

What Top Retailers Do Differently to Succeed in Social Media

The 5-Minute Expert Interview



Edith Maioriello is a Senior Account Manager at ICUC, working closely with ICUC's retail accounts. Despite their size, all these customers are united by the unique set of challenges faced by retail industries. Edith explains the social media marketing challenges faced by her accounts, and how ICUC can help address them.

What are the challenges unique to the retail industry?

Retail can be slower to adapt than other industries. It's not because of lack of innovation; many of our accounts are eager to try new things. But there is a lot of overhead and stakeholders to get on board. And because changes made at the corporate level can propagate to every store, there's increased pressure to get everything right.

There's also a risk of looking disingenuous on social media. Retail brands have to balance the desire to engage against trying too hard to seem hip or cool. Fortunately, my accounts understand that to speak our customers' language we have to think like them first. It involves listening and consistent engagement.

What makes a retail customer different?

When you think about it, retail customers do a lot of research in proportion to their spend. And they look at a lot of resources: Blogs, social media, competitor websites. And this isn't a bad thing, since all those points give us a place to engage the customer. While our customers are doing their homework, we get a chance to listen and interact. Your customers aren't just looking for information: they are looking for inspiration too. If we can provide that, we've nudged them that much closer to the inside of a store.

What do your retail clients crave?

If the people I work with don't report directly to the CMO, their boss probably does. And what they always need are compelling insights to report at their monthly marketing call. They have five minutes (and two slides if they're lucky) to explain what worked, what didn't, and what's coming next.

And our reporting can do that. We give the brands we work with a high-level view of trends, consumer sentiment, competition analysis, and we provide our recommendations on next steps. Once you do this for a while, the data will show you something completely new. These "big idea moments" are great. Instead of a simple iteration, the client gains an insight that can completely reposition the brand.

Can you talk about your customers' content needs?

There's a lot! Our job is to find what resonates with customers and what doesn't. Because we're tapped into customer bases all over the world, we have solid insights on what's working. And when we find it, our job is to amplify that content.

Is user generated content important in retail?

User generated content has become really important. There are certain customers in the retail space with high social capital, i.e., influencers. ICUC can identify this subset of customers and we learn everything about them—their readership, impressions, etc. Then we leverage their reach and following, to reach more customers.

But you don't need 10,000 Instagram followers to be relevant. Retail brands are seeing remarkable user generated content on every channel. ICUC can reach out to these creators so we can repurpose that content. Static editorial layouts that require a full-day photoshoot aren't as interesting as the in-the-wild photos created by real customers. Fans are thrilled to be featured, and our client has a growing library of authentic-looking collateral. It's win-win.

What about social media and customer service?

Customers don't call 1-800 numbers anymore. They hit social first. A brand finds out about a problem at the same time as Twitter. That's why an integrated system is important. Since ICUC is always listening, we keep ahead of problems.

As an example, even though we offer it, one of my accounts manages their own customer service team. When we see something troubling on social, we escalate it to this internal team. But on the customer side it's seamless, because we're speaking with the same brand voice. The customer doesn't know—or care—that their issue is being handled by our behind-the-scenes partnership. They just care that it gets fixed.

Are product or business reviews worth paying attention to?

I think retail is ahead of other industries on this front. Our retail accounts appreciate that they can see all the reviews of all their brick and mortar locations in one place. They really want to fix problems at the store level, and local reviews is a crucial part of that.

We also can help mitigate the effect of bad reviews. They happen all the time, and we encourage brands to face negative reviews head on—don't hide from them! Many times there is a solution and when you can execute it in public, that's another win for the account.

Why is an integrated solution so important?

For my accounts that have previously relied on point solutions on different teams, there was a methodology problem and a measurement problem. When your boss is using a different yard stick, it's hard to get aligned.

So it really benefits our clients when they have a unified team they can rely on, that truly understands their brand, their business goals, and their customer. It definitely takes us time and effort before we truly know a brand inside and out, so I can only imagine how complicated that would be with different service providers.

We Would Love To Talk
To You About Your
Social Media Strategy
1.800.710.2713