

BY EDDY GOLDBERG

Social SKILLS

MARKET LOCALLY WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media marketing has evolved from the new kid on the block to its more proper role as a part of a brand's overall marketing strategy—a large part that is still expanding—much as the Internet did since business first “discovered” it in the mid-1990s.

Social media is still a moving target—as are its mobile customers. But franchises are learning to use it in their advertising and marketing campaigns more effectively with each passing year. We asked a dozen brands what they're currently doing with social media, their plans for 2018, and how they educate and train franchisees to uphold brand standards as they employ it as a local marketing tool. We broke out two mini-case studies from forward-thinking franchisees (see page 44), along with comments from marketers at those dozen brands.

In researching this story, we received more responses than we have room for here. In the months ahead, look for in-depth stories from each brand in our Franchise Consumer Marketing Report newsletter. (Subscribe at franchising.com, Newsletters.)

Let's get to it!

Training, training, training

“Social media is a big part of our marketing strategy for all our franchisees,” says Patrick Conlin, senior vice president at Wayback Burgers, which has 135 units open in the U.S., 6 more overseas, and 20 under construction. Social media training for new franchisees begins during their

week-long initial training at Wayback University. The training includes all the usuals—operations, accounting, etc.—with marketing as a day-long session. “The feedback we get is that day is the most enjoyable part,” says Conlin.



“The first thing we do is set up a Facebook page for each restaurant, and we act as administrator,” he says. New franchisees are shown how to add a post on their own, and franchise coordinators (30 stores each) are in contact with them at least once a week. “Once they open their restaurant, the coordinator goes over what the franchisee wants to post. The coordinator can do that for them or walk them through it if they're capable on their own. In addition to what the franchisees do, we do national Facebook posts at least 3 to 4 times a month.” The brand also uses Instagram nationally, but doesn't push franchisees to do it themselves.

Locally, franchisees are encouraged to do fundraisers and participate in their

communities—and post about it. If they don't feel comfortable doing it themselves, “They can send us the pictures and we can do Instagram for them,” says Conlin. “We want to make sure it happens, because it's a really important part of our marketing.”

Digital asset management

“Our corporate strategy for social media is that the local voice is really the most important for driving foot traffic to our franchise locations,” says Monkee's Marketing Manager Nicole Powell. Monkee's, with 25 locations and plans to add four more in 2018, is a ladies boutique selling shoes, clothing, and accessories. With the brand's focus on fashion, she says, “Instagram has really been the driver of our business for the past few years.”

Powell, who joined the brand “before social media hit the franchise world by storm,” says that corporate only recently recognized the need to rev up its social media game to meet its franchisees' local needs. Previously, franchisees would



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submit requests for social media materials, which were handled in-house. “With social media so ephemeral, there’s a sense of urgency, and they can’t necessarily wait a few days for our branded graphics,” she says.

To become more responsive to franchisees’ requests, Powell began to research digital asset management (DAM) systems. “We discovered a lot of amazing, robust ones, but the one key thing for us was simplicity,” she says. “We wanted something that would be very easy for our store owners to use, even on the go. Our franchisees are boutique owners so they travel a lot.”

She selected We Brand, which she described as a “very new” company. The upside was that the company was willing to partner with her before the public release of its DAM product, allowing her to provide feedback as its features were finalized. “It gives us the ability to provide branded assets so our owners can show their local spirit and personality, but make sure they do it within our guidelines,” says Powell. “It’s perfect for our small-business owners.”

One thing she found is that Monkee’s customers value authenticity over slickness. “Our local social media may not always have professional pictures and may not always be perfect, but that authenticity is what’s always important to our customers,” she says. And for the franchisees, so is speed, and the new DAM system makes it possible to provide real-time branded graphics that franchisees can customize—and it’s accessible on any desktop, laptop, or mobile device, 24 hours a day.

The new system was launched September 1 to franchisees with a wide range of comfort (and discomfort) levels with new technology. The brand was founded in 1995, well before social media was even a thing. Powell’s solution was to train them individually, which is possible in a smaller system, as well as by recording a webinar and some mini-training videos: 30- to 60-second clips showing how to perform a specific task, from changing a font to changing a photo. That’s also available any time.

“We spent a lot of time testing and building out the system. It seems to be working very well for our owners,” she says. “This is a very big change, a disruption to how we’ve supported our franchisees, so it was very important to make sure they

were comfortable with the new system.” It also helped to show them how it will positively affect their business. “They’re savvy business people—scared of technology or not—and can see how it will improve their bottom line.”

Changes afoot

“For reasons that are readily apparent, social media plays an increasingly important role in the marketing mix of any branded foodservice concept with multi-unit operations, and Saladworks is no exception,” says CMO Steve McMahon. He says the role of social media at Saladworks is not



only expanding, it’s also evolving to support the emerging needs of both guests and franchisees as the brand evolves.

Saladworks recently began franchising again after an 18-month hiatus, following its acquisition out of bankruptcy by Centre Lane Partners in mid-2015 for about \$17 million. “We just started actively pursuing franchising again,” says McMahon. Most of the brand’s franchisees own single units, but that’s about to change if all goes as planned.

“While we’re not as far along from a franchisee standpoint, we are making changes in social media capability and capacity that reflect a strategic shift in our franchisee target,” he says. “Going forward, we’re focusing on larger, better-capitalized, multi-unit operators with multiple concepts, many of whom are Millennials. Like their consumer counterparts, they tend to be heavier users of social media themselves.”

To support this new mix of franchisees, the brand is consolidating all its social media pages, as well as its Google business listings, under a single corporate umbrella. This strategy, says McMahon, “will allow us to create a single look and

feel consistent with our brand positioning, while allowing for customizable content by those franchisees who have the capability and capacity (and marketing sophistication) required to establish relationships with consumers in social media.”

