5 Quick Questions: Bobby Harris, CEO of BlueGrace Logistics

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It didn't take long for the novelty of social media to fade, and the search for practical application and measurable impact of these vehicles to become a priority. Despite the commercial success of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and several other platforms, manufacturers are still seeking out answers as to whether the time spent on social outreach is worth the effort.

Bobby Harris is the Founder, President and CEO of BlueGrace® Logistics. Began in 2007 as a technology company in the logistics industry, it has evolved into a full-service third-party logistics provider. It was recently recognized by *INC* as the fastest growing privately held logistics and transportation company in the U.S.

Harris believes that social media and the platforms it rests on are not just a fad, but the future of his industry. He recently sat down with *Chem.Info* to discuss social media and the potential impact it can have for manufacturers.

5. The benefits of social media seem obvious for consumer brands and products. How do they match up for manufacturers?

A: In my opinion, there's no scenario where social media is not a fit. In fact, the value of social media increases in the business-to-business (B2B) environment because everybody what's to know what everyone else is doing, whether it's your

customers or fellow employees.

Social media platforms can really help improve internal collaboration, as all employees want good, open communication. It also helps engagement with the customer. While the first thought might be “I want people to find me and start using me” – that’s not how it works. It’s going to be a more drawn out process with prospects. However, you can engage current customers if you have the platform (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.) ready and set-up.

Also, people are always researching the companies and individuals they either currently do business with, or might work with in the future. Social media pages help support those activities. New product launches and corporate philanthropy are excellent examples of social media content, and help boost recognition during the research phase.

An open social media policy is also a great employee recruitment tool. In addition to providing a tool they know and like to use in engaging customers, you can see what they’re doing. You can also browse Facebook pages or LinkedIn profiles in getting to know your employees before you hire them.

Finally, social media offers insight to some of the negative things people might be saying about your company or products. Addressing these “issues” and talking about the fixes via social media can be a very strong strategy.

The big thing for manufacturers to realize is that they shouldn’t be afraid of social media. It’s not as invasive as some perceive. Think of it as a phone conversation – you can control the message. Also, social media strategies can be as complex as you desire and involve as much time as you want to allocate.

The most important thing to remember when working in social media is … be social. Don’t feel the need to be clever – be interesting. This is how you’ll get people to follow, connect or “like” you. And one of the best things about social media is that you can realize all these benefits for free.

4. Although access to social media platforms is free, there are a number of tools out there to help manage social media campaigns. What are your thoughts on these tools?

A: There are a billion of these tools out there. Personally, I like the ones that integrate a company’s data or content with all the social platforms being used. For example, in my opinion Twitter is probably the strongest for business. Facebook is very big, obviously, and LinkedIn is great. So you want something that integrates with all of these outlets and helps clean up your desktop so you’re not posting the same thing three different times.

3. What do you feel are the strongest elements of a social media campaign?

A: The number one thing is to make sure your entire company is involved. I think

the biggest mistake many companies make is assigning Facebook or something else to one person. Roll it out to the entire company, but with guidelines. This allows for sharing what's most important, just be ready for some really social stuff coming from everyone who can access it.

Then, make sure it's traceable and easy to research and understand. My advice would be to keep the analytics focused on customers – how many attached to the company via social media and how can it be charted over time. I continue to see increasing social media numbers mirroring customer retention rates. So if the social numbers start slipping, you're probably losing customers as well.

2. What are some of the biggest do's and don'ts for social media?

A: Do:

- Be social, talk about things that are personal – to a point. It's okay to discuss your favorite football team or where you're going on vacation. But explain to staff that whatever they post is being seen by everybody.
- Use social media to listen to what people are saying about you. You see a lot of bigger companies doing that now. If you tweet out that you had a bad burger at a fast food chain, don't be surprised when they respond via Twitter in trying to better understand your dislikes. This active listening is a huge benefit of social media.
- Keep it interesting.

Don't:

- Politics – you can discuss politics, but be careful.
- Also, be careful how employees utilize or represent your company's name in their handle and correspondence.
- Avoid sales pitches, or make sure there's a limited focus on what you do or how great your products and services are.

1. As it pertains to social media's use by manufacturers, what keeps you up at night?

A: Don't be controversial for the sake of being controversial, or pick polarizing issues. Keep it focused on the content you want representing your business. Also, make sure those who have access to proprietary information understand that the competition will see your posts.

Slang and cuss words can be detrimental to social media success. The best rule that I've heard when it comes to thinking about your posts: pretend your mom is going to see it.

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