

While they enter with some inherent advantages, nonprofit organizations still face the same challenge of building a membership for a private social network. Sometimes, a cause alone is not enough to get people involved. To draw in members, tailor features to the audience being targeted. The audience for networks on antipoverty or veterans support, for example, might be very different. Further, use general-purpose social networks (such as Twitter or Facebook) as beachheads to gather up a more specific following, and bring them back to the private network.¹⁰¹ In this way, a general social network presence can be used to serve the particular goals of the organization.

The Future of Social Networks

Interest in social networks has grown at a constantly increasing pace since 2005, with no indication of tapering off.¹⁰² Although Facebook dominates the landscape today, Google entered the fray in early June 2011 with its network, Google+, which has grown at a rapid pace, reaching an estimated 50 million members by October 2011.¹⁰³ Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google, believes that there is room for multiple social networks and for more cooperation among them.¹⁰⁴ This belief is evidenced by the many niche social networks that have survived and even thrived by catering to specific interests. One such example is Ravelry, which targets people with a passion for knitting, or My Own Car Show, which caters to hot-rod and antique car enthusiasts. These and other targeted social networks illustrate the power of specificity in audience selection.

However, Google+ and Facebook want to capture the masses, not small target markets. Schmidt is on record saying that Facebook with its 750 million users may well have too many entrenched users to face serious competition, but Google+ seems well positioned to give Facebook a run for its money.¹⁰⁵ Even though large networking sites are not always the best place to invest a marketing budget, they set social media trends and thus are worth developing a presence on.¹⁰⁶ Whatever the outcome, marketers who follow the precepts set forth in this chapter are likely to be the biggest beneficiaries of the competition and growth in social networking.

EXERCISE CASE STUDY

Anvil Media Uses LinkedIn for Brand Building^{††}

Introduction

Compelling content, strategic connection building and search engine optimization (SEO) are just a few tools that Anvil Media president Kent Lewis uses to gain prestige via LinkedIn.

^{††}Smith, Kimberly (2010). "LinkedIn Success Stories: How 11 Companies Are Using the Global Networking Site to Achieve Their Business and Marketing Goals." © MarketingProfs LLC. Reprinted with permission.

History

Founded in 2000 by [Kent] Lewis, Anvil Media, Inc., is a search engine marketing agency specializing in SEO, pay-per-click management, search engine marketing public relations, online reputation management, and social media marketing services.



Kent Lewis of Anvil Media

Challenge

Lewis [wanted] to continuously cultivate both his firm's reputation and his personal brand.

Strategy

To proactively connect with prospective clients and partners, Lewis requests introductions from existing contacts and uses the "People you may know" feature on his LinkedIn homepage. His goal is not to make as many connections as possible, but to make quality connections. The main reason Lewis makes an effort to grow his contact base is to "flatten out the six degrees of separation" to the people he wants to meet.

A high number of recommendations was a priority for Lewis, however. "Recommendations show quality and depth," he says. To strengthen his profile, Lewis reached out to associates from every line item of his experience with a request for recommendations. Today, his profile boasts 84 recommendations and covers every position but the oldest listed.

