

## How CPG brands can succeed on Social Media

### The 5-Minute Expert Interview

**Consumers aren't going anywhere. Literally. More than ever, people are conducting all of their discovery, research, decision-making, and purchasing online. This means brands selling consumer packaged goods (CPG) must think beyond the shelf to engage new audiences. We talk to Christina Miller, account manager at ICUC about the social media challenges faced by CPG brands and how ICUC can help.**

## What are social media obstacles faced by CPG companies?

People are shopping in completely different ways. Brick and mortar stores are going away and people are switching to e-commerce. Customers are no longer faced with a "wall of choices" and for our CPG clients packaging has become less important than brand loyalty. Online, consumers only order exactly what they know. The challenge is to build loyalty where the audience is.

Another challenge is the potential for a PR crisis online. A social media post that says, "My package has mold in it," can quickly go viral. Other consumers will assume the same thing happened to them. Brands need to know how to respond. You can't take down damaging content on social media, so it stays online for years, maybe forever.

## What are your CPG clients' social media challenges?

One of our largest CPG clients is an American-based food manufacturer with a global portfolio that includes food and beverage, pet foods, and smaller packaged goods. Each of the portfolio brands have different audiences and different goals.

Before ICUC, they handled social media internally but they could only respond during business hours. That meant a potentially explosive post posted on Saturday would only be resolved on Monday morning.

Five years ago, people called hotlines; today they start with social media when they have complaints or problems. With us, they have a team that's always on, including holidays. Their audience get answers whenever they have a question, wherever they are. Someone is building that relationship with their customers... even at 3am.

## What are some mistakes brands can make on social media?

A major issue for CPG brands is product recalls. These can be contentious because a consumer will post something that just isn't true. But handling this poorly can lead to more problems down the line.

Here's an example from a client before they engaged with ICUC: A customer posted online that he had purchased one of their drink products and that it contained mold. The brand was skeptical of this claim and chose not to issue a recall.

There was a lot of negative press and backlash against the brand. Eventually they responded by changing the packaging of their product to be clear—letting consumers see that the product was safe.

With ICUC they might have been able to avoid this cost. We can keep ahead of the conversation happening online and make recommendations on how to respond in crisis situations. While you can't always prevent a crisis, you can take steps to mitigate the damage to your brand.

## How have CPG consumers changed thanks to social media?

You used to be able to resolve issues at the store level, or direct people to your 800 number. Now consumers push back if you try to move the conversation away from social. They want you to resolve their issue on Twitter or Facebook or wherever they are.

Besides, when brands move things offline they face another risk: lack of transparency. Your audience sees the conversations happening on social media. That means brands have to close the loop on those same social platforms so that everyone can see how issues are getting resolved. Nothing happens “backstage” anymore.

## What are some other challenges your CPG clients faces?

It's a rapidly changing market. Think about the rise of gluten-free products; a category of product that didn't exist 10 years ago. If you don't adapt, your sales will plummet. You have to give customers what they want, give it to them quickly, and if that isn't hard enough, you have to be mindful of health/allergy issues.

For example, to avoid cross-contamination our client needed to build new facilities to produce the gluten-free goods customers want. Social listening gives our client an opportunity to know about trending topics in food culture, so they can adapt their own products in time.

## What are some opportunities that brands might not be aware of?

Social media has the ability to improve brand loyalty and awareness. On social media there are so many different kinds of conversations relevant to your brand. Sometimes your customers just want to talk to someone—not just complain. ICUC can respond to a user that says: “I love your peanut butter.”

You have a million other things you want to focus on: next year's marketing, quarterly sales targets, new products, etc., but your audience needs attention too. They need someone to hear that they love peanut butter and to provide a human response. Not just a copy-and-pasted one. That's what ICUC does and we can do it around the clock. We manage the millions of back-and-forth exchanges that build trust, empathy, and loyalty for your brand.

## What some need-to-know advice for CPG brands?

With social, more isn't always better. A lot of our clients ask, if they should be on Snapchat or on Pinterest or another new social network. We guide them based on their goals. We review audiences, demographics, marketing goals. Do they want to connect with “Millennial moms” or “Retiree dads” or “Gen Y professionals”? Certain networks aren't for everyone.

We can give them the dimensions for each of these networks, explaining exactly what they need to be successful, or even if they should use that social network at all. We help them see the bigger picture.

## Are product reviews important?

People look at reviews before they buy anything. Some brands are even using this in their favor: Aussie shampoo even used real reviews about their products in an ad campaign.

But it's critical that someone is watching your reviews, even when they're not happening on your own channels.

Audiences care about things you might not think they care about. A product in our client's portfolio changed its packaging, and their audience was not ready for this change. Many took to online reviews to voice their concerns, erroneously, that the product itself had changed. ICUC helped our client manage this unique form of conversation. We allowed the brand to be there and resolve the customers' concerns.

## What's the role of influencers in CPG marketing?

Many brands are unsure about how influencer programs work, and if they are right for their business. It can feel like a very Millennial focussed thing. But the influencer audience is very valuable, and it's the closest thing brands have to “buying allegiance.” Not only do influencers mention your product, they can help you create an “army of advocates.”

They're not former actors or athletes who have no connection to your product or your audience. They are people who learn about and represent your brand—and they have followers who trust them. It's the future of advertising.

## How do brands get ROI from social media?

It's hard to conceptualize ROI on social, so you have to think about it differently. You could look at conversion rates of social content, or how many tickets you resolve through social customer care, but it's more than just those numbers. Social media is where your audience is. Take the example of Wendy's: their sardonic tone of voice on Twitter has rejuvenated their brand and increased sales. Now their Twitter feed is a walking-talking ad that actually engages audiences.

When you develop your brand where your audience is, and foster genuine conversations, it can be like having millions of spokespeople. Your audience will become a part of your brand story—even if they aren't visiting your stores.

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