

What do The Hunger Games and Social Media Have in Common? You Have to Fight to Survive!

In recent weeks the film “The Hunger Games” has not only worked up teens and tweens into a sweet frenzy, it has worked up social media enthusiasts into one as well. The film, which premiered last March, opened to staggering numbers at the box office, due in large part to an ingenious social media strategy.

Even if you haven’t the slightest idea who Katniss and Peeta are, there is much to be learned from “The Hunger Games” strategy: to win the *game* of social media you have to have a clear and focused multi-channel campaign that targets a very specific audience.

It’s a Numbers Game

Before the premiere of “The Hunger Games,” the film’s marketers launched an all-out social media attack, covering Twitter, Facebook and the blogging platform Tumblr. All social channels were set up in such a way as to allow fans to customize their own experience, thus enabling true user engagement.

By opening weekend the staggering numbers showed the campaign’s efforts had truly paid off. Over 3 million digital conversations surrounding the movie took place, most of those, not surprisingly, on Twitter. Film fans took to the media outlets in droves raving about the film and sharing personal insights and experiences which led to box office records.

How do these numbers stack up against the social campaigns for other teen fantasy films like “Twilight: Breaking Dawn” and “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hollows Part2?” According to the analysis company Fizziology, nearly twice as many digital conversations centered on purchasing tickets early for “The Hunger Games” as did for the other two films. Also, 4% of the social media buzz for “The Hunger Games” was about seeing midnight showings - twice as much as for the film “Twilight.”

These numbers should be a case study for any other studio planning on incorporating social media into the launch of a new film.

Secrets to Success

All successful social media campaigns follow certain rules. For starters, the campaign should be geared toward a very specific target audience. It's not enough to guess, you need to know your target market and know them intimately in order to create the kind of engagement that will hold their attention. The minds behind "The Hunger Games" campaign focused on their target audience: teens and tweens. They hung out where teens and tweens hang out – mainly, social networking sites - and used specific strategies tailored to this age group that would not have been successful with an older crowd.

Secondly, winning social media campaigns are more like digital fine wines than cups of instant coffee; time and patience create a brew that delivers a powerful punch. The campaign for "The Hunger Games" began almost a year before the opening weekend, and it was this slow and steady momentum, this orchestrated audience tease, that led to an eventual frenzy.

Finally, what makes the success of "The Hunger Games" campaign such a lesson is not the numbers but the creativity and innovation behind those numbers. The marketing was actually not marketing so much as creating memorable and personal moments through online gaming, video and social events. This brilliant strategy leveraged the already-enthusiastic audience and brought about the record-breaking opening weekend.

Live in "This Moment"

Like any marketing effort, success is based first and foremost on the ability to track your attack and make adjustments as needed. In the case of the campaign for "The Hunger Games," the marketers used the tracking platform **thismoment.com** which allowed them access to real time data and the ability to tweak the campaign when necessary based on dynamic customer input.

The Flip Side

As compelling as the success of "The Hunger Games" social media campaign is, not everyone is eager to give credit where credit may or may not be due. What many social media enthusiasts have forgotten is that "The Hunger Games" was originally a book; a book that spent 100 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list. It should be posited that the social media campaign simply leveraged an already loyal following of a very popular book.

If there is a moral to “The Hunger Games” story and a lesson to be learned by all brands who seek to extend their market reach, it is that in order to have a successful social media campaign you need to first have a product or service that people can easily get behind. Then, you need to engage with your market of supporters in creative and innovative ways and leverage their enthusiasm to spread your brand’s message.