



Social Media

2019 AWARDS

What is one social media goal you are implementing in 2019?

Tell us on Twitter at [#CSDSMAWARDS](https://twitter.com/CSDSMAWARDS).

Social media trends are evolving and savvy chains are keeping pace, going into 2019. CSD recognizes c-store chains succeeding at social media and mobile apps.

By Erin Del Conte, Senior Editor

Convenience Store Decisions (CSD), for the seventh consecutive year, is recognizing convenience store chains leading the way on social media.

In 2019 social media best practices are evolving to keep pace with new features, changing algorithms and shorter attention spans as the conversation shifts to a focus on digital media as a whole.

CSD partnered with three social media experts: Gini Dietrich, founder and CEO of marketing communications firm Arment Dietrich and author of "Spin Sucks: Professional Development for Communicators;" Mari Smith, social media thought leader and Facebook marketing expert; and Pam Moore, CEO and co-founder of Marketing Nutz, to identify what trends loom for social media in 2019 and the best practices convenience store retailers can follow to drive social media success in the new year.

In 2019, brands should be thinking about digital marketing overall and how each platform—including social—can help convey their message.

"The synergies and integration that need to happen with omnichannel, are really going to start to become more apparent this year, even more than they have in the past," Moore said.

Savvy retailers will look to create a seamless message and voice across social media, Web and mobile app, as well as in store. For example, when announcing a promotion on social media, ensure customers can find details and answers to questions on the website, incorporate the

mobile app into the deal and use similar design elements across platforms, including in the store.

TRENDS AHEAD

While Facebook (FB), Twitter and Instagram are the major platforms for retailers to target in 2019, depending on their demographic, c-stores could find also success with Snapchat, FB messenger, YouTube and LinkedIn, which Moore noted "is on fire in a good way" this year.

"Like everyone else FB, Twitter and Instagram are the big three for us," said David Jackson, digital marketing and loyalty manager for La Crosse, Wis.-based Kwik Trip, which operates 630 stores in three states. "We're also active on Snapchat and have approached content in a similar fashion on Twitter where we focus on sharing user-generated content. That said, we expect the big three to continue being the most important platforms for us in 2019."

This year, "shorter is better," said Smith. Short attention spans dominate, and the 'stories' format for micro-content is growing. The stories feature on Instagram and FB are huge. Stories can be photos, GIFs, polls or short videos. They disappear after 24 hours or can be highlighted on the page.

"Businesses need to learn how to tell stories in images and 15-second video clips," Smith said.

Short video content in general is a key to success. "Embrace FB Live. Go Live using your mobile device with special offers, customers spotlight, product demos, meet

staff members, short interviews, etc. Live broadcasts can be a few minutes or longer," Smith said.

"We have done a few FB Lives this year, and they have been a great tool for driving awareness," said David Heilbronner, director of brand strategy and advertising at Westboro, Mass.-based Cumberland Farms, which operates 562 c-stores. Some favorite features included its dispensed beverage category manager teaching coffee drink recipes and CEO Ari Haseotes talking about the chain's annual Cups for Kids fundraiser. "We have found video and FB Lives to be very effective at driving a lot of impressions for specialized content," he added.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is another trend to consider. Smith recommended integrating a third-party chatbot tool on FB specifically to answer questions, such as location, hours, directions and so on.

"We're constantly looking at new technology and new tools to utilize with social, but most recently we implemented a FB Messenger Chatbot on our page," said Jackson. "We believe that leveraging a chatbot will enhance that experience for (customers)."

Dietrich agreed, "If you haven't already implemented a chatbot...I would say that is something to consider for 2019."

The No. 2 trend according to Dietrich is nano and micro influencers. Influencer marketing continues to be a big trend among all social platforms, but in 2019 it's no longer about big celebrity influencers but micro-influencers—those with under 10,000 followers but whose followers are really engaged; or nano influencers who may only have 500 followers, but if they say they're going to Wawa, their fans follow suit.

"Forward-thinking businesses understand customers want honesty and transparency. Influencers have pre-existing trust and affinity with their audiences," Smith said.

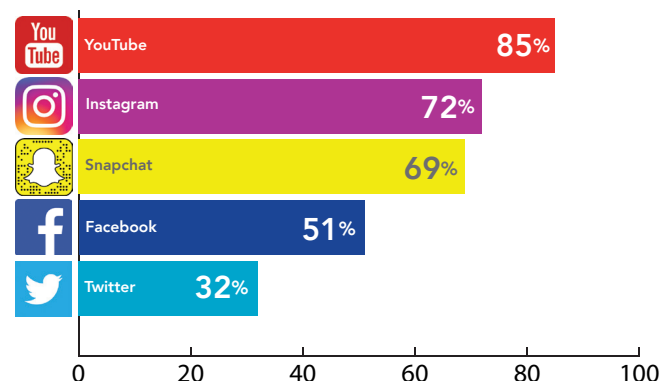
BEST PRACTICES

Regardless of which platform you're using, Moore stressed quality over quantity.

