

Maersk Line: B2B Social Media – It's Communication, Not Marketing

Case Analysis by Moira Krier

Introduction

Nina Skyum-Nielsen is slated to take over as head of social media at Maersk Line. She is replacing Jonathan Wichmann, and is anxious for the future. Her questions included what should she do next, what are Maersk Line's next social media steps, should she support Wichmann's proposal for scaling up, and should she integrate the social media operation into the marketing department.

Maersk Line is the collection of shipping and energy companies owned by Maersk Group. As of 2012, the Maersk Line employed over 25,000 people, across 325 offices in over 125 countries, and had a revenue of \$27 billion. Maersk defines their strengths as their global reach, financial strength, sustainability, talented employees, and drive to innovate. With their unique platform Maersk Line is the largest shipping company, and continues to grow in a variety of fields.

That growth continued when Maersk Line entered social media. Launching in the end of 2011, Maersk's entire social presence was launched, run, and managed by one person, Jonathan Wichmann. Fighting against the company's mindset that Maersk wasn't right for social media, and too boring to garner any interest, Wichmann spent half of his time on social media initially. By July 2012, he focused full time on social media, and in mid-2013, Wichmann finally earned the support of a community manager and product manager.

During this time, Wichmann set a precedent for the content on each of Maersk Line's social media accounts. Facebook lead the way in their social media expansion, shatin unique looks into Maersk's digital photo archive of ships, seascapes, and ports. By sharing the company's unique history as well as unique current activity. This also grew to launch the "container spotters," people who would capture photos of Maersk Line ships and share them with the page, who in turn shared them with their larger audience. These tactics attracted an interesting audience, made up 83-84% fans or enthusiasts, and only 15-17% customers. Facebook was also used for large scale news sharing, getting ahead of stories that were considered "bad press," taking control of the narrative before it went in a direction they didn't want it to go. Twitter was used for sharing industry news, as well as humanizing the brand by interacting with customers, employees, and fans. Instagram continued the container spotting tradition, using hashtags to connect the brand with the spotters. In 2013, Maersk Line became one of the strongest brands on Instagram. LinkedIn provided access to customers more directly, rather than fans. Wichmann developed a group call the Shipping Circle to share more advanced industry specific content, and connect with a niche group of customers in a more detailed and still personable way. Google+ was used in a similar fashion, but on a smaller, faster scale. Pinterest and Tumblr were both used to share photos and blog from both the company and it's employees. YouTube and Vimeo were used to develop synergies across business units. See Exhibit 1 for a tabular breakdown of Maersk Line's follow count across their social medias.

Situation Analysis

The situation surrounding Maersk Line and its social media has been analyzed in a SWOT analysis framework. The SWOT analysis identifies the internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as the external opportunities and threats of a firm.

Strengths

Maersk Line's strengths start at the largest possible level, in 2012 their revenue was \$27 billion dollars. Having a financially stable business means there is no requirement for immediate high performance results. The business has some room for leeway on growth, expansion, and testing when it comes to seeing what works and what doesn't for the social media.

Another strength of Maersk Line's social media is on a smaller scale, the staff working the social media department and their ability to produce quality, creative solutions. Having a small staff and an even smaller budget, Wichmann was able to produce incredible results in terms of following numbers. By working with a tight budget, he and his small team were forced to come up with the most creative use of their resources, which led to an incredibly high quality product, and a flexible process.

Another strength is Maersk's digital archive of over 14,000 photos of ships, seascapes, and ports. These photos are a strength in two different capacities, the first being it brings excitement and interesting content to the streams. Secondly, having this body of work to rely on helps reduce the amount of content that the social media team has to come up with for each day. By giving them a quality go-to, they can reduce the workload for daily content.

An interesting strength comes from the employees of Maersk Line using social media to connect with coworkers and family members. Using the different channels, the social media team has been able to share updates and news for different ships around the globe.

The final strength that Maersk Line has is addressing the negatives before they get out of control. Some say there is no such thing as bad press, but in reality there is, especially in the world of social media where a narrative can spin out of control in a matter of minutes. By addressing any problems, mistakes, or potential negative stories on social media, it increases trust and authenticity in followers.

