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## GOOD GUIDE FOR BANKS JUST JUMPING INTO SOCIAL MEDIA

Have you tried Crest 3-D White? (And why a banker should consider that)

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Customer Experience Without Borders: A Practical Guide To Social Media In Financial Services, by Christophe Langlois, Searching Finance Ltd., 240 pp.

Reviewed by Katie Segner, marketing director, SpiritBank, Bristow, Okla.

When the opportunity came up to review Christophe Langlois's book, the timing could not have been more perfect.

Personally, I am an active social media participant, but as a financial institution employee, I had just finished writing the first draft of our social media plan. And the question that many people were asking is the question that is forefront in the book:

Do people really want to join a bank's community?

And the answer is yes &hellip; if you do it right.

But before we get into the how to do it right part, I wanted to start with one helpful hint before reading the book: If you haven't done so already, sign up for personal accounts with both Facebook and Twitter and observe (and participate in) the conversation for a few days. The book has many practical ways to use these two avenues for marketing your financial institution, but it isn't a "how-to" guide on how to use the sites. So get some hands-on experience first. You'll better appreciate all that Langlois has to say.

## Getting started--know where you want to go

Langlois, a former banker, heads Visible-Banking.com, a blog site devoted entirely to financial services and social media. This is a public face of his consulting business, which tracks more than 2,400 financial services social media efforts in more than 70 countries. The book has dozens of case studies and examples.

When putting together your social media strategy, the hardest part is getting started. Langlois offers a checklist of items to ask, such as:

1. What do you want to achieve?
2. What social networks are your target markets using?
3. What do you want to offer? (If you have no idea, the book does get into this in later chapters.)

The next step is to come up with the reasons why people would want to join your community. Langlois recommends coming up with "rewards." These do not have to be monetary and the main ways to reward community members are through:

- Visibility and networking.
- Exclusive content.
- Fun and entertainment.
- A challenge/opportunity to win a contest.

When creating our social media strategy at the bank, content was one of the biggest hurdles. We want to offer our customers more than product information. Then we realized we have a great deal of information right at our fingertips:

- Sharing financial tips and articles from popular (and not so well-known) websites.
- Job postings.
- Sharing fraud alerts from our risk management department.

However, the book offered other options that I hadn't even considered:

- Presentations
- White papers
- Analyses and reports
- Telling your customers' stories

“Word of Mouth Marketing--your best friend, or someone you've never met

As a marketing professional, my favorite type of marketing is “word of mouth.” First, it costs the bank nothing, but second, who does someone trust more than a friend or family member on the best new restaurant, the most fragrant laundry detergent &hellip; or their bank?

But does this work in social media?

According to Langlois, it most definitely does.

He writes: “Statistics demonstrate that over two-thirds of people trust other people's recommendations, even from strangers, sometimes from people who admit to not having much relevant product knowledge or experience, significantly more than your plain old marketing messages.”

I was skeptical about this statement when I first read it.

Then I thought back to a few purchases I made over the past year based completely on recommendations on blogs, Amazon reviews, and Facebook ... mainly from people I had never met.

One specific purchase was of Crest 3-D Vivid White toothpaste. A blogger wrote about the dramatic transformation on her teeth after using it for a month. She is by no means a dental hygienist, nor had I ever met her. But I had to see for myself.

My review: The results really were outstanding. I kept waiting for people to tell me how white my teeth were. (I am still waiting, for the record.) Nevertheless, I bet you now will have Crest 3-D Vivid White on your next grocery list. And we have never even met.

(You will thank me, by the way.)

However, to every positive review we come across online or in our everyday life, there is also the negative. Langlois makes a strong case about the downside of social media.

“Nowadays an angry customer will always find a way to express their thoughts online, whether it is on your blog or another one,” he writes. By having a proactive plan on how to address your customers’ concerns/complaints on the web, you will have the opportunity to share your message and response with current and potential customers.

Feedback (now you’re really asking for it)

One of the scariest, but potentially the most enlightening ideas in the book, is to ask your customers for feedback on your social networking site. (Actually, just thinking about it makes my heart palpitate.) But the point is, wouldn’t you prefer to be seen as a company that listens, cares, and responds?

Another feedback method suggested in this book to share your customers’ stories. One way in which this was illustrated in the book was to help with adoption rates of products that may seem “unsafe” to the customer, like online banking and bill pay and use your customers’ feedback to help show others that this is a safe and valuable tool.

I can already think of so many ways our customers’ stories could be used:

- A small business owner whose business turned into a huge success because of their SpiritBank small business loan.
- A customer who was able to surprise their wife with a new car on her birthday.
- A customer who can tell about how their Sunday evenings now have more time since they have adopted online bill pay.

This is where our staff could get involved by helping identify our customers that have such great stories to share about the bank.

Measuring success--not always the obvious metrics

With social networking, it can seem that the best way to measure success is by the number of friends/followers/likes you have.

However, as Langlois points out, it is more about the quality of the audience and how active and engaged they are.

In addition, you have to review how much exposure you gave to your social networking sites. Included in the book are tips and ideas on how to promote your social media activities to get your network to grow. These include where to place links, how to hold contests, and clever case studies from financial institutions throughout the world.

#### Risk--ever present in social media

While the book is not a compliance handbook on the subject of social media, it does address one of the biggest hurdles for entering the conversation: risk. It also addresses the idea that not embracing social media carries its own risks, such as:

- Not knowing what is being said about your brand online.
- Not being able to reach out to those who are saying negative things about your brand.
- Being too late to the game when you need to manage a crisis.

Overall, the rewards of developing a comprehensive social media strategy outweigh the risks of utilizing social networking sites.

#### Bottom line: A good place to get started

This book is a great resource for financial institutions looking to enter the social media environment or enhance their current presence. It will be a helpful guideline as my own bank goes forward into social media.

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