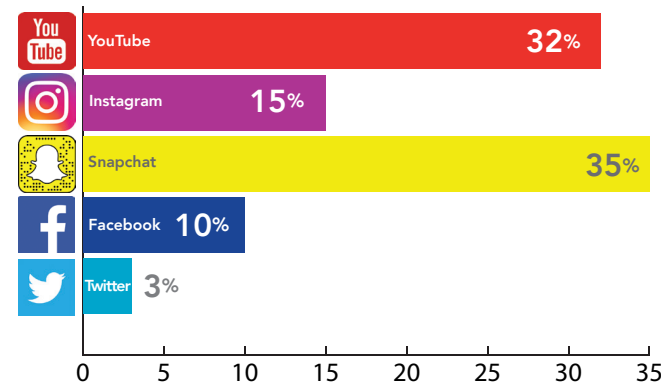
When it comes to best practices in quality, remember 'the basics' can take c-stores far. Before posting anything, Moore urged c-stores to decide the brand identity they want to convey, their target audience and their goals and objectives. Then use those basics to drive strategy.

Especially on Instagram, don't be afraid to take risks, Moore suggested. When it comes to success on Instagram, Moore predicted polished content that takes time to produce as well as raw content that resonates on an authentic level with followers are most likely to succeed. She recommended offering deals via stories that followers can find and access for a limited time, such as "First 100 customers to store X get a free coffee with purchase." Making use of hashtags, especially on Instagram gets eyes on creative.

MOST POPULAR PLATFORMS GEN Z SAY THEY USE:



GEN Z SAY THEY USE MOST OFTEN:



Source: Pew Research Center "Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018"

As algorithms on FB and Instagram have changed, engagement is now crucial. "You have to have engagement on your content to be seen," Moore said. The more you engage, the more your content is visible. This means responding to customers and encouraging them to interact with you.

Engagement or lack thereof can have ramifications all the way to store level. According to a study by Uberall, a location-marketing solution company, one-third of customers don't return if a brand doesn't respond to their review.

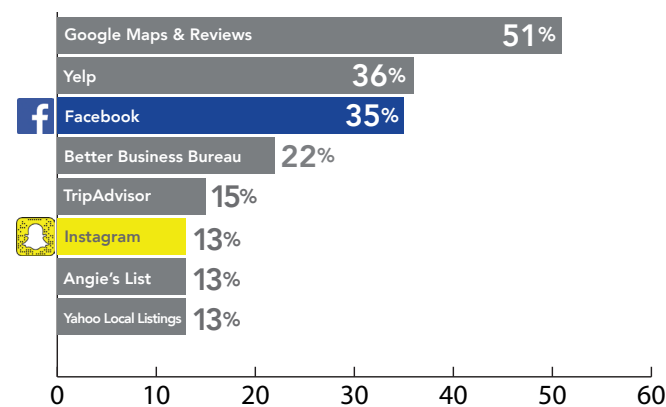
WHERE IS GEN Z?

Pew Research Center found Gen Z's top three favorite platforms are YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat. "If retailers have the resources to dedicate to building a presence and community on Snapchat they should go for it, as it's certainly one of the potentially best ways to reach Gen Z," said Smith. Another option is to take short video and stories content from FB and Instagram and repurpose some of that content on YouTube to reach Gen Z.

"I've seen some success with Snapchat, but not nearly



WHAT REVIEW AGGREGATORS AND PLATFORMS DO SHOPPERS MOST USE?



Source: Recent Uberall survey of more than 1,000 consumers in the U.S.

SOCIAL MEDIA AWARDS

This year's social media awards recognize an overall social media winner as well as winners in the subcategories of brand responsiveness, frequency of posts, creativity of content and level of engagement, all of which were considered within the overall award as well.

The data and research for this year's social media awards were created and supplied in part by Stuzo's c-store digital rankings program. Stuzo is a provider of personalized predictive commerce solutions for fuel and c-store retailers. Stuzo examined the social media pages across FB, Instagram and Twitter for the top 100 c-stores (based on number of locations) between Jan. 1 and Dec. 1, 2018 and ranked each chain on a scale of five, with five being the top score.

BEST OVERALL SOCIAL MEDIA AWARD

Chains were evaluated based on brand responsiveness, frequency of posts, creativity of content and level of engagement on FB, Instagram and Twitter.

WINNER: Cumberland Farms, Score: 4.86

RUNNER UP: Wawa, Score: 4.4

Both Cumberland Farms and Wawa consistently posted creative content that resonated with their customer base, spurring engagement from fans and followers, which they responded to.

"We try to keep things both varied and valuable on our social channels so we give people a reason to want to visit daily—just like we do in our stores," said Cumberland Farms' Heilbronner. "With social media engagement, you create an opportunity for people to talk about your store to their friends and family, which is something they might not do otherwise."

SOCIAL SUBCATEGORY AWARDS

BRAND RESPONSIVENESS AWARD

Brand responsiveness considered how chains used social media channels to connect with their audience, whether brands replied to customer comments and complaints and how often, and whether they were using personalized or standardized messages in communications. It also examined whether brands posted polls or sweepstakes to further engage its consumers.

WINNER: United Dairy Farmers (UDF), Score: 4.9

United Dairy Farmers replied to customer comments and concerns consistently.

