

Playing the Virtual Game

ArabAd met with **Eastline Marketing**, an A-Z online agency, to discuss the various strategies being employed with the aim of adding value to any brand that crosses their way.



Marc Dfouni

What's the edge of a company like yours over the international digital arm of big ad networks?

Marc Dfouni: Over the past seven years we've been gathering extensive user data to bring value to our services. Our edge is local and regional market intelligence that gives both clients and advertisers the opportunity to optimise their marketing expenditures and increase conversion rates.

In your opinion, how far behind do ad agencies in the region stand in the understanding and adoption of social media?

Marc Dfouni: Ad agencies are still adopting an offline advertising model to an online advertising medium and that will eventually not stick in the long run. Digital and social media have their own rules and ad agencies should learn to play the virtual game accordingly.



Wissam Badine

Do you think digital specialist shops form a big threat to the full-service ad agency's role as lead marketing voice? And do you get to service ad agencies or pitch against them, as some say Social media cannot be a silo; to truly leverage the power of the channel, it must be integrated with a brand's total communication programme. What's your stance?

Marc Dfouni: We consider ourselves an A to Z online marketing agency and not a digital specialist shop and some businesses such as e-commerce based websites count solely on us to drive sales. Ad agencies need our services to cater to their clients' ever growing online marketing requests and we usually partner up with them to add value to their clients' global (360) marketing campaigns. An online marketing campaign can generate tremendous buzz and viral effect without any offline support, however, we always prefer

bridging between online and offline to increase brand equity and stay top of mind.

How would you describe the demand for social media marketing? Do clients usually know what they want or they just want to have a Facebook page with many likes and a Twitter account with loads of followers?

Marc Dfouni: Over the past seven years, we worked really hard to educate our clients about social media marketing and we still do. Clients were skeptical at first about the medium's efficiency but we always managed to convince them to try it out with a "test" budget and most of them did and most of them were surprised about the return on investment and consequently decided to invest a little bit more. Clients find it easy to justify a campaign's performance with KPI's such as the numbers of likes or the number of followers however, we know for a fact that quality is more important than quantity because the bottom line is to increase sales.

Why is Social media important for any business?

Marc Dfouni: Social media marketing is not recommended for

just "any" business, however, online marketing is important for "all" businesses for that it allows them to reach and connect to their consumers through the online and mobile mediums. Our job at Eastline is to recommend the right channels for our clients and ensure that their marketing budgets are depleted efficiently.

To clients who are still sceptic wondering if social media marketing does work, and how effective it is, what can you say?

Wissam Badine: Some clients are still skeptical whether they should have a presence on the social channels, fearing the fact of dealing with user crisis. However, the argument doesn't stand when we convince them that it is better to be aware, face and deal with such crisis on their own social presence rather than users writing about it behind their backs.

And what do you say to clients who think they can succeed with their social media strategy by hiring their own community manager?

Wissam Badine: We encourage our clients to hire their own community manager as an addition

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to their marketing team and we go out of our way to recruit and train someone for them should they require us to do so. That's the best model in our opinion. However, we always keep in touch with the resources that our clients hire to provide them with tactical trainings and consultancy.

How are the social media marketing efforts converted into tangible results? Are you able to measure the return on investment for clients' social media activities?

Wissam Badine: That is by far the most buzzing question among marketers today. Social media marketing efforts can be converted into tangible results only when a proper strategic approach is applied and that is summed up by three main marketing pillars:

- 1- Recruitment campaigns
- 2- Constant fan Engagement
- 3- Conversion Tactics

However, there is no doubt that social media activities' ROI are easier to quantify when they are bridged with offline activities.

Do you have any insightful facts and figures you could share?

Wissam Badine: The majority of the 'Like' sources of the pages we manage come from mobile devices. The top liked page category for females, living in Lebanon between the ages of 20 and 30 is Retail and Consumer Merchandise. The top liked page category for males, living in Lebanon between the ages of 20 and 30 is Services & Products. The average cost per fan in Lebanon for a Facebook page through advertising is \$0.40.

