Context for the Great Debate

In today's landscape where brand communications are becoming increasingly globalized due to waning digital boundaries, the issue of whether to approach social media via global or local programs (particularly with regards to Facebook fan pages) has recently plagued brands working towards defining an effective social strategy. In order to answer the question of whether a local vs. global social strategy is more effective for a particular brand, brand leaders and communicators must ask themselves what they are trying to achieve with their social presence, whether it be feedback on products or services, brand awareness, sales, improved perceptions of the brand, etc.

The Evidence: Attracting Fans v. Keeping Fans Engages

Until now, one of the most straightforward ways that brands have been evaluating the success of their fan page is simply the number of fans they have accumulated. However, this metric is now increasingly recognized as too simple. Over the last few months, Millward Brown has undertaken a research project to determine the true 'value of a fan', and have created a measure called FanIndex – a reflection of numerous factors, including willingness to recommend the page, favorability of the page, etc. The study identified a correlation between number of fans and quality of the fan page, where larger fan pages had, on average, a higher rating. However, size was not a guarantee that fan pages would generate a high 'FanIndex' rating, as some pages with a small fan base rated quite highly. These findings indicate that, while a page with quite a large fan base (usually a global page) may prove valuable and engaging, the size of the page is not necessarily indicative of its value.

The second part to addressing the most effective approach to defining a local vs. global social strategy is rooted in how we keep fans engaged, and the importance of this aspect vs. simply attracting them. In a recent report, SocialBakers Analytics tracked and compared engagement statistics for a number of brands with active Facebook pages operating in both a global and local capacity. The overwhelming finding revealed that local pages gained approximately three to five times more engagement than global pages, much more wall activity, and more relevant and local wall discussions.

Implications

While the issue of determining a local vs. global approach can be defined in many ways, the core of the issue is that the value of a page to a consumer is only as strong as the impact it creates with them. Getting consumers to follow a brand is step one, however, if content isn't relevant the engagement can actually negatively impact a consumer's association with the brand. Engagement must be the primary measure considered when examining the 'effectiveness' (or value) of a page. Evidence seems to imply that brands which operate in, and pay attention to, their local markets have a greater opportunity to boost fan engagement and activity.

Additionally, with the advent of Social Media Management Systems (SMMS) brands are able to create and manage a consistent brand presence across multiple pages, whether globally or locally. Brands have seen an increase in efficiencies with regards to content development, workflow, and resource, while users are afforded a consistent experience and journey through every page.

Settling the Debate

The global vs. local fan page debate must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis in the context of four core questions. What role does the brand page play in achieving brand objectives? Is the brand global or local in nature? Does the brand have the resources to facilitate? What technology is required? Should a brand take the time to evaluate the answers to these questions, as well as what they wish to achieve with their social presence, they should be afforded a clearer idea of whether a global or local social strategy will be more effective for them.