



Brand Management and Social Media

Brandjacking on Facebook

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Introduction to Facebook Marketing

Introduced in February 2004, Facebook is a social networking site designed to connect friends, businesses, and people with common interests. With over 400 million active users and 70 language translations, Facebook has global reach. According to company statistics, Facebook users are connected to over 160 million objects of interaction, including pages, groups, and events. 50% of these users log on to Facebook *everyday*¹.

Facebook became popular as a marketing tool when time on the site increased in specific user segments. In order to reach these segments, marketers adjusted promotion strategies to include social media. Marketers understand several key opportunities with Facebook:

- Allows for consumer interaction and two-way communication that is both personal and professional
- Offers a way to develop the brand that was not possible on a company website or through traditional advertising
- Provides a level of credibility for brands, because users are able to communicate with each other and directly with the brand

Celebrities, professionals, and athletes alike use Facebook as a way to develop themselves as a brand, as well as showcase their talent, ideas, and personalities.

Online Brandjacking

The United States government works with the other institutions to protect businesses. Trademark and copyright laws protect brands. Privacy laws, paparazzi laws, and anti-defamation laws protect the reputation of celebrities and professional athletes. How do these laws apply to your online identity?

The Internet is not regulated like other communication channels. Current laws treat online identity theft the same as offline identity theft, but they are not the same. Content posted online can often be difficult to delete. In a MarkMonitor

¹ Facebook Statistics 2010

survey, 80% of brandjacking sites that were observed in 2007 were still active on the web at the end of 2008².

The Federal Trade Commission offers preventive tips on how to avoid online identity theft, but what if the thief isn't after your credit card information or your social security number? What if instead of your money, someone wants to impersonate you to experience the glory of your success? How can you protect yourself or your company from **brand identity theft**?

Compete Communications Client Case Study: Professional Athlete

Professional Athletes are especially vulnerable to brandjacking. Fans often personify athletes. Impersonators believe social networking sites like Facebook are an easy, relatively undetectable way to hijack an identity. They can live vicariously through professional athletes, with the help of the Internet, and they can do it right from home.

Compete Communications works with professional athletes to build their brand image. To protect the privacy of this client, and for the purpose of this study, we will refer to him as "Client X." During a review of Client X's website analytics, we identified Facebook as a main traffic source.

Further research concluded that three Facebook pages were operating under the name of Client X. Each page held similar characteristics:

- Stolen photos with watermarks
- Status updates impersonating Client X
- Hundreds of fans, in 2 cases, over 500
- Responses to fan comments and questions
- Media writers and broadcasters were among the fans
- Some web addresses for Client X's site were links to Wikipedia and other unofficial pages

² *Brandjacking rises as top online abuse*. The Washington Times. 2009. Retrieved on May 27, 2010 from <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/mar/09/brand-jacking-rises-as-top-online-abuse/?page=1>

Client X had no involvement with the creation or maintenance of these pages. Furthermore, our client was unaware they even existed. Compete contacted Facebook immediately. Within two hours, **all three** false pages were removed. We recognized this scenario as an opportunity to educate our client on how Compete could further manage his brand. Using our proprietary system, Compete consistently screens for false client brand identities on the Internet, particularly on social networking sites.

We put our client back in control of his brand!

Protecting the Brand You Built

For all our clients, time is valuable. Online impersonators and brand hijackers are aware of this as well, and take advantage of the fact that often your attention is needed elsewhere. Compete recognizes your dedication to success. Whether your brand is the face of a corporation or *your face* as a professional athlete, Compete account managers will work with you to identify your marketing needs. We will help you establish your brand on the Internet, before someone tries to do it for you. If you do not have a website for your business or brand, we'll help you build one. Having difficulty keeping up with social media trends? We are competent in social media outlets including but not limited to: Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, and YouTube. Consistent monitoring of how your brand is used and referred to on the Internet will allow us to immediately respond and address any falsifications. As with Client X, the issue of false Facebook pages presents a key marketing opportunity. After the elimination of the impersonating pages, Compete consulted Client X in making an official Facebook-approved page. In light of a situation that could have devastated Client X's brand integrity, Compete stayed focused on our ultimate goal: helping our clients reach their marketing potential.

Conclusion

Brandjacking can feel like a personal attack. It has the ability to hurt your brand and interfere with future opportunities. Online brandjacking means you have temporarily lost control of what is said in your name on the Internet, therefore leaving you vulnerable to media attacks or bad publicity. Let Compete help you be proactive about protecting and managing your brand. Compete Communications can offer appropriate marketing solutions that build your brand and maximize your earning power.



About Compete Communications

Compete Communications is a full-service integrated marketing communications agency based in Troy, Michigan. Our clients trust us to help them reach their marketing potential, and we deliver. We have worked with financial advisors, professional athletes, as well as small and large business owners. Compete account managers are proficient in social media with experience in digital marketing. We strive to provide clients with the *edge* needed to **compete**.

For more information call us at (248) 229-9980 or email us info@competecommunications.com

<http://www.competecommunications.com>

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