Objective and Importance

One of my major projects as an intern at Landus Cooperative was reviving the social media accounts for Dairy Nutrition Plus, a line of dairy feed products that the cooperative processes and sells. The product line is successful; however, prior to the start of my internship in May 2018, the accounts had not been active in over two years (Dairy Nutrition Plus Facebook and Twitter, 2018). My primary objective was to increase the visibility of the product line by adding social media exposure for the brand while incorporating the AIDA Model of communication.

The objective was important to the company because social media is a great marketing tool in the agriculture industry, and leaving an account inactive lets competitors overtake that area of the market. To the communications department, it was also important as an intern project because no one on the five-person team has enough time to manage the accounts, which was why posting stopped initially. The underuse of a marketing tool and lack of time were both issues that, when solved, could benefit the cooperative.

In the agriculture industry, social media use is a tool of ever-increasing importance. In today’s market, a cooperative, service, or product line without social media has fallen behind competitors and often fails to reach its marketing and communication potential. Farmers, processors, agribusinesses, and agriculture organizations all use social media as a tool to reach each other, customers, and consumers. For many people, social media is also a news source. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, just over two-thirds of Americans said they get at least some of their news from social media, with twenty percent reporting that they do so often (Shearer and Gottfried, 2017). With such a large percentage of the population getting information from various platforms, brands not using social media miss an important marketing
and public relations opportunity. Building relationships is a critical part of social media and can’t often be done with the same efficiency offline, especially when the product line sells internationally like DNP.

**Previous Literature**

The model of communication I chose to focus on was the AIDA (attention, interest, desire, action) model. This theory describes the “four cognitive phases experienced by an individual upon receipt of a new idea or a new product purchased” (Hassan, Nadzim, & Shiratuddin, 2015). The four phases translate to four steps that should be accomplished when advertising: garner interest from potential customers, obtain their interest in the product or idea, create desire for the product, and finally, convince them to take action (buy the product).

According to Lagrosen, the most difficult step when applying this model to online examples is catching attention (2005). Hassan, Nadzim, and Shiratuddin state that this can be overcome through the use of popup banners (2015). However, it is also important to note that customer attention is dynamic, and continuous research is needed. What was true in 2015 may not be true today. According to an article by a leading Nielsen Norman Group, which focuses on user web experience, website viewers have developed “banner blindness;” that is, the tendency to ignore content perceived to be an ad (Pernice, 2018). The ability of businesses and organizations to adapt to viewer actions is an important part of the success of online marketing campaigns.

Ghirvu mentions the DAGMAR model as a variation of the AIDA model (2013). The two are very similar—the segments of DAGMAR are listed as awareness, comprehension, conviction, and action instead, but they essentially follow the same ideas as the parts of the
AIDA model. The DAGMAR model, however, takes the AIDA model one step further and allows for the creation of tasks with specific objectives, which enable more accurate evaluation of marketing success (Bhasin, 2018). The objectives are as follows, according to Bhasin (2018).

1. Select concrete and measurable tasks—do you want to strengthen your brand’s image, introduce your brand to a new market, or increase sales?

2. Define the target audience and demographics

3. Determine the degree of change in attitude or awareness sought—do you want to simply create awareness in an unaware market, or do you want to change their opinions entirely?

4. Specify the allotment of time—how much time do you want to designate for each phase?

These steps allow marketers to set plans in advance and evaluate how successful the advertising campaign is at any stage. This addition updates the concepts of the AIDA model and makes it more applicable to modern campaigns, in which the importance of analytics is ever-increasing.

Many companies use this model frequently, whether intentionally or unknowingly. Even if an organization is not specifically following these steps, their customers still go through the stages of the AIDA model. Even if the company follows the DAGMAR model or the consumer adoption process—which includes awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption/rejection (Schroeder, 2017)—the general concepts of the models relate to one another fairly closely.

Hassan, Nadzim, and Shiratuddin used a focus group to propose “a strategy for using social media as a marketing tool for small business based on the Attention, Interest, Desire, Action (AIDA) model” (2015). At the time of publishing, the effectiveness of the model as it relates to social media was unknown. Even currently, there is little information or peer-reviewed
research available beyond a simple explanation of the model. The researchers developed a list of specific tactics to implement on social media for each phase of the AIDA model. Examples are listed below.

1. Attention: connect social media with websites, properly use tagging in posts
2. Interest: post photos of products, provide clear, concise product and business information
3. Desire: organize contests and offer promotions or discounts
4. Action: clarify order, payment, and delivery processes and options

These examples, as well as others listed in the paper, clearly and effectively show that the AIDA model can be applied to social media. Personally, I have noticed several of the given examples used frequently and successfully by various companies (including Landus Cooperative).

The AIDA model relates closely to my objectives at Landus Cooperative as well. It can be directly applied to my main goal of increasing visibility of the Dairy Nutrition Plus products. Generally, we want to move consumers from attention to action. However, the current differentiation in customer phases poses a challenge not covered by the model. Within each demographic, customers are at different phases in the model. Some are not aware, and some have already taken action and by the product. This limits the ability of the marketing team to target a specific audience with the concrete objectives mentioned by Bhasin (2018). This requires some creativity and variety in order to develop social media campaigns and individual posts.