Weaknesses

When it comes to weaknesses, Maersk Line does not have many, especially in regards to their social media. The few of note are skeptics and new leadership. There were many skeptics at a variety of levels at the start of Maersk Line and Jonathan Wichmann's foray into social media. Over time, both have seen immeasurable success, and earned the favor of the skeptics. That being said, there still are some who question the long term ability or longevity of this success. The second weakness of Maersk Line's social media is the change in leadership, especially after such a dramatic success. New leadership is always a risk, changing tactics, mentalities, and approaches to problems can lead to disaster if not carefully orchestrated. When it comes to a change after such a dramatic success, the risks are even more intense.

Opportunities

There are seemingly endless opportunities for Maersk Line's social media. The first of which is having over 25,000 employees in 325 offices, across over 125 countries. Having such a diverse company culture creates the opportunity to incorporate and share their stories throughout Maersk's following. Outside of direct features, another opportunity is encouraging employee social media by sharing, promoting, and featuring their related content on Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr. An interesting direction to take this in would be to open up Instagram 'takeovers' where employees take photos throughout their day, and post about their duties and interesting experiences that day.

Another opportunity presents itself in the company's key competitive advantages of reliability, simplicity, and focus on the environment. Maersk Line emphasizes these advantages outside of the digital world, why shouldn't the company promote and encourage it on the social media as well.

At this point, Maersk Line is using Twitter at a basic level. A big opportunity for Maersk would be to use Twitter to similar to the way that Dell's Social Listening Center works. Maersk should be monitoring both direct and indirect mentions of the brand on Twitter, to manage and resolve not just customer service questions, but fan questions as well. With that, Maersk is holding consistent to fit their approachable and personality-driven social media branding. On the whole Maersk needs to post on Twitter more frequently, and fielding questions is a great way to do that in an efficient and effective way. The container spotters are definitely a unique opportunity as well. While sharing their pictures is a great step, the social media department could take it further by using a Flickr album and a Facebook group for people shipping enthusiasts and active container spotters. The use of YouTube and Vimeo is also a potential opportunity. Instead of just using it for synergistic uses, but creating content for the masses would be an interesting new form of content to branch into. This could include interviews, tours of ship, tours of harbors, and more.

Additional content opportunities include a traveling mascot with engaging contest-like content, ship of the week, or employee written blog content from each person's unique perspective.

The final opportunity is the largest and most obvious, the opportunity to have a large budget and staff. With Wichmann's new proposal, the budget is increased to \$250,000 and potentially joining with the already existing marketing department. The new budget was created by decreasing print advertising, web banner advertising, and sponsorships. With that money, there are more people and dollars working to grow the social media initiatives, create new interesting content, and produce stronger data from the different medias.

Threats

While Maersk Line may not have many threats, they are incredibly significant ones. The is corporate interest. At face value, it seems great that the upper levels of the company are interested in the social media, when in practice, it's the exact opposite. With the corporate interest growing, there is less control, tighter restrictions, and more critical eyes who don't understand social media. For example, corporate interests may see Twitter as mainly for celebrities and frivolous, and push for less content. Less content on Twitter will reduce a main method that the company has for connecting employees to their families, connecting the public, educating the public, and reducing the overall scope of voice that Maersk has. Given that they control the budget, especially a large one, there is little power to say no.

Another threat is seemingly inevitable, copycats. Given the massive success that Maersk Line has seen, there is no question that it will be copied. It could be copied in practice by competitor shipping companies, or copied in theory by other B2B companies looking to jump ahead in their industries. This will eventually lead to the true downfall of Maersk Line's social media strength, especially if Maersk doesn't handle the third and final threat, not moving forward. The internet is constantly changing. What worked yesterday won't work today, and what worked today won't tomorrow. A company has to keep up, or get left behind. If Maersk is not constantly thinking forward, moving forward, and looking forward, the social media strength they have today, will dwindle into mediocrity.

Assumptions and Missing Information

There is a few pieces of information that would be necessary in order to provide a full, detailed recommendation. The first of which is the availability of paid posts or advertisements across platforms. Today in 2018, paid posts are available on all platforms. Five years ago though, the digital marketing space was very different, and it is not made clear which, if any, of the platforms have paid posts or advertisements.

