Facebook Branding: an Emerging Yet Critical Trend in Palestine

In the social media era, Facebook branding is currently used by various businesses and is actually getting more people involved since marketers have realized the necessity to be digitally visible. The question remains, however, as to whether Facebook branding in Palestine is being done correctly and strategically.

By Ahlam Tarayra

A s an active Facebook user for more than five years now, I have been able to see how people, as individuals and groups, have been utilizing the organic reach on Facebook (FB) to promote themselves and their businesses. I have, however, also seen how it is becoming harder for a post to gain exposure in FB News Feed given that there is now far more content being published than there is time to absorb it, according to FB experts and analysts. These observations cannot be actually seen by everyone on Facebook. I have found myself several times wishing that an important post had been posted at a different time of day when more people would see it and engage. Not everyone can really realize when the right time to post a story is, or even what the right way to post it is. Marketing and promotion on Facebook is indeed critical to utilize this giant ubiquitous network called Facebook.

Since Facebook's rise to popularity throughout Palestine in the late-2000s, marketing specialists have realized the importance for their organizations to be visible there. To website developer companies' chagrin, many organizations—whether profit-making companies or non-profit institutions, have relinquished their website branding to FB branding, which has consequently affected the website design and management industry in Palestine, as reported in Al-Quds Newspaper's information technology index. However, we cannot be sure that marketing specialists in Palestine are considering social media marketing, particularly on Facebook, as a strategic approach. Therefore, the trend of FB branding can be only temporary and is just a symptom of "Facebook fever." Recent statistics from Sharek Youth Forum illustrates that 1.5 million Palestinians have accounts on Facebook, and one million of them are 15-29 years old. Taking these numbers into account, one can conclude that FB branding, if integrated with other tools, would formulate fruitful efforts, as can be seen through the successful social media marketing campaigns that some organizations and companies have achieved recently.

Facebook marketing, with other online and offline marketing tools woven into the mix, can be seen as an efficient and effective tool that would remarkably serve organizations developing an attractive and engaging digital presence as part of the total customer relationship management (CRM) efforts. I have actually attended opening ceremonies of new businesses, events of local and

STILL STANDING!

ALL WITH GAZA

international organizations and also decided to try restaurants and coffee shops after seeing advertisements only on Facebook. Most of these advertisements were organic (i.e. free content), as I could see them through other friends' engagement on Facebook. Hence, I could hear about them without being a "liker" of those particular Facebook pages. Another interesting thing about FB marketing that is rarely found in other marketing tools is the customers' direct engagement with the service or product provider. I see this more often on the FB pages of consultancy and training organizations, restaurants and cafés, and fashion stores. People ask about the availability of a product/service at certain times and places, and also give feedback, whether to other customers or to the business owners, on a product or service that they tried.

Nevertheless, the time for Palestinian-based organizations to pay money for extensive visibility on Facebook is in fact approaching. While I am not willing to get involved in the debate of whether FB branding is less or more expensive than other traditional marketing tools, I would highlight the fact that as more people are joining Facebook and more pages are being promoted in Palestine, it is becoming fundamental to sustain an outstanding digital presence.

I remember the first time I saw an advertisement of a FB page for a Palestinian politician whom I would never have thought to look up on Facebook. I could observe the rising number of people joining his page—information that was attached to the ad itself—and when I asked some friends why they had joined since they have never been fans of his, they simply said that since he was paying advertising money to get us listen to him, we should at least see what he has to say.

Although this did not give me enough reason to "like" his page, it definitely taught me that paid ads can increase marketers' share of the audience on Facebook.

Since social media marketing in Palestine is still in the early stages, and yet to be accepted as a strategic approach (rather than a passing trend), now is the time for private sector and civil society organizations to start developing their online marketing strategies on a solid and sustainable basis. Developing a solid strategy requires an organization understands the core elements to be applied in order for them to obtain the benefits of social media marketing. As one of the three Search Engines Optimization (SEO) pillars since 2013, social media marketing is also believed to be a necessity rather than a luxury in order for organizations to be in the loop of the emerging trends in the marketing industry. Marketers within organizations quickly realize that engagement in social media requires a lot of effort to reach a branded social presence that can help build word-of-mouth momentum to gain customers, mentions, and shared links. This presence can be maintained through specialized marketing companies that can help marketers within profit-making companies, non-profit organizations, and group or individual businesses to achieve their online marketing goals.

Ahlam Tarayra is an Operations Manager at Smarts Events and Marketing in Ramallah after eight years working in the non-profit sector as a humanitarian professional. As a blogger on "Modern Discussion"—a well-known Arabic regional website that is linked to Facebook and Twitter pages—Ahlam has learnt the significance of social media marketing in the era of the non-stop digital revolution.