

Justin gets social with Bent Rail Collection and kicks off social media presence for all brands

Leading the social media revolution for Fort Worth-based Justin Brands is Lisa Lankes, one of only two female executives in Justin's 131-year history. Lankes, the vice president of communications, licensing and social media, is first and foremost a communicator, who is now skillfully leveraging the latest technology of social media to connect with consumers.

Lankes took time out to look back at one of Justin's first forays into social media. It came in the summer of 2009 with the launch of Justin Bent Rail boots. The trendy line was directed to 18- to 24-year olds, a target demo which Lankes notes is notoriously hard to reach through "traditional" media, yet totally wired into social networks.

Putting their eggs nearly entirely in the social media basket, Bent Rail launched branded pages on Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and Blip.fm. They created the "I'm with the Band" promotion, inviting fans to follow the music of Justin's up-and-coming country music endorsees including the Randy Rogers Band, the Casey Donahew Band and Wade Bowen.

For a behind-the-scenes look at life on tour, band members posted backstage videos and random photos shot from the back of the tour bus. Out on the road, fans had opportunities to meet the bands and to see and purchase the Bent Rail products through special retailer tie-ins promoted exclusively through social media sites.

Quantify Results and Track Sales Growth

According to Lankes, the campaign was an unqualified success. The strategy focused on driving consumers to the deeper content on the brand website. Justin watched as an important indicator, clicks on the "Find a Retailer" tab, jumped by an astounding 213 percent. Website traffic increased over a period of five months by 116 percent and ultimately, the brand exceeded sales goals by 30 percent.

In the final analysis, the campaign benefited from a clear-cut strategy with well-defined goals. But more importantly, it all worked because Justin followed one of the most basic tenets of social media marketing and that is to engage the customer, rather than to do a hard sell. Justin invited the consumer along for the ride and on the way, Bent Rail fans got caught up following the music, the bands, and the boots they were wearing. The social media content was so fun and so authentic that people shared it, and they were excited enough about the boots to seek out the retailers that sold them.

Of course not everything the company did in regards to the Bent Rail campaign worked. "When we first launched Bent Rail, we set up a MySpace profile and our customers were not interested in interacting with us there. We shut that page down and the experience taught us that we have to be paying attention to where our customers are, and where they are moving to," says Lankes.

Success Rolling Out to Other Brands

Based on the Bent Rail success, Justin has since expanded their social media efforts to all brands including Justin, Justin Original Workboots, Tony Lama, Nocona and Chippewa. These days, Lankes reports that people of all ages are using social media. "We're actually seeing a fast rise in older consumers joining the community. As our following grows, so does the diversity of the interests of these consumers. We try to keep that in mind and vary the content and subject matter of our posts to reflect that."

On Jan. 1, 2011, the company will kick off a celebration for Tony Lama's 100th anniversary, driven by social media. It's a bit ironic to think that a product with a 100-year history will be marketed with such a new communications form, yet Lankes knows that it's just the place to engage customers.

Tony Lama "Oldest Boot Contest" on Facebook

To jumpstart the yearlong party, Tony Lama will host an "Oldest Boot Contest." Using a custom tab on the Tony Lama Facebook fan page, people will be invited to submit photos of their oldest pair of Tony Lama boots. As a reward for entering, all contestants will get a 15 percent rebate on the Tony Lama products. The top 12 finalists will be featured in a Facebook photo album and in a 2012 Tony Lama calendar and commemorative poster. The Grand Prize winner will win a monogrammed, made-to-measure pair of Signature Series Tony Lama boots and a trip to the National Finals Rodeo. Lankes intends to promote the contest on the brand's Facebook and Twitter pages. She'll also use e-mail blasts, mentions on the brand website and Facebook ads to tie it all together.

When asked to predict what's next for social media, Lankes says she's excited by location-based services such as Foursquare, Gowalla and Facebook Places, among others. "I think there's a real opportunity for our retailers' business there. We'll continue to look for ways to partner with our retailers—this is an ongoing priority. We've got our ear to the ground and are paying attention to what is going on in the marketplace. The one thing we know for sure is that this tool is ever-changing and evolving and we have to be prepared to catch the next wave."

BENT RAIL
Justin BOOTS

FOLLOW THE MUSIC
EXPERIENCE BACKSTAGE VIDEOS, INTERVIEWS & LIVE MUSIC **NOW**

BENT RAIL
Justin

ROADIES

Become a Bent Rail Roadie for free tickets, backstage passes, Bent Rail gear and boot discounts. It's free. **CLICK HERE**