The brand also has reallocated all of its non-promotional spending to reach a redefined consumer target, “leading with social media messaging and allowing other media, like digital display, paid search, and even loyalty marketing, to play supporting roles,” he says.


Specifically, within the brand’s social media mix, he says Saladworks leverages different types of posts with different creative content to either build the brand or drive guest visits. It also uses continuous boosted posts on its pages to build the brand by activating different aspects of its brand positioning—for example, reinforcing choice and customization by showcasing the number of salad combinations guests can create from 65 ingredients and 17 dressings.

The efforts are already paying off. “We more than doubled our new loyalty member sign-ups this summer by promoting a special offer for new guests in dark posts in social media,” he says. “As with all of our digital media, we collect and capture the metrics we need from social media to make fact-based decisions, including impressions, CTRs, and in some cases, conversion rates.”

Time to hire?

“As of today, we control all social media profiles for our local markets at the national level. Our franchisees aren’t really engaged on a local basis in terms of execution,” says Scott Iversen, vice president of marketing at Toppers Pizza.

“That said, just today we extended an offer to someone to join our internal marketing team in the newly created role of director of social media and PR. This person will bring all leadership and execution of social media in-house versus how we currently use our lead ad agency for strategy and execution. We believe very strongly in the power of localized social content—so much so that we are making a big investment in this new person to lead it.”

For thoughts from more marketers on how they use social media for local marketing and how they enforce brand standards, see page 46. 

“I’m Sandy from Saladworks!”

In 2010, Sandy Webb left the corporate world to become a Saladworks franchisee. Two years later she opened her first in Dover, Del. She closed that one and today has one open in Middletown, Del., another about to open in Dover, and plans a third by 2020. She’s become one of the brand’s social media enthusiasts. “I had no background in using social media before,” she says. “People who know me were surprised how I embraced it.”

In August she created a Facebook page for her new store. Her first post “did okay,” she says, but her second one, with paid boost, really took off: 61,000 impressions—about 57,000 to 58,000 organic—and more than 8,000 post clicks. The paid boost, she says, produced only about 400 post clicks.

“I do think a lot of it is our crazy little state. People were sharing left and right, and that’s where the organic growth came from,” she says. “People are really excited. We were in the Dover Mall previously and people were singing our praises.”

Although she had a Facebook presence for her Middletown store, it was only in the past year that she really embraced it as a local marketing tool. “Before, I did some things just to keep up my visibility.” Now her Facebook feeds are integrated with Instagram, automatically feeding into that platform. She mostly posts visuals of salads and the salad case, has online contests, and gives away free food. “Customers love it,” she says.

Webb works hard to make social media work for her. She’s attended Facebook training; attends monthly meetings of a local think tank for women entrepreneurs; and learns every day from her employees, customers, and people she meets, both online and in person. “I kind of do random conversational surveys when I talk to people,” she says.

She also follows local feeds from towns, neighborhoods, and other groups in the area. “I stay on top of all of them. I can have a conversation with somebody I don’t even know and I can become a part of their lives on a real, personal level,” she says. “I’ve won business by staying up and following feeds. Everybody knows I’m ‘Sandy from Saladworks.’”

The other side of the coin, she says is the chance to field negative comments. “Even on my post that was so overwhelmingly successful, I had maybe five negatives,” she says. “Even when people post negative stuff, I love it. It gives me the opportunity to give a public response in a public forum so others who may be thinking the same thing can see it.” 



Local Posts Are the Best!

At Amphibious Holdings, which operates six Rockin’ Jump trampoline parks, the focus is on local postings—but with centralized training, guidance, and the goal of creating a consistent brand message across all its parks.

Like most, the company’s social media involvement began with Facebook, and later added Instagram, says Monique Perretti, vice president of sales and marketing. She will be introducing Snapchat geofilters this quarter and into 2018. The target demographic is two-pronged: parents (especially mothers), and the kids themselves. “Kids are on Snapchat. It’s about generating awareness,” she says.

Each month, a central team creates a monthly social media calendar that includes what she calls “generic posts.” For example, since there’s a frog in the brand’s logo, the parks celebrate National Frog Day in June. While the central team creates tweakable materials all the parks can use, “Local posts receive higher engagement than brand or generic ones,” says Perretti. Posting local events, she says, builds on what the central team

does and produces better results in local communities.

She encourages local franchisees to get involved in street fairs, ballgames, and other community events. “We want the local parks to go social themselves. Social media for family entertainment centers is not about just posting content, but engaging with guests as well,” she says.



On the local level, each park is responsible for events like birthday parties or other group activities. “We encourage the parks to take pictures and share them locally,” she says. This also goes for videos. Each park has a rock climbing wall, and one posted a video of kids climbing and shared it with the other parks. The key for local success, however, is not for other parks to use that video. “We really encourage people to make their own. The families and kids in that video tag it, so all of their friends see it and like it,” she says.

To keep everyone on the same page, Perretti created a best practices document to guide each park in the most effective ways to use social media. It establishes guidelines on how to maintain the same voice, respond to online reviews, handle complaints, and tips on how to share photos and videos. For instance, if a video is great—or not so great—she will let them know. “If they’re unsure, they’ll share it with me first,” she says.

To keep everyone current, she holds a weekly marketing call with all the parks, makes site visits, and has additional calls during the week with individuals. “So many of our parks are new. There’s a learning curve,” she says. “The sharing of information between the parks is what’s most beneficial,” she says. “I’m in constant dialogue with them.” 