Another important piece of information is the rates of engagement for each platform, in specific. Engagement rates are an average of interaction a page receives overall, or in a specified timeframe, divided by the total number of followers, then multiplied by one hundred. With an assumed margin of error, this percentage can be used to establish many things. This includes: brand growth overall, brand growth on a specific platform, brand engagement compared to competitors, content popularity, long term content performance, and more. Having this information would allow for a more specific recommendation, especially regarding the next steps for both Nina Skyum-Nielsen as well as Maersk Line. The engagement rate is assumed average, and recommendations are generalized to fit given information.

The final piece of missing information is the statistics of the social media areas that Maersk Line is in. A few questions come to mind with the lack of this information including: where to shipping competitors lie for social media, what are they doing, who are Maersk Line's biggest competitors on social media, and who are rising accounts with new and innovative content. With this missing information, the surrounding situation will be taken into account as it is minimally defined in the case, and the recommendations are generalized to fit.

Problem Definition

In the case of Maersk Line's social media, there are multiple questions that need to be answered for the problem. The first is regarding whether the social media operation into the marketing department. If the department is combined, there is potential for more employees, but a shared budget. If not, the lean is best ideology will continue, and the social department will continue to have a dedicated separate budget for their activities. The second problem is whether the new director Nina Skyum-Nielsen should support Jonathan Wichmann's proposal. As it stands, the proposal adds three additional employees, and tripling the current budget. Skyum-Nielsen's options include full support, no support, or altering the proposal. The third problem is regarding what Skyum-Nielsen should do next. As the new director, her first moves and decisions will set the tone for the rest of her term as head of social media. The fourth and final problem is regarding what the next move should be for Maersk Line's social media. There are a few different options, continuing with the same track that the company has been on, revamp the social media content and re-initialize from the ground up, or alter the current track while taking and adding different things.

Development of Alternatives

Given the situation, there are a handful of questions to address, each with alternative

1. Should Nina Skyum-Nielsen integrate the social media operation into the marketing department?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Should Skyum-Nielsen support Jonathan Wichmann's proposal for scaling up?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Altered
 - i. More
 - ii. Less
3. What should Skyum-Nielsen do next?
 - a. Full performance review
 - b. Prepare for hiring
4. What are Maersk Line's next social media steps?
 - a. Keep going on same track
 - b. Revamp entirely
 - c. Reduce low performers and introduce new content

Recommendation to Management

Regarding the question of whether Nina Skyum-Nielsen should integrate the social media operation into the marketing, it is my recommendation that no, the social media operation should not make the move at this time. The social media team doesn't have a need for the support of the marketing department, and the marketing department is not a particular strength of the company. Given the source of the new proposed budget, there is a chance that the marketing department just wants their budget back.

Regarding the question of whether Skyum-Nielsen should support Wichmann's proposal for scaling up, it is my recommendation that she submit an altered version of the budget proposal. Wichmann's proposal is very broad and includes a huge jump in resources that don't seem to be needed at this point in time. That being said, while the "lean is fun" mantra worked in the beginning, Maersk Line's social media cannot continue to grow with so few resources available to it. In specific I would recommend that the proposal be pared down to include 1 Social Media Lead, 1 Community Manager, and 1 Social Media & CCM Manager.

Regarding what Skyum-Nielsen should personally do next, it is my recommendation that she first institute a full performance review of social media activity. This includes previously posted content and content that was scheduled to go up in the next 10-14 days. By reviewing and analyzing how these posts perform in the short and long term, as well as how they are received by audiences will determine what the social media team should do and change.

Regarding what Maersk Line's next steps on social media should be, it is my recommendation that after the results of Skyum-Nielsen's content performance review, the social media team reduce low performing content to phase it out, expand high performing content, and produce new content. The low performing content is a waste of resources for the team, and it should be replaced as soon as possible. High performing content is already liked by fans and followers, and bringing that to the more frequently, the engagement rate of the social media channels will increase. New content should push boundaries and test to see what viewers like and dislike. When producing new content, the team should be open to ideas and opportunities, especially those outlined in the opportunities section of this analysis.

Appendix

Exhibit 1. Tabular breakdown of Maersk Line's follower count across their social medias.

Social Media	Follower Count
Facebook	400,000+
Twitter	81,000
Instagram	24,000
LinkedIn	48,000
Pinterest	702
Google+	1,266