



Dell: Free Range Marketing

Business case: Product Launch for the Inspiron 910 (Mini 9)

The Opportunity

While hanging out at The Wall Street Journal's **D: All Things Digital** conference in May 2008, Briam Lam from the popular tech blog Gizmodo got wind of something big that Dell was cooking up.

Lam had bumped into Michael Dell himself, who had toted with him a bright red mini-notebook that hadn't been seen before. And true to form, Lam went right back and blogged about what he'd seen. At that point, no specifications had been released, and his initial post generated fast and furious buzz about Dell's new product: the Inspiron 910 (otherwise known as the Mini 9).

Dell realized they had a significant opportunity not only to monitor the buzz online about their new laptop before its launch, but to hear how the community drove the conversation and what they were anticipating the most about this new product. To accomplish that, Dell used the Radian6 social media monitoring platform.

The Approach

Dell's official launch for the Inspiron 910 was slated for September 2008, more than four months away from the original blog post on Gizmodo. They needed to be mindful of their upcoming launch activities, so they turned to what they termed "free-range marketing": allowing the community drive the excitement and the story about the new product. Blogs, forums, and social bookmarking sites like Digg were abuzz with talk about the new Dell notebook.

Dell actively monitored the ongoing dialogue, absorbing the information and feedback from the community. As customers and the web buzzed about their thoughts and opinions and speculations about the Mini 9, Dell strategically added to the conversation with bits of product information or corrections about misinformation. They were careful, however, to allow the conversation to happen as organically as possible.

As Dell continued to monitor the social web using comparative topic monitors in the Radian6 dashboard, they learned that their product held a distinct competitive advantage.



“By setting up topic profiles on both Inspiron-related keywords and those of competitor’s products, we learned that customers who were contemplating a purchase of a mini notebook were foregoing competitor’s products in favor of waiting for the new Dell Mini 9,” says Geoff Knox, Supervisor, Global Operations for Dell’s Community Team. “The buzz in social media was creating a level of anticipation that was actually extending the buying cycle and driving demand for our new product.”

In addition, listening online helped Dell understand their customers’ expectations for features and capabilities for the notebook. From specifications to pricing, their customers and prospects were talking about what they wanted from the Mini 9. By participating in that dialogue and passing that feedback to their internal notebook teams, Dell was able to understand and address any discrepancies between the community’s expectations and the actual Inspiron 910 itself.

Leading up to the product launch, Dell also set up topic profiles in Radian6 based on the keywords they’d uncovered throughout their monitoring in the previous months. They were able to craft their launch messaging around what they’d learned, and measure the peaks in conversation before and after the Inspiron 910 hit store shelves.

“When it came time for the actual launch, we felt informed and prepared, and our team was very excited about building on the momentum that social media had generated for the Mini 9,” says Knox. “Monitoring the social web allowed us to join the conversation in a completely relevant way.”

The Results

Before the Mini 9 was officially released, mentions of the notebook averaged about 200 posts a day up until the month before the launch. Using the Radian6 topic trend graphs, Dell saw a steady increase in mentions during the 30-day lead-up, and during the week before the release, mentions spiked at around 2,000 per day.

“Our brand as a whole really benefited from the buzz surrounding the Mini 9,” explains Knox. “We noticed that during the four month period from the Gizmodo post to the product launch, mentions of any other Dell product often led to mention of the Mini 9 and its impending release. That kind of word of mouth and brand-building is only really possible on the fast-moving social web.”

The mainstream media took note, too: The Wall Street Journal picked up and ran a story about the launch of the Mini 9 purely because of the online buzz it was receiving.

Knox and his community team are excited to work with their product groups in the future to apply what they’ve learned from monitoring the social web around the Mini 9 for future product launches. Their product teams will be able to use what they hear about customer expectations to create products that have the pricing, features, and capabilities that their customers want.



Dell has also been able to determine who key online influencers are in their industry through analysis of Radian6 social media metrics such as comments, inbound links, and social bookmarks. Not only were they able to return to earlier mentions of the Mini to update the community after the release, but they are the first to respond to new mentions about the product and deploy appropriate internal resources to engage with the community.

“The intelligence we’ve gathered through social media monitoring has been invaluable,” Knox says. “Dell’s involvement in social media has been pivotal for our company and our customers. Not only was the Mini 9 launch a huge success for us, but we’re more plugged into the online conversation than ever before. That’s community building at its best.”

