

CONNECT

Twitter marketing tool of the future

Agency says businesses can't afford to ignore tweeting activity

by Simon Hendery

New Zealand businesses need to consider the online marketing potential of micro-blogging site Twitter seriously now Google and rival Bing are incorporating its content into search results.

That is the view of Auckland-based online marketing agency First Rate, which has published lists of the most-followed local Twitter accounts on its blog.

"[Companies and brands] in New Zealand seem to be more engaged in social media — Twitter in particular — than their Australian counterparts," says Grant Osborne, First Rate's director of search and performance.

"As a smaller country we get behind our brands, such as [Air New Zealand's] Grab-a-Seat and Vodafone. We have a few voices, such as [com-

munications manager] Paul Brislen at Vodafone who are really driving social media."

Osborne says businesses are using Twitter in a variety of ways as a marketing and brand-building tool.

Some companies are simply "pushing" offers and special deals to customers who follow their tweets while others are taking a "more conversational" approach — engaging their followers in a Twitter "community" based around their business and answering followers' questions about their products and services.

Samuel Stadler, First Rate's chief operating officer, says that in the past month both Google and Microsoft's Bing search engine have signed deals with Twitter to receive live feeds of what users are tweeting.

Google has also launched a new

tool, Google Social Search, to capture comments made on Twitter and other social network platforms.

"Tweets are now indexed by Google and, secondly, as part of Social Search, when one of your followers turns up in a search from Google the search results will favour content that you have tweeted over standard search result listings," says Stadler.

"This means [businesses] cannot afford to not measure Twitter activity. [Through their realtime feeds] Google and Microsoft have placed it as a pivotal part of their information-gathering strategies."

Osborne and Stadler say First Rate compiled the lists of the top 10 corporate and individual New Zealand twitter accounts based solely on the number of followers the accounts had, describing it as a useful starting point for analysis.

THE TOP 10 ACCOUNTS ON FIRST RATE'S LIST

The most popular New Zealand Twitter accounts on First Rate's list are:

1. WE LIKE BIKE 42

- Twitter name: WeLikeBike42.
- Followers: 21,600.

As part of a marketing campaign in the United States, New Zealand-founded vodka brand 42 Below promised that if at least 20,000 Twitter users followed the tweets on this account from bike riders trekking across the country for bike advocacy, it would donate US\$42,000 to the Alliance for Biking & Walking. Osborne says the 42 Below brand has always had a strong following, which has transferred on to Twitter with this campaign.

2. DIY FATHER

- Twitter name: diyfather.
- Followers: 17,200.

Linked to the locally run DIY Father website, which promotes resources for effective fathering, this Twitter stream is "conversational and functional", says Osborne. "While the tweets cover a range of topics, they relate to a well-defined community."

3. AIR NEW ZEALAND GRAB-A-SEAT

- Twitter name: grabaseat.
- Followers: 11,700.

An account focused on pushing out the daily deals promoted by Air New Zealand on its Grab-a-Seat website. The account is an example of how Twitter is proving effective for limited-time promotions.

4. BUSINESS TALK

- Twitter name: BusinessTalk.

- Followers: 9200.

Another "conversational" account used to enhance and promote the related website, focused on business issues. "They have an agenda, but it's very much about their community," says Osborne.

5. AIR NEW ZEALAND

- Twitter name: flyaimz.
- Followers: 8900.

Air New Zealand's effectiveness as a social media proponent is demonstrated by its achievement of having two Twitter accounts among the top 10. FlyAirNZ is the company's corporate voice, as opposed to grabaseat, which is focused on promoting deals. Stadler says companies may need multiple Twitter accounts, in the same way they promote separate sales, support, and information email addresses on websites.

6. TOURISM NEW ZEALAND

- Twitter name: purenewzealand.
- Followers: 7100.

The tourism marketing agency has a particular focus on technology-savvy travellers and the popularity of its account also demonstrates how Twitter can be used to engage an international audience.

7. NZ MUSIC COMMISSION

- Twitter name: newzealandmusic
- Followers: 5600.

The internet has proven a valuable tool for promoting local music and this account shows that concept can be extended through the use of Twitter.

8. VODAFONE NEW ZEALAND

- Twitter name: vodafonenz.

- Followers: 5200.

"Through their Twitter account Vodafone represent their brand quite nicely," says Osborne. "It's not all about customer service, it's not all about their product. It's about engaging that audience with something that's fun or exciting, which fits with the brand. So they are portraying the brand in the light they want to through Twitter."

9. EVENTFINDER.CO.NZ

- Twitter name: eventfinder.
- Followers: 4800.

Stadler says an account like Eventfinder, which pumps out information on event information published on its website, runs the risk of becoming "a little bit dry if all you do is push out event information". He says the account has the ability to lighten itself up by breaking up the stream with a variety of related tweets. "It seems to be quite a one-way conversation at the moment, but it would be extremely easy to change that into more of a two-way [conversation] by gathering information from followers with questions such as: 'How did you like specific events, can we pass on any suggestions to the promoters?'"

10. DATING ADVICE

- Twitter name: datingadviceNZ.
- Followers: 4800.

Like DIY Dad and BusinessTalk, a Twitter account offering its community of interested users a change to interact with the brand in a conversational style. Interaction is easier for accounts linked to this type than for more "corporate" accounts, says Osborne.