with the, you know, teen demographic and some others.

Ken White

You mentioned something you sort of touched on the crisis. I mean, crises do come up in social media. How do you, in your position, manage this, and how do other people who do what you do for a living? Where does the crisis come in crisis communication?

Christen Barber

Yeah. Crisis is a really important part of social media, that if you're going to turn it on, you need to be prepared for any type of crisis. And it could be we like to talk about crises here at CreateDigital as crises of opportunity. There's always an opportunity within potential crises that are happening with social media for you to utilize this as an opportunity to make your customers feel even more loyal to you and potentially come out even better on the other side by actually implementing change or, you know process change within your company. So, for instance, I think when you're getting ready to start on social media, and we do this with our clients as we always create a crisis communications plan for social media before we even turn the channels on. Though we go through an exercise with our

internal copywriting team as well as with the client, and we go through potential crisis scenarios, what are potential things out there that could happen that we need to be prepared for? So we brainstorm and develop a list of potential crises, and then we come up with predetermined message and messages that we can share on behalf of the client. And so we kind of go through that process and kind of determine. So if this happens, then this, if this happens, then this, and then we also come up with what we call our crises workflow as well as our the levels of different crises. So we have, you know, in ours, we have a five-step crises system from a low, you know, low potential risks to a very high level of risk like you know code red.

Ken White

Yeah, no doubt.

Christen Barber

That the level of crises, and so we go through a different process where we grade each of the different crises and determine what level of response would be necessary. Working with our client and then looking at the workflow in terms of, you know, from the frontline, our social media managers who are monitoring the platforms on an ongoing daily basis all the way up into getting into, you know, the CEO of our client getting them involved in determining what's the right response. So there's lots of, you know, levels. Everybody does it a little bit differently. But we are big proponents of preplanning, going through the potential situations with the clients, and that everybody is aware. So as soon as we turn them on, we're pretty much prepared for anything.

Ken White

You know when talking to people in your line of work the war stories are just amazing, right? Everybody has all these examples of companies that have faced certain issues. It can be incredibly serious and huge, can't it?

Christen Barber

It's very true. And I think a lot of times where I've seen, you know, here, we like to watch those and see what we can learn from obviously and how we can bring that back to our clients.

Ken White

Sure.

Christen Barber

From my perspective, I think the biggest thing that always comes up when I'm looking at some of those things that are going on the biggest thing that comes up is that the

company waits too long to respond. So I think sometimes the company thinks that, well, it's just social media, you know, it's going to blow over, you know, and it's going to be rather quick. People will be on to the next thing, and I think that that's a really poor, you know, management strategy of a crisis. I mean, I think one of the biggest things that in social to do is to respond swiftly and quickly. If you don't have all of the information or you don't have a resolution in social, it's okay. They just want to know that you're working on the issue and a potential timeline for when you're gonna get back to them with potential next steps or a resolution, or a way to solve the problem. And I think sometimes is what happens is companies again ignore something that seems really small. Whereas if you can nip it in the bud very quickly, you know you can potentially also you know kind of avoid any future issues are turning into you know you know a code red you know, like the worst possible crises.

Ken White

And you can turn it around maybe to a positive right.

Christen Barber

Exactly. And a lot of times, you know if the company does act swiftly or does attempt to resolve a potential issue in the beginning, usually your loyal followers others within the platforms will also come to your aid to show that hey the company is trying to make you know you know make amends here. Let's give them a chance.

Ken White

Sure.

Christen Barber

You know you're usually you'll start to see your loyal followers rally.

Ken White

Right.

Christen Barber

However, you'll quickly see the loyalists turn on you if they don't think that you're responding in an appropriate manner quickly enough as well. So you know that that can also, like I said, not responding quickly and swiftly can really get a lot of companies in hot water.

Ken White

If someone is leading a business, whether CEO, small business, you, or you're the leader. How much should that leader be involved? I mean, there are some people when we say

social media. We think of the Richard Branson's of the world. There are tweets flying out of there, you know, constantly, and you wonder, can he possibly be doing that? Is that a team? How does that how do you feel about that, and is that the CEO really speaking? Is it a team and how should they be approaching that?

