

SQUEEZE Packs Now in 5 Varieties!



**10-Pack Carton Now
Configures to Gravity-Feed
Dispenser OR Tray Display
with Dynamic Pop-Up
Header!**

- ✓ Certified Organic
- ✓ Non-GMO Verified
- ✓ Gluten-Free Certified
- ✓ 1.15 Ounce Size
- ✓ Portable—on-the-go Snack
- ✓ Convenient—Dispense from Package
- ✓ Merchandise Anywhere



www.OnceAgainNutButter.com
(888) 800-8075

Social media is an imperative for brands today, and board members are the biggest high-profile advocates your co-op can have.



Facilitating Investment
in Food Co-ops
Since 1975.

Cooperative Fund
of New England



To discuss
investing or borrowing,
call 1-800-818-7833 or
visit www.coopfund.coop

Place your ad here

To advertise contact:
Dan Nordley 612/436-9177
dan@grocer.coop

Getting on the Train:

Social media and co-op boards

BY HOLLY FEARING

Picture this: A person stands on the platform of a train station, and as a train passes through the station she flashes a bright message, hoping everyone on the train will see it. On a second train, as it passes to the next station there's also a person inside each of the train cars giving the people in that car the same message.

On which train will more people get the message?

In this analogy, the sign on the platform is a brand's social media presence, and the individuals in the train cars represent the power that board members can have as ambassadors to share the co-op's messages on social media. I'm betting the second train will have more people who get the message, although a combination of the two approaches is the winning mix.

As scary as it may feel for both the co-op and its board members to have the expectation of board members being ambassadors of the organization on social media, it must also be recognized that not tapping into the power of

your co-op's biggest advocates carries equal or greater risk in terms of opportunity loss.

To ignore risk on either side of the social media coin would be foolish. Everything we do in the course of running the business of our co-ops has associated risk, and social media is no different.

Social media's dark side

It's smart, and prudent, to be informed and prepared for the dark side of social media. Often the source of discomfort starts with an unfamiliarity with the online platforms and fear of the public spotlight social media can shine on the business. Then there's the scary general hodgepodge of mistakes, controversies, disgruntled individuals, information breaches, policy or compliance issues, and even labor law violations to which social media can expose your co-op.

Understanding and accepting that these risk factors exist can help you mitigate the dangers.

Mistake magnification: Many years ago, social media opened the once-closed doors of communication between brands and individuals. It used to be a one-way conversation of the brand to the consumer. Today, it's a two-way communication street. It has taken many organizations years to come to terms with that reality. There's no doubt we all make mistakes, and at times social media amplifies those missteps.

Human error: Let's face it, we're human, and we mess up sometimes. We have good and bad days. It's possible one day our >

accounts could get hacked. And when you engage with the public in real-time, sometimes we just do or say the wrong things.

Legal/labor issues: The National Labor Relations Board has spent years looking at social media and workers' rights. They have maintained a few key points, including, "Employer policies should not be so sweeping that they prohibit the kinds of activity protected by federal labor law, such as the discussion of wages or working conditions among employees." Other legal issues reflect the privacy side of things, such as content ownership, intellectual property, defamation, discrimination, and harassment.

Reputation damage: With social media, you can't control everything that happens or what is said outside your co-op's walls. Your reputation is at risk of being damaged by consumers or members who are simply ticked off or have an axe to grind.

Bandwidth burnout: In order to keep your social media activity going, you need people, time, and resources to keep your strategy on track. It takes time to create content and a process for review by your marketing department (or person).

Absent ROI/strategy map: Not setting up solid goals for your social media strategy is risky because without them you don't have a focus or direction for your work. Your time, posts, and content should be able to be linked to a return on investment for the co-op.

Not doing social media: These days, not adopting a social media presence can be damaging to your reputation. A lack of social media presence can have a negative perception on your brand by members, employees, and even vendors. It also makes it harder for new and potential members to find out about you in the first place.

Okay—that felt good to get it all out. The risk is real. But when treated right, social media reveals an exciting bright side—and it can afford your co-op many priceless positives that outweigh risks.

Advocates for the brand

Social media is an imperative for brands today, and board members are the biggest high-profile advocates your co-op can have. Often, they are significantly connected to the co-op's community and other current or potential co-op members. Through empowering your board and arming it with skills to properly use and strategically execute on social media, your co-op's social media presence can be amplified tenfold.

If your co-op is questioning whether it is worthwhile to spend time connecting with members and potential members on social media, nearly every community on the planet has already answered that question with an emphatic YES! More than 2 billion people in the world are active users of social media today.

Here are five key strategies for ensuring the co-op's social media shines bright and for board members to safely amplify those messages.