RUNNER UP: Cumberland Farms, Score: 4.88

Consumers engaged with the brand answering questions, commenting on posts and stating concerns, and Cumberland responded consistently.

"We know that increasingly, consumers are turning to social media for customer service," said Cumberland Farms' Heilbronner. "We have a team dedicated to being responsive to customers there because, more often than not, people just want to be heard."

He added, "By taking the time to reply when they comment, we are showing them that we care which inspires them to keep commenting."

FREQUENCY OF POSTS AWARD

Frequency of posts looked at how often chains are posting to FB, Instagram and Twitter.

WINNER: MAPCO, Score: 5

MAPCO posted daily on FB and Twitter, and every other day on Instagram, often promoting its rewards program and other promotions.

RUNNER UP: QuikTrip, Score: 4.98

QuikTrip engaged customers by posting entertaining content and product offerings frequently across channels.

CREATIVITY OF CONTENT AWARD

Creativity of content examined whether a chain promoted loyalty promotions and app promotions, the overall level of creativity in the content, including use of various forms of media such as video, photos, gifs and graphics. Video received a special focus and considered the diversity of video content (animated videos, Live videos, educational content etc.).

WINNER: Cumberland Farms, Score: 5

Cumberland Farms posted interactive polls, funny videos, images of seasonal products, among a range of content that is fun, humorous and valuable to its consumers.

RUNNER UP: UDF, Score: 4.5

UDF's content included images of its ice cream flavors with fun and clever captions, as well as loyalty and mobile app promotions.

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT AWARD

Level of Engagement considered use of social media

channels and how they are inspiring customers to engage with the brand.

WINNER: Wawa, Score: 5

Wawa not only has a large following compared to other chains with the same number of locations, but its consumers are extremely engaged liking, commenting and sharing Wawa's content.

RUNNER UP: Kwik Trip and Sheetz tied, Score: 4.9

Kwik Trip is highly engaged with its consumers, sharing and commenting. Kwik Trip's retweets and comments are amusing and receive numerous likes and retweets. Sheetz posts original, relevant content that resonates with fans who are engaged across all channels liking and sharing Sheetz content.

CSD spoke with Kwik Trip's Jackson about the chain's Twitter presence. "There's been a big shift in the content we place on Twitter over the last year, which has resulted in a dramatic increase in engagement for us," he said. "We've pushed our focus toward authentic content from our fans

rather than some of the professional and promotional content you see on a lot of other channels."

Kwik Trip realized its fans were

already creating great content and it just need to amplify it. "This shift has really resonated with our fans because it's humorous content coming from fans just like themselves and they can relate to it," he said.



MOBILE APP AWARDS

With digital media becoming a bigger focus in 2019, CSD chose to also recognize mobile apps with data provided by Stuzo. The app awards recognize an overall winner as well as winners in the subcategories of payment, loyalty and mobile ordering, all of which were considered within the overall award as well. Brands were again scored on a scale of five with five being the highest score.

BEST OVERALL MOBILE COMMERCE AWARD

This award considered average app store rating, downloads compared to store size, when the app was last updated as well as loyalty, payment and ordering integration.

WINNER: Exxon, Score: 3.34

Exxon's Speedpass+ app offers an easy-to-use interface. Consumers can manage and redeem rewards points, find stations and pay for fuel at the pump via the app, at more than 11,000 Exxon or Mobil-branded retail stations across the U.S. The app currently accepts all major credit and debit cards, ExxonMobil Smart Card, Apple Pay, Google Pay,



Exxon's Speed-pass+ app was rated highest among c-store mobile apps because of its easy-to-use interface as well as loyalty and payment integration.

MasterPass and Samsung Pay. The app can also be linked to a checking account.

"The app enables customers to authorize a pump for payment through the use of cloud-based technology, which does not require waving or tapping the phone at a pump or payment device," said Sarah Nordin, media relations advisor of public & government affairs for Exxon Mobil Corp. "A customer can authorize a pump for payment from within the comfort of a parked car."

MOBILE SUBCATEGORY AWARDS

MOBILE PAYMENT AWARD

Criteria considered payment options and ease of use for payment at the pump and in store.

WINNER: Sunoco, Score: 3

Sunoco's recently-launched app allows customers to pay both at the pump and in store. Consumers can link their debit or credit card, Sunoco Rewards credit card, a Sunoco gift card or pay via Apple or Android Pay. Users can also apply for a Sunoco credit card via the app.

MOBILE ORDERING AWARD

Criteria included ease of use, food tracking, delivery, pick up in store and personalization, as well as user experience and interface.

WINNER: 7-Eleven, Score: 2.75

7-Eleven offers a separate app, 7NOW, which offers mobile ordering. Customers can order 7-Eleven c-store items and have them delivered.

MOBILE LOYALTY PROGRAM AWARD

This award considered program mechanics, user experience and interface, personalization and ease of use.

WINNER: Speedway, Score: 4.75

Speedway customers can monitor points earned and store their rewards card, digital gift cards and coupons in the Speedway Wallet within the Speedway App, for ease of use. **CSD**