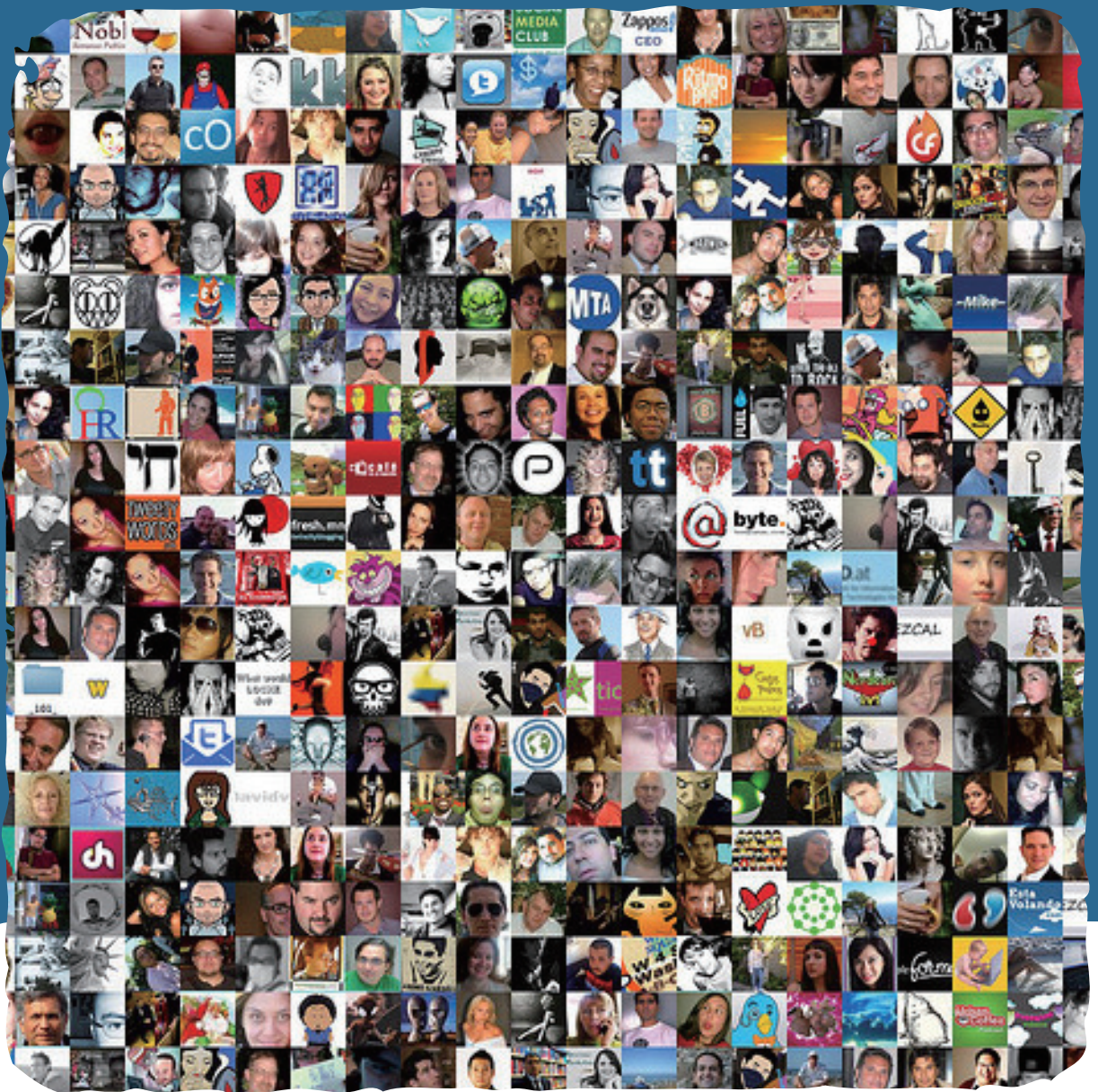


Best Practices in Chinese Microblog Communications

By Stephy Liu, Johan Björkstén and Charlotta Lagerdahl





About the research

This report and its findings were produced by Eastwei MSL consultants leveraging a variety of sources, including interviews with traditional media and bloggers, research on social media habits of Chinese audiences, review of third party research and other published reports, and insights and best practices from Eastwei MSL's social media and microblogging campaigns for more than 15 clients. These campaigns have included work for multinational and local Chinese brands and have included a variety of target audiences ranging from consumers to b2b and corporate stakeholders.

