

Top US suppliers increase social media activity by 144% in 2015

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In December 2014, [a report highlighted that many US suppliers have ineffective social media profiles](#), and that these were impacting their exposure to prospective customers.

The latest report published in September 2015 highlights that while key Tier 1s have made solid progress in social media use, many are still making mistakes. According to Bianchi Public Relations' 'Social Media and Automotive Supplier Habits 2.0' study, this can hinder their profiles' effectiveness.



Top US suppliers are taking to social media with greater effectiveness

The social media usage of the top 25 North American suppliers across the four most popular platforms for the sector – Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube – was analysed during the first six months of 2015.

Linking up

Since the last study, top suppliers have increased their posting activity by 144%, and have more than tripled their following – but how does this vary between platforms? In 2014, suppliers were not using LinkedIn as much as they should have been, given that it had the largest average audience. As it stands, LinkedIn is now the only platform where all 25 suppliers have a presence, and is typically where they have the largest following, with an average of more than 110,000 followers.

Over the last year the average supplier's following grew the most on Facebook, with a 1,177% increase over 2014. LinkedIn came in second (+268%) followed by YouTube (+115%). Following on from last year, Twitter remains the top channel in terms of posting volume, with a 45% share of all posts, however this was down from 48% the prior year. LinkedIn made the greatest surge in volume with a 23% share, up from 19% in 2014.

Despite these gains, Jim Bianchi, President of Bianchi Public Relations, believes top suppliers still have some great opportunities to fully leverage these social media tools. "There's been some improvement, but there are still some missed opportunities that are easily addressable and can have a big impact on social media engagement and effectiveness," he told *Automotive World*.

The study investigated the largest suppliers in terms of sales in US dollars, but are these results transferrable to smaller Tier 2 and Tier 3 suppliers? "Tier doesn't necessarily relate to size but to relative relationship with the automakers," notes Bianchi. "Tier 1s sell to OEMs and Tier 2s sell to Tier 1s, so many of the suppliers we looked at are Tier 1s. Our assumption is that if the biggest, most successful suppliers are making social media mistakes, the smaller and lower tier suppliers, which would likely have less staff and fewer resources, are probably doing the same."

Small teams, big responsibilities



"Suppliers have so much to deal with, and typically they have relatively small communications teams" – Jim Bianchi

Bianchi believes that the improvements made over the last year are significant, given the multi-faceted role of internal communications teams. “Suppliers have so much to deal with, and typically they have relatively small communications teams who are charged with an increasing amount of responsibility – traditional and digital advertising, shows and exhibits, PR, employee communications – and social media is added often without any additional staff or budget,” he points out.

Of particular merit is the increased use of visuals, which he explains has been proven to boost engagement. Suppliers are using visuals on Twitter “much more – up from 15% of Tweets to 50% of Tweets this year – but less on LinkedIn – down to 75% this year from 86% last year,” says Bianchi.

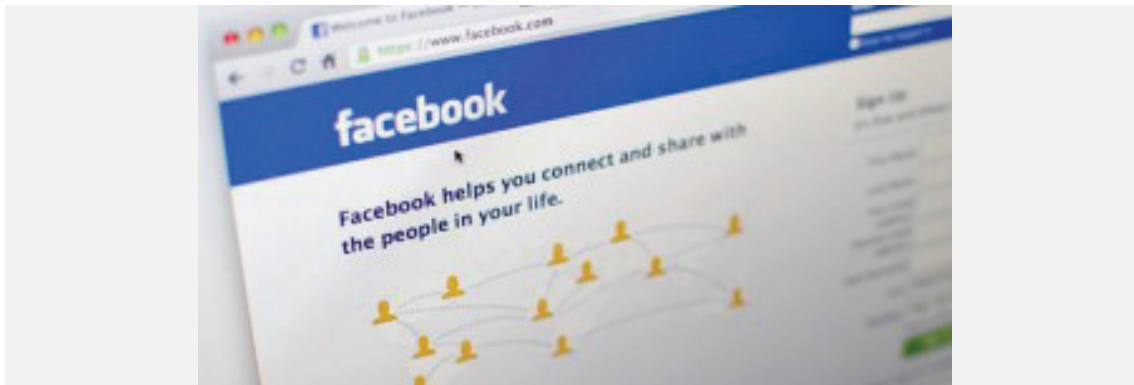
In addition, the significant increase in the use of LinkedIn is a welcome development. LinkedIn is “perhaps the most important channel for auto OEM suppliers because it’s where they have by far the largest number of followers, and therefore, the greatest potential reach,” observes Bianchi. “Other studies indicate that in the B2B world, LinkedIn sends nearly four times as many visitors to a company’s website than Twitter and Facebook do.”

Eager beavers

As suppliers have become more experienced with social media, they appear to be posting more frequently.

The average supplier in the study posted 58.6 updates per month across its top four platforms, more than double the 2014 average of 26.9 posts, and doubled the number of videos it shared on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn in 2015. As a result, the average number of followers across all four channels increased by more than 350%.

A key mistake highlighted in the 2014 study showed that suppliers were blowing their own trumpet too frequently with self promotional posts. As Bianchi points out: “Social media is geared at creating conversations, but if one party is doing all the talking, then it isn’t a conversation, it’s a lecture, and that can drive people away.”



Four of the top 25 US suppliers have not posted on Facebook in the past year

Fast forward to 2015, and top suppliers are sharing less media coverage socially (as a percentage of overall posts). “Last year the share was small (6.5%) but even smaller this year (4.3%),” notes Bianchi: “This is an area of great potential impact because third-party media coverage is much more credible than other types of content.”

Antisocial media?

Were there any particularly surprising showings from the results? “One surprise was that while most of the top suppliers are using Facebook more, four of them that have Facebook pages are actually using Facebook less,” says Bianchi. In fact, these four have not posted a single update in the past year. “They’ve either given up, focusing social energy elsewhere, or have lost interest,” concludes Bianchi.

Suppliers need to utilize social media in order to enhance engagement with customers and relevant groups. Typically, this simply requires a closer analysis of their audience and goals, and some proactive planning. In general, the results from the latest study would suggest that suppliers are improving at integrating social media campaigns into their overall communications efforts.

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