Maximizing the Economic Value from Facebook Marketing in the Agrifood System: Boosting Consumer Engagement Through Contests

Abstract

The Mississippi Bricks to Clicks Extension Program teaches the economics and management of social media to agrifood businesses. The purpose of this article is to explain how agrifood businesses can use Facebook contests to boost consumer engagement by correctly following Facebook's contest rules. Extension professionals can use this tool to improve their own Facebook contests when engaging with clientele or to advise agrifood or other types of businesses.

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Introduction

Facebook is the largest social network among all social networks (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat), with more than 1.4 billion global active users (Statista, 2015). Facebook generated more than $12.5 billion in revenues in 2014. As a result of frequent interactions and a growing number of global active users, Facebook's advertising revenues have been projected to continue to increase in the years to come. For those businesses operating in the global agrifood system, such an advertising platform that connects businesses to consumers holds great promise for efficiently connecting millions to agrifood markets.

The purpose of this article is to provide Extension professionals with a brief explanation of how to use Facebook contests correctly, one part of the social media training provided by the Mississippi Bricks to Clicks (B2C) Extension Program (http://www.msbrickstoclicks.com/) at Mississippi State University. We use examples from an agrifood business in Starkville, Mississippi, to demonstrate how a contest can be a successful tool for building engagement between a business and its consumer base. Extension professionals can use this information to conduct their own successful contest to connect with clientele or to educate business owners who want to maximize the economic value of Facebook marketing.

Mississippi B2C

B2C is an entrepreneurship program that trains entrepreneurs to understand economics and management best practices when using social media in business as well as how the use of social media can translate into economic value. We use experiential learning projects to identify best practices in posting content and implementing paid advertisements (Barnes & Coatney, 2015a). Adopting these research-based Facebook best practices has led to capturing economic value for agrifood businesses (Barnes & Coatney, 2015b) as well as promoting regional rural development (Barnes & Coatney, 2014).

The Rules of the Trade

First, anyone contemplating conducting a Facebook contest must read the rules for Facebook business pages (https://www.facebook.com/page_guidelines.php#promotionsguidelines). The administrator of a Facebook page is responsible for following Facebook's rules, or what are referred to as Facebook pages terms. If a page is for a state or local government in the United States, the administrator should read the government terms set by Facebook. Also, in Facebook's help center, instructions are provided for page administrators on how to run a contest or sweepstakes (https://www.facebook.com/help/513248435437336?sr=1&query=contests&sid=1BwwArIlcYSB8M1S3). *As of January 16, 2015, the following options are the only methods approved by Facebook for collecting entries into a sweepstakes or contest*:

- Like a page post ("like this post to enter").

- Comment on a page post ("comment on this post to enter").

- Like and comment on a page post ("like and comment to enter").

- Publish to a page.

- Send a page a private message.

Posts that ask people to "share a post" or "like a page" to be entered are not allowed. Facebook refers to asking people to "like" a page to be entered into a contest as "like gating." Penalties can include actions from deleting a post or posts from a page to deleting a page. It is up to Facebook to decide the penalty if contest rules are not followed.

An Example Contest

In the B2C program, we worked with almost 50 businesses and organizations in Mississippi during 2014 and 2015 (Barnes & Coatney, 2014; Barnes & Coatney, 2015a). One of the agrifood businesses we have assisted is the Oktibbeha County Co-op in Starkville (Figure 1). Through a series of workshops in the B2C program, we have assisted the co-op with creating and organizing Facebook content, including conducting paid advertisements and routinely conducting a weekly contest to boost consumer engagement with the co-op's page.

Figure 1.
Oktibbeha County Co-op Facebook Page (4,359 page likes), July 21, 2015

Figure 2 illustrates the contest conducted on the co-op's Facebook page July 4, 2015. The contest asked fans to "like and comment" on a post to be entered into a drawing to win an All-American Fish Cooking Kit, a $60 dollar value. The contest was from Wednesday, June 29, to Friday, July 3. The post was "boosted," meaning that we opted to have this post served to the fans of the page and their friends, a form of paid advertisement available to Facebook pages. The cost for this boosted post was approximately $45 dollars. The rules governing all contests were placed in a note on the page.

Figure 2.

Oktibbeha County Co-op's 4th of July Facebook Contest

The performance of the contest can be seen in both Figure 2 and Figure 3. Figure 2 shows that this

post reached a total of 20,264 people with organic and paid reach equaling 12,427 and 7,837, respectively. Organic reach is the total number of unique people who were shown a post through Facebook's newsfeed distribution. Paid reach is the total number of unique people who were shown a post as a result of a paid advertisement. The post was shared 70 times without our asking fans to do so. A total of 13 consumers "liked" the page as well, but we did not ask them to do so.

Figure 3.

Oktibbeha County Co-op's 4th of July Facebook Contest Performance
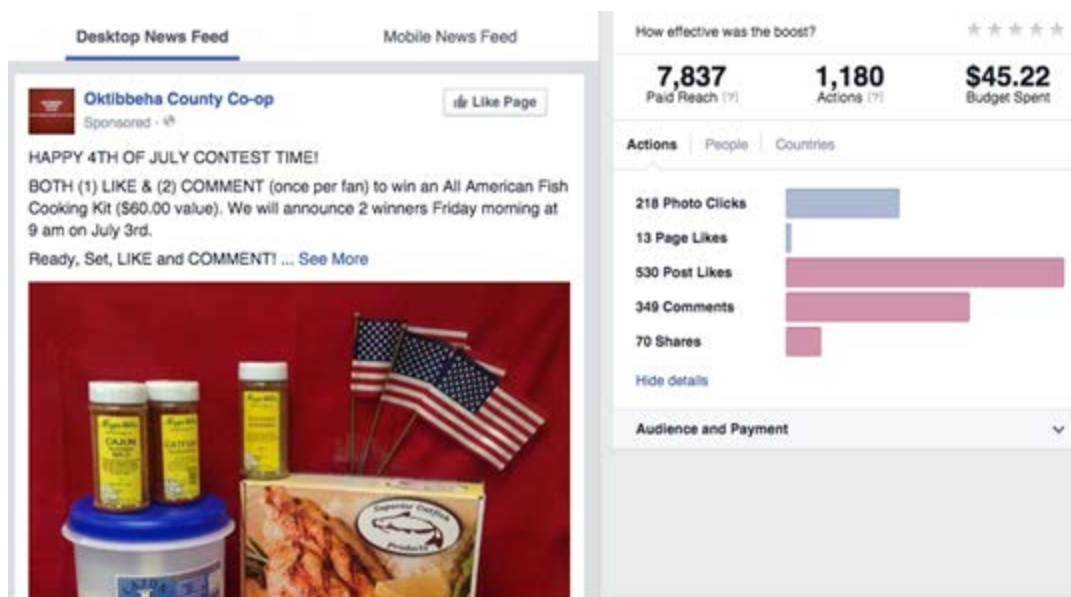
Conclusion

Clearly, Extension professionals have been using social media, Facebook included, to work with clientele (Kinsey, 2010). Interestingly, social media can be an effective tool that can deliver economic value to agrifood businesses (Barnes & Coatney, 2015b) and to Extension clientele as well. As social media evolves, agrifood businesses and Extension professionals alike need to learn new social media best practices. Part of that evolution should include understanding the correct use of Facebook contests.

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