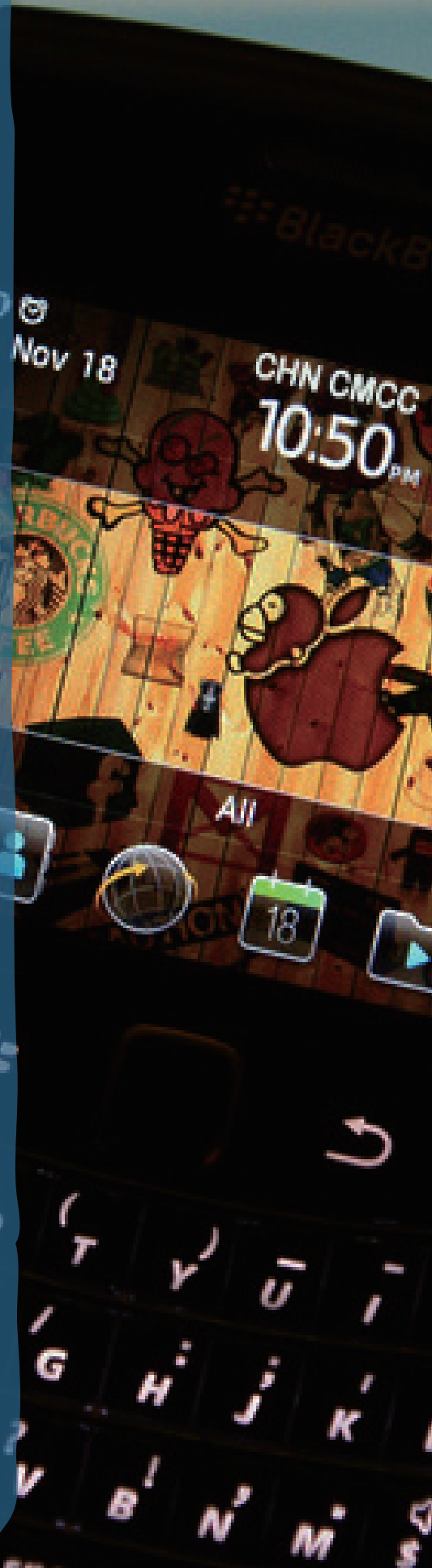
About Eastwei MSL

Eastwei MSL is China's leading strategic PR agency, founded in 1994 by partners who are still active in the firm. Eastwei MSL is part of MSLGROUP, the PR arm of the world's third largest communications network: Publicis Groupe. Eastwei MSL provide communications analysis and strategy, marketing communications, corporate communications and event management to a number of Fortune 500 and smaller clients.



About MSLGROUP

MSLGROUP is a speciality communications and engagement group that's one of the world's top 5 PR and events networks. With more than 2,500 people, its offices span 22 countries and cover virtually every discipline required for clients to engage creatively with their audiences 24 hours a day. Adding affiliates and partners into the equation, MSLGROUP's reach increases to 4,000 employees in 83 countries. The group offers clients strategic advice, insight-guided thinking and big, compelling ideas - followed by thorough execution. MSLGROUP is Publicis Groupe's flagship PR and Events network. www.mslgroup.com



A developing communications landscape

Online communications in China are changing quickly; the emergence of microblogs, so called weibos, is one of the major developments of the last few years. Marketers have called microblogs “the ultimate social media”; this is because they combine the social networking characteristics of SNS with the convenience and immediacy of Instant Messaging (IM), the individual touch of blogs, and the variety of subjects of BBS discussions. In the US and Europe, the main microblogging platform is Twitter, which already has a long history of commercially promoting brands and products. The 2007 US presidential campaign was a key milestone, as Barack Obama rallied the American people through frequent use of Twitter and other social media tools. But although microblogging started in China at roughly the same time as in the US, it was only in 2010 that it really took off.

