Essential marketing during Covid-19

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Since the outbreak of Covid-19 and the introduction of lockdown, only essential businesses have been able to operate under certain guidelines and only at certain times. With this in mind and new industries now able to open up, large-scale advertising is not as cost-efficient or effective and businesses are needing to communicate local messaging, hygiene practices and information such as 'latest opening times', which require updating on an individual store level. It has also become increasingly important for businesses to understand, in real-time, what their customers are saying about the changes they are making in-store.

Local content

Based on our consumer review survey conducted earlier this year, Social Places found that 75% of consumers prefer interacting with their local stores rather than brand head offices.

"We've seen an incredible uptake in franchise businesses focussing on "local-store" social media, as this has been the most effective tool to communicate the latest updates with customers in their regions," says Ashleigh Wainstein, director of martech firm Social Places.

"Instead of a 'top-down' approach, franchises are increasingly using software, which enables head offices to collaborate with stores to produce local content, this allows store owners to have their own voice to produce unique content that is relevant to their neighborhood and community and at the same time, the head office team can ensure that all content is on brand and within company regulations," says Wainstein.

Up-to-date listings

Consumers are relying on the information that is found on platforms such as Google Maps and Facebook to see if businesses are open, what products or services are available as well as latest offerings.

Google My Business has rolled out new features to support businesses during lockdown. The 'Covid-19 listings feature' allows you to temporarily mark your business as closed or update special trading hours, as well as offer a 'Covid-19 update' to communicate any information you want your customers to be aware of, such as hygiene regulations. Businesses can also advertise if they are offering delivery, takeaway or pick-up services. This however can be extremely difficult to manage across 100s or 1,000s of stores, especially as the lockdown regulations are regularly changing.

"We've been working closely with our clients to ensure their online listings on platforms such as Google, Facebook, TripAdvisor and Zomato are kept up to date and that their message is consistently carried across to their customers with any updates and developments. We're encouraging more and more businesses to explore these free online opportunities to maximise visibility during these trying times," says Wainstein.

Customer feedback

Customers are currently extremely sensitive to issues relating to hygiene. It's important that the respective customer care and management teams within a corporation are notified immediately of any brand damaging sentiment or feedback from customers.

Social Places recently released a new feature using artificial intelligence, which acts as an early detection system for brands against any harmful or sensitive cases posted in online reviews. Head offices or local stores are notified about mentions regarding sensitive topics, including Covid-19, hygiene, sexual harassment, discrimination, theft and racism. We have seen a range of sensitive sentiment come in, and stores have now been able to deal with the problem, often while the customer is still in the store.

Social Places' product suites - GoListings, GoReview, GoAds and GoSocial - all work in unison to provide multi-location franchise brands with a holistic solution to manage their online presence through the use of a single login. In addition to the vast improvement of internal efficiencies, you will have access to powerful reporting that offers business intelligence based on how people are interacting with your business online. Social Places work with South Africa's leading franchise and multi-location groups including Spur Group, McDonalds, Pep, Midas, Virgin Active, Old Mutual, Life Healthcare and many more.

For more information contact tristan@socialplaces.co.za or visit www.socialplaces.co.za

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Social Places is a MarTech company that specialises in location-based marketing and reputation management for multi-location and/or franchised brands.
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