A Beginners Guide To Marketing With Hashtags

Hashtags seem to be everywhere these days. They have become a mainstream part of the culture, but lots of people are still trying to understand exactly what they are, how you use them, and why they exist.

As a marketer you might be left wondering,

"How am I supposed to use hashtags for my business? - and should I invest the time to figure it out?"

Let's start at the very beginning and then review everything you need to know to get up to speed on this topic. According to Wikipedia:

*A **hashtag** is a word or an unspaced phrase prefixed with the number sign (#). It is a form of metadata tag...Words in messages on microblogging and social networking services such as Twitter, Facebook, Google+ or Instagram may be tagged by putting "#" before them.*

What's all that mean?

Hashtags are the card catalog system of the 21st century - a method for tagging and then
searching for topics
- Jason Miles

Although hashtags are usually viewed through the specific social media platform you're used on, most commonly Twitter and Instagram, they can also be viewed in a consolidated way via a third party viewer tool.

Exercise: Look At A Hashtag Viewer
The best way to begin to understand how hashtags work is to go look at them through an easy to use viewer tool. A viewer tool will allow you to see the big picture. You can look up any hashtag and see how it is being used.

I personally like statigram - recently renamed www.iconosquare.com. It's free and easy to use. To give it a whirl simply go to www.iconosquare.com and look for the search box in the top right corner. Simply type in a hashtag you're curious about and look at the results. For example, type in "Pixiefaire" or "libertyjaneclothing". Now try your brand, name, or other names you're interested in.

Can You Do Marketing With Hashtags?
You can use hashtags for sales and marketing purposes - and that is the real powerful part about them. How? Let's look at a simple hashtag marketing plan that you can implement without too much technical expertise.

A Hashtag Marketing Plan: Let's outline a basic hashtag marketing plan. Here are the steps:

Step #1 - Claim & Promote
The first and most obvious step is to begin using a hashtag in association with your work. You simply "claim it" by using it. There is no formal process and no one can truly own a hashtag. It can be your company name, your product name, a slogan, or just about anything else you want to use. Just realize anyone can use it.

Begin including the hashtag(s) in your product listings, on your website, in your "about me" information, in your newsletters, and everywhere else your customers, fans, and followers might find it. The success of your hashtag promotion efforts will be directly tied to your brand power and influence. Much loved brands will get significant engagement. Unknown brands will get very little engagement. But the good news is that even a few enthusiastic fans can make a big difference!

Step #2 - Track & Evaluate Usage

Use a free viewer tool, like Iconosquare.com to track and evaluate how your followers are using the hashtags you promote. You might be surprised to

find a new level of community involvement in a fun and easy way.

Step #3 - Thank Your Hashtag Users
Since most hashtags are used on Twitter and Instagram - you'll want to get an account on each of those platforms. Then simply like, comment or retweet the posts that include your hashtag(s). When you thank and acknowledge people for using your hashtag you reinforce the user behavior and join their conversation online.

Step #4 - Add Hashtag Content Into The Sales Process
When you can include your community's hashtag'ed content into your sales process then you've hit the "big leagues" of Hashtag marketing. This is referred to as UGC, (User Generated Content). Using UGC will become a common practice over the next few years - and it's something every online seller should begin to understand and explore. You can see how we are doing that on site www.pixiefaire.com both on the homepage and on our Inspiration page.

There are free tools available with limited functionality that you can use - and even website themes that now have this type of basic functionality built in.

The only tool we've found that allows you to integrate UCG into the product level sales process is Readypulse. Full disclosure - I'm honored to serve as an Advisor to them and we couldn't do what we're doing on www.pixiefaire.com without them. We are seeing exciting results and as we continue to learn new things about UGC I'll continue to write about the journey. There are still lots of unanswered questions in our minds about how to do all of this, but it's fun to begin to see it all come together.

Do You Have A Question About Hashtags?
Leave a comment and tell us what you think - or ask a question about hashtags!