Different user habits

Today, Chinese microbloggers are a diverse group. They include celebrities, CEOs, teenagers, media and parents. However, they benefit in different ways: CEOs project their company brand and culture internally and externally through thought leadership, company updates and industry projections; celebrities use it as a channel of communication to their fans. By posting pictures from their daily lives and revealing “secrets” before they reach the traditional media, people in the limelight use microblogs as a highly efficient tool for staying close to their audience and creating closer bonds with them.

For journalists, microblogging is a mixed blessing. On one hand, it gives media a new source of information – many journalists closely follow the microblogs of CEOs and celebrities as a source of quotes, updates and insights for articles. On the other hand, the emergence of microblogging could also be seen as a threat to the entire media business model. Many journalists testify that microblogs force them to increase the speed and quality of their reporting.

For the average person, the weibo is a lifestyle where their entire life is open for display – something that is primarily meant for peers, but can be used by marketers to get a feel for what is going on in the lives of target audiences. Our research shows that female users tend to focus on posts covering daily life, shopping, travelling, emotion and gossip. Men on the other hand are more likely to share news about a specific industry, or sports and technology, as well as doing online networking with other microbloggers who are perceived to be “in the know”.

An emerging communications tool

Multinational companies in China have been slow to take up microblogging as an opportunity to increase ROI of existing marketing initiatives, cement relationships with consumers, and ultimately drive sales and enhance reputation. Even so, Eastwei MSL has built one of the strongest Microblogging teams in the country: beginning in 2009, we have designed and executed a few dozen successful microblogging campaigns for some of the most sophisticated marketing organizations in mainland China. Here, we want to share some of the key insights and concrete tips on how to successfully leverage this exciting new tool to support communications and business objectives.



● **Microblogging Tip: Weibo user behavior at a glance**

- | Majority of users are between 20 and 40 years of age
- | Tier 1 cities have the highest penetration, with peaks in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chengdu
- | In southern China, users usually weibo at night
- | In Beijing and Shanghai, users weibo during office hours
- | 43 percent of weibo users are female
- | 57 percent of weibo users are male
- | 36.6 percent of weibo users access via their mobile phone, and among those, 29 % have an iPhone

