

AMEC Communication Effectiveness Awards 2012

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Company Name: Media Measurement Limited (MML)

Client/Campaign: Continental Tyres UK

Objective/Brief:

Continental Tyres UK began engaging with stakeholders via social media in experimental style, focusing on developing stakeholder relationships (rather than building brand buzz), using social networks including Facebook; Twitter and YouTube. Initial, anecdotal perceptions that this had been a valuable initiative led it to want to build on this 'bootstrap' approach, and so, ahead of making a pitch to HQ for increased budget to fund a more strategic engagement, it asked MML to help it measure the success of its efforts to date, frame performance objectives and develop a business case to support its request for additional funding. In January 2011, MML commenced a hybrid research project, combining aspects of a social media audit with analysis of competitive strategy and market best practice. Key objectives for the project were:

1) Define a baseline for Continental's competitive performance in traditional and social channels.

To understand its baseline position across media channels, and understand how coverage, especially in social media, had changed over time, Continental wanted a clear analysis of qualitative and quantitative performance in social and traditional media over a 24 month period.

2) To fully understand the nature of the social media communications opportunity.

Tyre buyers infrequently buy on brand, so while Continental is well known to the public, nurturing other types of stakeholder relationship – especially with B2B / channel customers – can deliver more direct benefit. In this context, while it is attractive to measure brand 'buzz' as a competitive benchmark, it is not necessarily the most valuable data point. Strategic clarity was essential to align the social media channel with priority stakeholders and communications objectives.

3) Identify 'quick win opportunities' in competitor and peer social media engagement

Case studies offer a wealth of insight into tactics – especially from competitors. However, in a young channel, there are as many failures to learn from as successes. While some competitor initiatives were eye-catching and high-profile, a closer look was needed to ascertain whether they delivered value that justified their cost – and were worthy of serious consideration for implementation by Continental.

4) Set meaningful objectives

Continental required information that was clear, accessible and easy to understand, so it could be used to populate a credible, 'yessable' business case. It needed to define performance expectations to justify its budget request – and this presented it with a unique challenge. As a business, tyre manufacturers experience severe seasonal volatility in media and stakeholder 'interest' – not only between Summer and Winter, but also between 'warm' and 'cold' winters. It was essential that measurement criteria reflected this, and that objectives set in the middle part of an extremely cold winter did not lead it to commit to an unrealistic or unachievable set of performance objectives.

Project budget: Budget not for publication.

Strategy:

We developed a bespoke research programme, combining the process rigor of our **social media audit** with a layer of **strategic counsel**, focused on identifying and developing implementation plans for practical communication opportunities. Activities undertaken included:

- **Set a benchmark:** we looked at the volume and nature of discussion about Continental and competing brands over a 2 year period, to set realistic expectations and develop a predictive model for organic growth, against which performance growth could be measured
- **Analyse competitors:** we conducted a review of competitor social media strategies, identifying 2 key strategy 'archetypes' for social media engagement by competing tyre manufacturers and analysing execution cost and value creation for each competitor
- **Present tactical options:** we undertook analysis of relevant best practice in social media comms, from which we identified a panel of 'quick win' tactics that could be adopted quickly, cheaply and effectively
- **Recommend measures:** from the data we had collected, we created a propositional model for what Continental Tyres could hope to achieve at various levels of budget commitment, and recommended a panel of relevant KPIs against which progress could be tracked

We delivered our findings via a series of briefings and workshops, and a detailed written report, presented in MS PowerPoint format.

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Execution/Implementation:

SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIT

For the 24 month historic audit component of the brief, Media Measurement (MML) employed several social and traditional media content aggregators (SM2, Topsy and Factiva) to build and develop a visual map of Continental's media coverage, across the 24 month period, against four key competitors: Bridgestone, Goodyear, Michelin and Pirelli. Overall competitive brand footprint was tracked across this full data set using quantitative analysis methods.

The report encompassed a broad analytic scope, comprising volume and quality of data, brand sentiment, key message profiling, source characteristics (especially propensity to act as an enthusiast and detractor in respect of the Continental brand), relative competitor comparisons and source profiling.

From within the social media portion of this data, an influencer mapping methodology was applied to identify priority outreach channels, and from these channels a representative sample of content was taken for qualitative content analysis of messaging.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

From the quantitative and qualitative data collection, a set of recommended performance measurement options were developed for consideration by Continental. Importantly, these recommendations emphasised the unique characteristics of Continental's business – especially recognising the danger of setting a simple quantitative baseline for brand discussion during the coldest part of the coldest winter experienced in the UK for several years: a time at which our analysis showed, discussion of tyres (especially winter tyres) was unusually high. Our recommendation given this extreme and unpredictable seasonal volatility was to use a KPI set that tracked performance relative to key competitors. We designed a clear, simple and robust set of metrics that met this description, which were adopted by our client.

Our findings were presented in person, and supported with a comprehensive report in MS PowerPoint format. Our clear, simple and effective presentation was taken and presented in turn to head office in Germany in support of the business case for additional funding.

COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

Using both secondary and primary research (based on phone interviews with industry experts), we undertook a comprehensive analysis of competitor social strategies – and from this analysis we identified two common strategic archetypes: an experimental / low-cost / 'bootstrap' approach (as employed to that point by Continental) and a planned / high-cost / 'destination' approach (as employed for example by Pirelli and Bridgestone). Our analysis of cost / benefit indicated that the latter approach had delivered minimal business benefit at a probable significant expenditure. Our clear recommendation was that agile experimentation – as employed by Continental – was the correct strategic choice for the business given competitor and peer experiences.

Conclusions:

Our clear, recommendation-focused research created a platform for Continental to plan resourcing and to plan strategy in confidence. Concrete outcomes that have been achieved using this project comprise:

BUSINESS CASE APPROVED

Our **social media audit** highlighted the social media opportunity for Continental (objective 2), and put in context both its progress thus far, and its performance in relation to competitors. The insight it gave into performance goals and execution budgets formed the core of a business case for accelerated social media activity that was successfully pitched to HQ (objective 4). The credibility afforded by our rigorous analysis of competitor strategies ensured that the alternative approach to social engagement – planned centrally, developed around social media 'destinations', and likely implemented slowly, at high cost and with little impact – was dismissed early in the business case pitch (objective 2).

SUCCESSFULLY STEER SOCIAL CREATIVES

Our definition of appropriate KPIs, identification of strategy archetypes and analysis of the potential value of a range of tactical ploys gave Continental the tools needed to manage social media strategy (objective 3). Creatives and other third party counsel use the research to ensure that their ideas are aligned with Continental's channel strategy, and to validate the success of their efforts (objective 1). We have been commissioned to conduct a gap analysis in Q1 2012 to validate the scale and nature of progress made during this budget year, using the measures recommended in this analysis as a baseline for analysis. Our KPI set is used directly to evaluate the performance of third-party creative counsel.