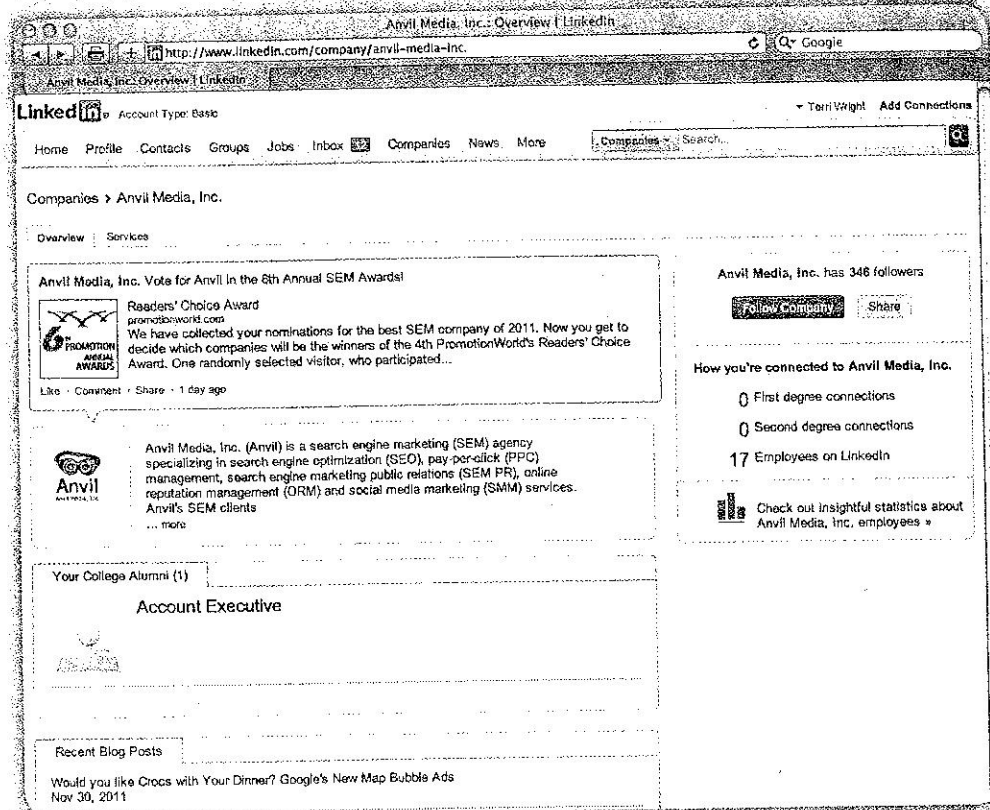
Lewis also optimizes his profile by incorporating keywords so that his information shows up in both LinkedIn and Google search results. For example, he lists every bit of experience he's ever had—every board membership, group affiliation, award received, you name it—and includes pertinent keywords in each description. He also lists key industry terms under his "Interests." "Social sites are highly trusted by Google," Lewis says, "and you can gain control of your brand through profile optimization."

LinkedIn lets users list three links on their profiles, so Lewis uses this space to describe each link with industry keywords instead of the default titles of "my website" or "my portfolio."

He also leverages applications, such as SlideShare, WordPress, and Events, to showcase his expertise and keep his name prominently featured on connections' homepages. "SlideShare on its own is a great SEO/brand management tool, but it's also good for marketing when others see your slides," he says.

His Twitter profile is synced, too. He uses it to broadcast interesting industry news. Lewis says he gets as much (and sometimes even more) interaction with these posts on LinkedIn as he does through Twitter.

LinkedIn Polls is another application he leverages. His network is notified each time a new poll is launched. Plus, Lewis takes the opportunity to share both the initial



Anvil Media's LinkedIn Profile

feedback and final results he collects from respondents—which exhibits credibility and his understanding of the marketplace.

Perhaps the most advantageous resource Lewis uses for establishing authority is LinkedIn Answers. He searches for questions relevant to his line of work; then answers anywhere from three to 10 per week. So far, 28 of his responses have been nominated as “best answers,” which means he usually appears as one of the top five experts in his contacts’ networks. “Create messaging so compelling that people are likely to share it, vote it a ‘best answer’ and contact you directly,” Lewis says. “When someone reads your answers and then takes the time to learn about who answered it, they’re already sold by that point.”

Results

Lewis’s responses on LinkedIn Answers, supported by various elements of his profile, have been instrumental in positioning both himself and Anvil Media as highly competent. Lewis reports that LinkedIn is one of the top three sources of qualified leads for the agency. It has helped him identify and connect with key clients, such as the firm’s largest one, a global book retailer. It also helped him secure a keynote speaking engagement at SEM4SMB in Austin, Texas, and aided in the development of an important partnership with an out-of-state company, for whom he may become a strategic advisor.

Courtesy Anvil Media, Inc.

Review Questions for Anvil Media Case Study

1. How did connecting with quality industry contacts bridge the gap between Anvil Media and the people they would like to meet?
2. Why should one seek recommendations from people on LinkedIn?
3. Why is it important to optimize a LinkedIn profile with keywords?
4. What is the value of adding applications such as SlideShare and WordPress to a LinkedIn profile?
5. How can LinkedIn Answers be used to showcase a person's expertise to a broader audience?

Notes

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