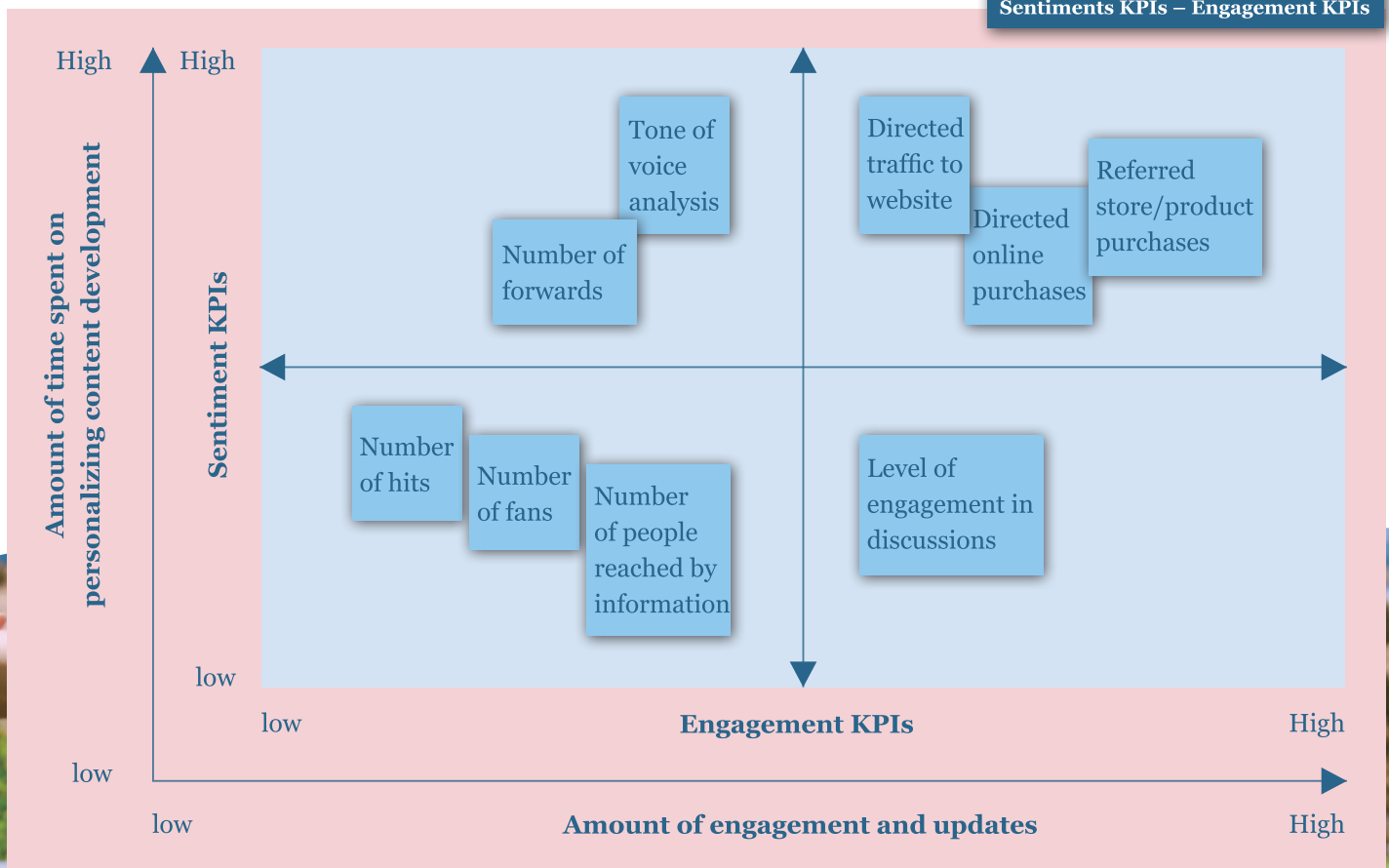
Insight 1: Brand identity, analysis, strategy and KPIs are always key, no matter which channel you are using

A weibo is the mirror of the brand. As such, it needs a real identity with a personality that directly faces the target group. Therefore, equip the weibo with a background, sentiments, hobbies and character traits. Before kicking off a microblogging initiative, analyze the habits of the target group. Are they online at all? If so: do they currently read weibos? How do they consume other media in general, and how do they find information about your products or services in particular? As with other media, microblogging is only effective if used by the target audience. When defining your strategy and your KPIs, there are two main dimensions to consider: stakeholder level of engagement

and stakeholder level of sentiments, see figure 1; “Sentiment KPIs – Engagement KPIs”.

The KPIs in the upper right-hand box measure the extent to which consumers become engaged and take action in addition to having a general positive attitude towards the brand. Getting results in this quadrant places the highest demands on weibo strategy and execution; it may take a while to reach this stage. The more easily achieved KPIs in the other boxes will help you measure progress towards this ultimate goal of full microblog engagement with stakeholders.

Figure 1:
Sentiments KPIs – Engagement KPIs



• **Microblogging Tip:**

Study 5-10 weibos from competitors or companies in industries close to your own; analyze target audience, objectives, underlying strategy, success factors, and KPIs, as well as areas that could be improved upon. This will provide you with lots of ideas, and help you differentiate your own offering from those of your direct competitors.

Insight 2:

Impact is highest when efforts are integrated

To optimize the outcome, a weibo should seldom stand alone. Consumers easily move between online and offline communications; your brand should do the same. An objective of the weibo is often to drive traffic or sales by keeping consumers updated and showing them the way to

more in-depth information. Microblogging gives you the opportunity to deepen your conversations about what is happening in other channels.

