

D2C Cleaning Company Truman's Puts Customer Engagement at Forefront of Social

Co-founder and CMO Alex Reed says Twitter is the best way to reach customers

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Creating an alluring social media presence is a tried-and-true strategy for direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands. Not only is it a cost-effective way to reach consumers, but shoppers are more likely to research a D2C brand by looking at its social content.

According to a May 2019 study from the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB), 44% of US D2C shoppers look to social media posts (not ads) before making a purchase, compared with 24% of traditional shoppers.

Research Activities that US Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) Shoppers vs. Traditional Brand Shoppers Conduct Before Making a Purchase, May 2019

% of respondents

	D2C	Traditional
Samples	45%	33%
Watch brand videos	45%	28%
Videos posted by other customers (YouTube)	44%	28%
Social media posts (not ads)	44%	24%
Check out news/recommendations on websites (BuzzFeed, Refinery29, CNN)	42%	24%
Talk to salespeople/customer service representatives	36%	21%
Celebrities/social media influencers	35%	15%
Go to a "pop-up" or physical store location	33%	18%

Note: internet users ages 13+ who are at minimum aware of D2C brands
Source: Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB), "Disrupting Brand Preference: The Impact of Direct Brands across the path to purchase," July 12, 2019

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Social advertising is particularly effective in the D2C realm, too. March 2019 polling by consumer insights firm Toluna found that 34.6% of US internet users discovered the first D2C brand product they purchased from a social media ad.

For D2C cleaning company Truman's, social media isn't just a way to introduce consumers to its brand, it's an opportunity to win them over through personal interaction. And while other D2C retailers rely heavily on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, Truman's focuses on the unexpected: Twitter.

We recently spoke with Truman's co-founder and CMO Alex Reed on the brand's social marketing efforts and learnings thus far.

What's your general approach to organic and paid social?

Social is a way to connect with our customers, and the only difference between our paid and organic effort is reach. Whether it's an ad post or organic post, we try to have authentic conversations with our customers. That's the central umbrella theme to how we do social media.

Is customer engagement a way to build your brand, drive performance or both?

It's both. I'm a big brand believer, and I think brand kind of trumps all. Brand isn't one post or comment. We want to have this fun brand that's very personable and engaged. It can't just be fun on our website and

then boring on social media. But what you also see on these platforms is the more comments that you have and the more you're engaging with a comment, your relevancy score goes up and you get shown to more people. So it's important for driving performance as much as it is building brand.

From a D2C perspective, why is customer engagement important?

We want to change this market. We want to go after the Windex's, and the Clorox's, and the Mr. Clean's, and the brands that have been around forever. They're a little bit low on this level because their customer is the retailer. They've never had to interact with the end user. When you think about them being 100-year-old companies, social media as a business tool has been important for what, 10 years? It's a foreign experience for them, whereas you see a lot of these younger brands—the folks operating them and working on them—have lived on social media for a lot of their lives and understand its importance.

Given your focus on customer engagement, why is Twitter your preferred platform?

Twitter can be a dark place for brands. If you look at Promoted Tweets, a lot of the content is trolling that brand. It's a very tough nut to crack for brands because Twitter is a place for debate and argument. You get these Promoted Tweets within your feed and sometimes people react viscerally to them. The No. 1 thing for us is that these tweets are coming from Jon [Bostock, Truman's co-founder]. No. 2 is that he's responding to the comments. We did an A/B test where we tried Promoted Tweets from our Truman's handle and from Jon's [personal handle], and the performance was much better on Jon's handle. Not every business can do that, but we're small enough now that it makes sense. It's the unexpected brand interaction that people love. Wendy's and others have gotten a lot of fanfare for what they do on social media, and I think for good reason because they are investing in it and prioritizing it.

But you don't use the same approach on Facebook and Instagram?

They all serve a different purpose for us. We focus on engaging our customers everywhere, but since Facebook and Instagram are more visual platforms, we share a lot of user generated content, which is great. We've taken our customers' reviews and had them visualized with playful illustrations. So it's a way of telling our story about our customers' experiences in a different way than the curated photo shoot in the studio with the glamour shots of products.

Traditionally, Facebook has been the place for D2C companies to grow. Is this still the case?

There are some tremendous headwinds with Facebook, but the bottom line is that there is volatility, and you're not in control. We see efficiency swings in terms of our reach and engagement, and it's an important lesson. Whether you're running a billion-dollar marketing budget or you're starting a company, you always want to diversify your marketing channels and experiment as much as you can. I would admit we have been overly reliant on Facebook because of the low CPMs and because it's a universal audience that's never existed in marketing before. We can reach almost every person on the planet. So there's a lot of good to it.

As with anything, if you become too reliant, whether it's a sales channel or a communication channel, you're definitely exposing yourself to risk. So the advice I would have to combat that is don't write off other communication channels. We never would have expected Twitter to work for us if we weren't open to testing things. Nobody told us to go advertise on Twitter as we sought advice going into this business. But we've generated so much awareness, mind share and even sales from our efforts on a channel that is completely counterintuitive to a D2C business.