Overall, the AIDA model seems somewhat basic, but shows greater depth and potential than has been properly explored through research. Regardless of intent or theoretical knowledge, most marketing teams include the concepts of the model in their advertising and marketing plans, because the concepts are basic but useful enough that they can be seen in other models and individual ideas.
Methods and Strategies

To reach my goal of increasing visibility of the Dairy Nutrition Plus (DNP) product line, I utilized the AIDA model of communication and the product line’s social media accounts. In order to move through the steps of the model—attention, interest, desire, action (Hassan, Nadzim, and Shiratuddin, 2015)—I created posts for Facebook and Twitter for customers and potential customers to view. The target audience was mainly dairy farmers and nutritionists, who are more familiar with the products and more influential when recommending products to farmers.

Since the social media accounts had been inactive for so long before I started the project, my goal was focused on simply getting quality content online with three posts per week on each platform. Since I will be continuing my internship part-time until next May, I hope to build on that plan to increase specificity and target frequency in the future; for now, I focused on starting slowly with a manageable number of posts each week, which would still make an impact on viewers.

The social media posts were used in conjunction with the marketing tactics used by the rest of the marketing and sales teams. The tactics included newsletters, a webinar, brochures, mailings, trade show booths, blog posts, and a free test kit. When composing posts, I pulled information from these materials, industry news sites, and the Dairy Nutrition Plus website. Examples of post topics that might reach each of the AIDA model’s levels using this information are as follows:

- Attention: industry news, retweets from other accounts
- Interest/Desire: product benefits, free trial kits, highlights of blog posts
• Action: “See us at booth (#) at (trade show),” “Subscribe today”

With this wide variety of posts, I was able to ensure that there was information available for customers and potential customers at every step in the model. This way, I could keep more viewers interested and make them see value in following the account.

Some posts, particularly those containing action steps such as “register” or “subscribe” were used to drive traffic to other resources rather than directly posting the information. For example, one section of posts announced a free webinar hosted by a DNP nutritionist and sales manager. It is more efficient to share information through the webinar than over social media; for this reason, it is clear that social media be used strategically to push viewers to that. DNP also launched a blog soon before my internship began, and the marketing team wanted to increase the viewership of the articles, so social media was also used as an indirect tactic there to increase visibility not through social media itself, but through additional resources.

To organize content, I created a schedule in Excel that included post date, time, platform, copy, image or graphic, link (if relevant), and post status (draft, approved, posted, postponed). The posts were scheduled in advance using Hootsuite to ensure that content was posted regularly. This also guaranteed that there were extra posts that could be moved to fill slots if other content needed to be postponed. The file was shared with the marketing specialist for the product line, who was able to review my drafts and add content ideas or resources.

Results and Reflection

Results

Overall, the results of this project were mixed. The analyzed Facebook and Twitter posts from 2015 and 2016 (before the accounts became inactive), had almost three times as many
impressions (total views) as the tweets from this summer. However, recent posts had approximately three times more interactions in almost every category. Possible interactions included but were not limited to likes, retweets/shares, comments, profile clicks, link clicks, media views, and detail expansions.

By looking at past post interactions, I can anecdotally conclude that some of this summer’s posts received more shares, retweets, and likes than past posts, though not by a wide margin. Additionally, posts later in the summer gained more interactions than posts at the beginning of the summer.

In contrast, the simple fact that posts went from zero to three times per week is an increase in impressions. No matter how many times a post was viewed, liked, or shared, it was still an improvement upon the zero interaction resulting from inactive accounts. Many DNP buyers are international customers, so global reach was a point of interest. At least two international customers interacted with tweets during the summer.

Overall, the reactions were somewhat disappointing but expected. The original goal was simply to push out content and create awareness, and that goal was met. Looking forward, it will be important to note the limitations and possible improvements of this tactic.

Limitations

Some aspects of the project and the business limit the analysis of the data. As mentioned previously, the inability to collect past data limited analysis of current tweets. Additionally, without a case study of followers who viewed the tweets, it was difficult to determine which of DNP’s many marketing tactics was responsible for the increase in the levels of the AIDA model. Customers of the DNP line are often distributors rather than nutritionists of farmers; many
INCREASING VISIBILITY: SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE AIDA MODEL

Distributors will not be active on social media themselves and therefore were unaffected by the tactic. Perhaps the most significant limitation at the end of the summer was a re-branding proposal that will not be resolved by the end of the calendar year and will affect the goals of the social media accounts.

Next Steps & Recommendations

The next steps could include a continuation of the social media accounts and a push to drive traffic to the accounts. Currently, not much is done to direct potential or current customers to DNP’s social media accounts; because results come from the product line’s e-newsletter, blog, and website, that is where the emphasis is placed, and rightly so. The e-newsletter or blog could add a blurb that says “Follow us on social media!” and includes links to the pages, or members of the sales team can mention the accounts to customers. For communications professionals, I recommend conducting a survey or focus group to analyze social media effectiveness. For my peers, I recommend integrating social media with other marketing tactics. My most popular posts linked to promotion of a webinar hosted by two members of the DNP team. This strategy not only increases interactions with the tweet, but also speeds up the AIDA model process. I also recommend speculating about road blocks and researching potential problems before beginning.

Final Thoughts

If I were to start this project over, I would do many things differently and take a proactive approach to minimize the effects of the listed limitations. The mere act of adding content to the Facebook and Twitter accounts was a success, and after the rebranding goals are solidified, progress on the accounts can continue. Despite a lack of concrete results, I feel that this project
has been extremely valuable. What I learned throughout this process can help me be successful in future social media management, and I look forward to improving upon my strategies and tactics in the future.
References


Schroeder, J., APR. (2017, Fall). Consumer Adoption Model. Lecture presented at ADVERT 230: Advertising Principles class lecture in Iowa State University, Ames, IA.