The Singapore Tourism Board, STB, successfully integrates on- and offline efforts for events in mainland China, with the ultimate aim of attracting Chinese visitors to Singapore. Besides using the STB microblog to invite journalists, media are also encouraged to follow the online updates. The resulting microblog content is in turn used as an invitation platform to make consumers excited about the upcoming event and to secure selected fan attendance. In a recent event, influential bloggers were also invited; this allowed STB to leverage the real-life, offline event content in the online world, by using the credibility and reach of established bloggers. The result was overwhelming, and the event became one of the most talked about offline happenings in the online communication sphere.

猜新加坡明星旅游大使•就有机会和TA现场面对面 9月7日@北京,新旅局将在新闻发布会上邀请新一届旅游大使与微博和豆瓣的幸运粉丝面对面,【回复你心中的新加坡旅游大使名字】猜对的粉丝就有机会下周到现场与TA面对面!大家也可以去豆瓣活动页面参加活动,非常漂亮的页面哦<http://sinaurl.cn/542uG>



9月3日 18:31 来自新浪微博

转发(145) | 收藏 | 评论(255)



Insight 3: It's worth spending time on getting your tone-of-voice right

Communicating though weibos comes with a built-in challenge: how to communicate in “social media speak” to relate to the online audience, while at the same time maintaining your brand’s image and integrity? How much should a company compromise – in both directions?

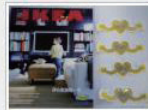
Don't try to be too chummy

How should you address consumers online? Should you try to be “best buddies” or keep a professional distance? Our experience from China bears out the findings of international research: sites that adopt a relaxed yet professional tone of voice attract the most followers. To find the right tone of voice, imagine how you write to a friend at work: you would start the conversations with

● *Microblogging Tip:*

The first and most simple way of making a weibo more accessible is to rewrite the company introduction. Instead of using an abstract boilerplate from a typical corporate homepage, strive for personalized messaging to create a more informal feeling: “Hi, this is...”

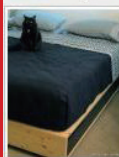
明天是#感恩节#你,你最想对谁说感谢? 😊 在这条微博下面【回复+转发你的感恩节心情,并且@你想感谢的人】就有机会获得宜家送出的感恩纪念品哦。借此机会,宜家也想感谢每一位顾客和每一位围脖粉丝,祝我们开心每一天。下周一抽取10位中奖粉丝,让我们的生活因感恩而更美好!



11月24日 16:32 来自新浪微博

删除 | 转发(535) | 收藏 | 评论(543)

周末快乐!你是想逛逛宜家,还是想当个贪睡的猫咪? 【曼德尔 床框架带储物盒 ¥2,999.00 (以商场售价为基准)】



10月16日 20:00 来自新浪微博

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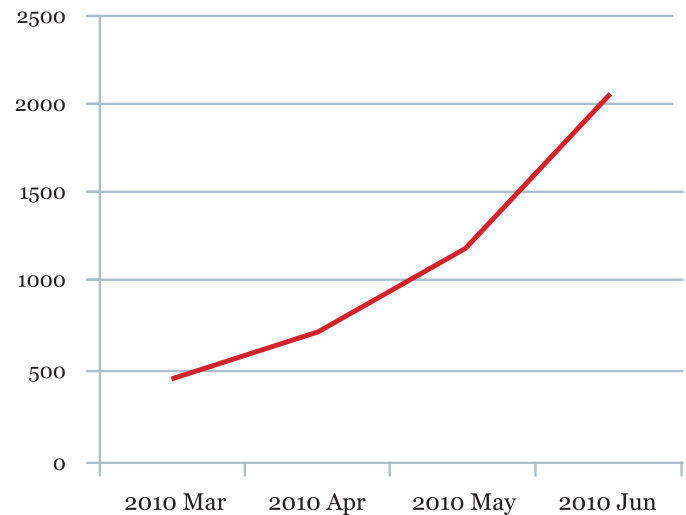


“Hi” or “Hello” instead of “Dear”, but avoid the close-friend “Whazzzz up” – unless, of course, you happen to represent a skateboard brand, in which case this tone of voice would sometimes be considered spot-on. Also, try to avoid copying formal text from your website or press releases.

Use pictures, videos and interesting stories

Generally, weibo posts that include pictures or video will generate more attention. The key is to post images that will tell the brand story in a captivating way. You don't need to commission original pictures every time – re-using advertising pictures can work just fine.