Christen Barber

Well, I think it's really up to the individual business and, again, like, what are the goals and objectives. How visible is your CEO? How much does your loyal followers or your potential customers know about the CEO, or are they a public figure? I think you'll see that a lot of brands out there, for instance, there is always, you know, a brand social media presence whether it's on Twitter or Facebook or, you know, the proper channel. But then there could also be, you know, a profile for the CEO or the CMO if it's the chief marketing officer. So there's various levels. I think, obviously the small business perspective, I think I would always recommend having a brand handle. If you're only going to have one have a brand handle.

Ken White

Got it.

Christen Barber

Even if it is the CEO behind the scenes that's managing it, I think having a brand handle again can give you a lot of credibility. It can make the brand seem larger if you're in a growth period, that sort of thing. As you grow, though, and the CEO becomes or you know the person in leadership becomes a public figure, and you're trying to lend that person's credibility or expertise to the business. That's where having a separate handle can really become valuable. I think that you know if you have a unique perspective as a leader in your industry, not just your organization. If you have a level of expertise that you bring to the table that you know by lending your opinion or your spin on things into the market that people would find valuable and want to follow and learn from you. That can be immensely helpful to any business organization if you have a leadership team out there. So it's just like going to speak at an event or serve on a panel or, you know, give a talk at a conference. Social media can do that 24/7 for you, so by creating, you know that level of expertise. So Twitter is an area where I recommend that those leaders do it, as well as on LinkedIn. LinkedIn has a new tool called Pulse where industry leaders can, as well as any business leader or any person on LinkedIn, really now can use this pulse feature to create microblogs where people can follow your expertise and kind of learn more about your opinions and thoughts. And again, it's really about having a unique expertise and opinion that you can lend to the current news cycle the things that are going on in business. And sharing that out because just retweeting somebody else's thoughts or being a parrot to what's happening right now isn't going to, you know, get you any followers or get anybody to really kind of see you to have that level of expertise. But from you did ask

earlier also from. Is it a team? I think you know a lot of times. I mean, any leader of a business would tell you that they're busy.

Ken White

Sure.

Christen Barber

They don't always have the time to manage their own social media channel. So sometimes it's one. It's just a writer that helps. I mean, the president doesn't write his own speeches.

Ken White

Sure.

Christen Barber

So I think it's good to realize that sometimes if it's not something that you have time to do and do well. One, question if you should have it or not, and two if you do have the opportunity to hire a team to support you. Great. I would recommend that you do often monitor your own channels also. In case you know, if you're putting up a blog post, make sure that you're responding to the comments and, you know, kind of still lending your unique expertise. I think it's hard sometimes to get a team to still have the level of expertise, you know, even if they are ghostwriting and doing some of that, and you know you're signing off on sometimes the monitoring and the replying you know, should be done by the individual.

Ken White

If you're a business leader or professional and you don't know a whole lot about social media, start where?

Christen Barber

I think, you know like I said before going back, I think there's a lot being written and talked about on social media. Like I mentioned, you know Entrepreneur Inc. There's also Marketing Sherpa is a blog online that I like a lot. I also follow it's called the smart insights brief. I get it in my inbox every week. Recently I've gotten into it's a blog called contently.com that has a it's called the content strategist. It's their blog every week that I really get into. There's also the content marketing Institute. They talk a lot about social but also other content areas, and I think one not only read about it and kind of make yourself a student of social media and like what's happening out there but also look at the CEO of Starbucks. Look at the CEO of Whole Foods. Those are two CEOs that have done it well to kind of again. They're a public figure, and then they also have their own social channels and look, you know who in your local business community is doing a good job from a CEO

or business leader perspective. See what they're doing. What are the hashtags in your industry? How can you kind of start? I would just start looking and monitoring conversations and then again coming up with a plan and a strategy. It's not just turning it on and deciding one moment that you're going to do it. It's what's the value. How is this going to benefit me as an individual in my position and my expertise? As well as how is this going to benefit my organization overall. And how can what I'm planning to do benefit and elevate the organization.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Christen Barber, strategist at CreateDigital.com, and that's our podcast for this week. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education can help you and your organization by designing and delivering a customized leadership development program that specifically fits your needs. If you're interested in learning more about the opportunities at the Center for Corporate Education, check out our website at wmleadership.com. That's wmleadership.com. Thanks to our guest this week, Christen Barber, and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Until next time have a safe, happy, and productive week.