



SCORE column: Social media can help brand people

By Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt • January 27, 2011

When a business puts together a marketing plan, it is typically designed to sell a product. Rob Moore, a Green Bay SCORE counselor and controller for Laugh Your Way America LLC, has a unique challenge. How do you market a product when the product is a person?

Moore, along with Miles Smith, general manager, oversees the Laugh Your Way America organization. Their main product is Mark Gungor, lead pastor of Celebration Church in Green Bay and national personality and face of the organization.

"Mark utilizes humor and comedy to get people to open up so that they readily accept the marriage advice centered around sometimes highly sensitive topics," Smith said. "Our role is to brand Mark through name recognition supported by a television series, radio show, various websites, ecommerce, social media, blog and YouTube channel."

Social media plays a large role in branding. Fans can follow Gungor on Twitter, visit on Facebook, read his blog, and watch videos on YouTube. Gungor's posts tend to be spontaneous and personal. Recently, almost as it was happening, he told his Facebook fans that his hot tub was on fire. With his humorous take on the situation, Gungor's reaction was consistent with his brand and is one of the reasons he has a large and growing fan base.

Smith says a full-time web designer and Internet marketing specialist make sure there is a consistent message and steady stream of information.

"Mark enjoys connecting with fans and is good at it. The information we provide supplements that. It's a good blend," Smith said.

In addition to social media marketing, e-mails are sent regularly to 60,000 subscribers. A mobile telephone app is in production, and new products are developed on a regular basis.

"In terms of driving sales and general awareness, everything fits together," Smith said. "It is important to diversify as an extension of the personality. The message and mission we have is still valid with or without the personality."

This means that revenue is derived not only from Gungor's personal appearances at his popular marriage seminars and other speaking engagements, but also from video seminars with trained presenters, DVD sales, books, CDs and other sources. However, Gungor remains the principal product, and the challenge is building a strong organization that could survive without him. The other unique obstacle is sharing enough of Gungor to promote the personal brand, but not so much that he has no privacy. Moore says the company has an important role in achieving this balance and also taking care of the details so Gungor doesn't have to think about it and can retain the high level of energy he's known for. However, the company focuses on creating strong relationships and people are watching.

"Whether the personality likes it or not, he/she is the subject of a higher level of public scrutiny from every angle of life, especially if you are using social media," Smith said. "It is simply a given and something to be accepted if the personality wants to become famous and have a significant impact in the world."

Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt is co-owner of DB Commercial Real Estate in Green Bay and assistant district director for SCORE, Wisconsin.

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