What are the top five platforms used by marketers, and which one is leading the pack?

Wissam Badine: In Lebanon, Facebook is leading the pack followed by YouTube in terms of the most data consumed then Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and Google +.

What are some of the projects you've recently undertaken?

Marc Dfouni: Our most recent project is called Sweepzapp.com, a self-serve platform developed in-house that allows users to create Sweepstakes (draw) and Instagram

promotions on their Facebook pages in just minutes. Since budgets are scarce in a tough economy, we thought to provide small to medium business as well as individuals a platform where they can leverage the power of Facebook's viral effect, gather a marketing database and

increase their Likes through an affordable, user friendly platform. Although this product targets Lebanese users, it is aimed to be leveraged around the globe. ■

Establishing Relevance

Martin Yofre, Business Director of FP7 sister agency, Momentum elaborated on how the agency is integrating both traditional and digital strategies to enrich the overall look and feel of the brands they service.

How did the social media explosion change the way you do business?

Social media has given us a new playground for experimentation and innovation. By its very nature, social media is dependent on the concept of trust and credibility. People trust their social networks more than they trust brand communication. Linking brands to influencers automatically links those brands to a set of values that people buy into. Therefore this has changed the way we conduct business in that our approach is more considered, our targeting is narrower and our content is more relevant.

How easy is it to find in this part of the world strategic digital leaders?

Finding the right talent is always challenging. Today, finding a strategic digital leader is as difficult as finding a strategic Creative Director or Account Director.

Do you think digital specialist shops form a big threat to the traditional ad agency?

Should the 'Traditional' ad agency be worried about the digital specialists? Not at all. We are living in an era of integration where the success of a brand communication campaign is achieved by integrating capabilities offered by both traditional and digital agencies working together. The gap between the two has narrowed dramatically often overlapping in terms of capability.

What do you say to clients who think they can succeed with their social media strategy by hiring a community manager or a digital strategist within the company?

Those are two very separate jobs. A digital media strategist – I think all clients should have a senior digital strategic resource. He or she should be a



communications professional who can speak the language of technology and facilitate the agency's work on behalf of the brand.

In terms of where to best house a community manager, my recommendation would be in one of two places: the ad agency or the PR agency. These are the two entities that communicate regularly with the target and have been doing it for decades. This is where the content is created, the key messaging is established and the tone of voice is an everyday practice.

Could you please tell us more about the social media projects you've recently undertaken or share a specific case study?

One of our proudest case studies that won us a Gold Effie in 2012 was for Subway's Ramadan Social Media promotion, in the UAE. Ramadan is a time when sales are typically down and the typical Ramadan themes saturate our markets. We took an alternative approach and capitalised on something core to the product, namely inches. Then tied those inches to togetherness. Since we were targeting expatriates, and since Dubai is largely an expatriate market, we brought distanced families closer together through a Facebook application, creating the world's first ever Virtual Ramadan Iftar table. Buy a Subway platter, get a code that gives you access to the app on Facebook, and invite six friends from anywhere in the world. Every platter purchased adds six inches to the world's longest virtual Subway sandwich. The longer the sub gets, the more Subway donates to a local charity on behalf of the customer. People not only signed up, but actively engaged with the brand on Facebook, and for the first time during Ramadan, we were able to secure a 9% increase in sales.

What are some of the difficulties you may be facing in a market like Lebanon with regards to digital communication?

Typically, a client's biggest fear and reservation, both in Lebanon as well as outside, is the fact that someone can say something negative. And indeed they can. Filtering all negative comments out will lose the brand its credibility. My advice to that is pretty simple. Accept it, address the issue raised and move on. People are not expecting you to be perfect. Believe in what you're selling, believe in your story, believe in what you stand for, and remain true to it. If you haven't seen the 'Our Food, Your Questions' case study by McDonald's, check it out at yourquestions.mcdonalds.ca. It will give you the confidence you need to take the chance.