1. Training and education. Security, insight, action, and results: effective training and education on social media leads to these ends. Everyone in the co-op benefits when everyone is on the same page, understands the strategic plan for social media, and is pulling in the right direction. Through tactical education sessions, board members and other co-op stakeholders are armed and empowered to share co-op messages, communicate with members, listen to the community, and watch the competition on social media.

Start with an assessment of board members' current comfort with and use of social media. Pick one or two of the more willing or savvy members to test a "social ambassador" pilot program on the board. From there, build a relevant training program that leads directors to the actions you want them to take, with plenty of "What's in it for me?" woven into the work you're asking them to do. Start small, show real examples, and provide tangible action steps that everyone can feel comfortable taking. All

along the way, make sure everyone knows the policies and rules...

2. Policies and rules of engagement. Creating a solid social media policy is absolutely essential for organizations using social media. This policy puts management, board members, and staff all on the same page. If you need an example of some good policies to model, search for "five terrific examples of a social media policy," and you'll see some excellent examples from organizations such as Adidas, L.A. Times, and others. The policy should state why you're doing social media, who's in charge of the platforms, the dos and don'ts of posting as an employee, and how to engage with members. All of this should be created hand-in-hand with your human resources department.

The policy is your co-op's roadmap for your social media activity as a marketing tool and an employee-engagement tool. Once it is completed, hold regular social media training sessions for all employees so everyone understands the rules of engagement and what's out of bounds as far as inappropriate items to post.

3. Dealing with negativity and escalation plans. Sometimes people are just ticked,

Fresh Solutions.

Better Value.

Secure and cost-effective payment processing solutions, designed to reduce risk and keep your co-op growing.

We have options to automate your in-house charge account program!





Call: 855.794.2602

Visit: www.thrivepay.us

have a bad day—or, honestly, you screwed up—and now they're angry. A lot of people use social media to vent their frustrations, and that's part of the social media game today: equal power and voice to consumers and brands. When it does happen, the best and most effective way to respond is to...RESPOND!

Members want to know they've been heard. The phrase, "We hear you and value your input," is very effective. When people do comment about the co-op, most of the time it's because they care and expect a lot from a brand they trust. You can come up with a handful of ready-to-go responses to cover the most common issues, so that you can quickly respond with something, then follow up soon with a more personalized response and resolution to the issue.

Board members should be aligned on an escalation plan, meaning they know who at the co-op to direct what issue to and feel comfortable responding to comments openly and transparently—because the co-op has their back and they have the co-op's. Which leads me to...

Understanding and accepting social media risk factors can help you mitigate the dangers.

4. Being transparent and genuine. This is where co-ops truly have the opportunity to shine. And by shine I mean differentiate themselves from the competition. If another brand is talking your co-op's mission and vision walk better than you are, you're doing something wrong. Often it's that you're trying to be all things to all people, which will leave you to be nothing special for anyone. Instead, as Socrates said, know thyself: meaning, know your niche—know what's most important to your co-op, know your voice, your message—and own it loud and proud!

As competition encroaches on the natural food space, it's never been more important to tell the co-op story or solidify unparalleled member loyalty. This is where you can ask for your board's

support in sharing the message. If your co-op has a message and your board members are agents of the co-op, they should embody that message and effort as well.

When you genuinely feel it, it shows. As a Willy Street Co-op board member, I am proud to share the co-op's messages and opportunities for the community to engage with or support us, as in our recent member bond drive. It was important to me not only to take that action, but also to encourage others to spread the message. In a recent Nielsen Global survey, 92 percent of people said they trust the recommendations of others in their social networks, and 70 percent said peer recommendations on social networks led directly to a purchasing decision.

5. Learning from others' successes and failures. As a co-op, it's important to remember you're not in this alone. And with social media, you're never far from friends. As a community of cooperators, we often say we succeed or fail together. So, when others fail, the best thing to do is learn from it and commit to not making that same mistake. And when others succeed, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Co-ops are sharers, and valuable insight is gained from examination of these successes. Social media is a great tool with which co-ops connect and network with other co-ops, general managers connect with other general managers, and board members connect with other board members. Many collaborative and networking groups are out there; you need only to join to begin seeing their value. Being there to support each other, to stay sane, stay motivated, stay positive, and keep going is the co-op secret sauce that not many other businesses can say flows so freely.

There you have it: the good, the bad, and the beautiful of social media for co-ops and boards. Only through a combination of signs at the station and talking on the train will the co-op's messages be heard often enough to get us where we're going. So keep doing the work, and get on board the train!

Want to talk about social media options for your co-op and board? Email me at hollyfearing@cdsconsulting.coop. □

FRUITS & VEGETABLES
Family-owned and operated growers and processors

snopac.com
snopac@snopac.com

Caledonia, MN