Effective View Duration of Sina Weibo
(thousand hours)



● **Microblogging Tip:**

Make sure to obtain the “official V” verification from Sina (the most commonly used Chinese weibo platform). This will make it possible for you to integrate your key visuals into the design of the weibo, as well as taking advantage of the flexibility of the medium. The V verification allows you to add temporary message icons, as well as adapt to seasonal changes. The weibo should be different from your home page, and keep it fresh by changing the design on a regular basis.

IKEA is a good example of a company which has found the right tone of voice in their microblog. The IKEA microblog voice is polite and friendly, posting a daily Hi and Goodbye to the readers. There are seasonal greetings as well as surprises. The IKEA microblog has been hugely successful because both tonality and the content is just right; tuning in to reader needs takes careful research and perseverance.

圣诞将至, 宜家微博举办【有奖转发Party】, 快来赢取新品礼包: 圣诞树型挂饰架和美丽饰品。只要 ①回复并转发你对朋友的圣诞祝福 ② @三位好友, 就这么简单! 转越多, 就越有机会赢取圣诞大礼包。现在就参加, 礼包送到家! 12号抽取5位幸运粉丝。在飘雪季节, 宜家和你一起打造温馨的家, 让我们都缤纷起来



12月1日 14:05 来自新浪微博

删除 | 转发(3007) | 收藏 | 评论(2783)

Insight 4:

Stay relevant to the hot topics of society and the daily lives of your target group

Microblogging is about real-time conversations with your target audience. The real-time aspect is a key attraction, but also a major challenge. Try to tie message content to current events, holidays or season. If a topic is hot and current, find a way to address it while at the same time displaying your brand values. Relating posts to people's daily or weekly schedules is just as important. Avoid Monday morning posts; your readers will be busy starting off the new work week. If you are in the food business, it might be a smart idea to post information about your products just before lunch, when people are starting to get hungry. If you want your audience to think of your weibo as a friend, you need to act like one.

In November 2010, there was a big fire in Shanghai. The city stopped and its people thought of little else but the victims and their families. Both companies and netizens reflected this in their weibos; one example was the "green ribbon" activity from Sina.

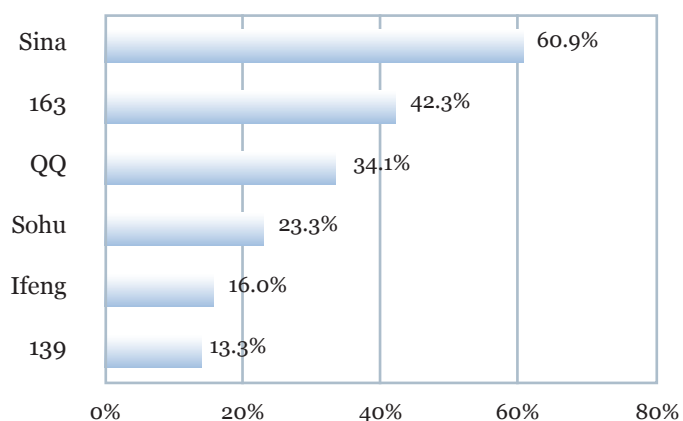
🕯️ 为上海高楼大火中逝去的同胞祈福 🕯️ 让我们转发传递 🕊️ 为53位逝去的生命哀悼! 为逝者默哀, 一路走好; 为伤者祈福, 早日康复。



11月17日 10:59 来自新浪微博

删除 | 转发(87) | 收藏 | 评论(37)

2010: Penetration of Weibo Users for Main Weibo Brands



Insight 5:

The content must be interactive; try to achieve viral potential

Research shows that a post including a picture is around 20 percent more popular than text-only postings. Pictures and movies are also forwarded more often, creating the desired peer-to-peer effect and consumer interaction. Preparing lots of pictures and stories based on an “editorial calendar” before launching your weibo is a the simplest way of ensuring constant activity. Another way of ensuring relevance is to be flexible and continuously add new content to the conversation, depending on user needs and what is happening in the rest of society.

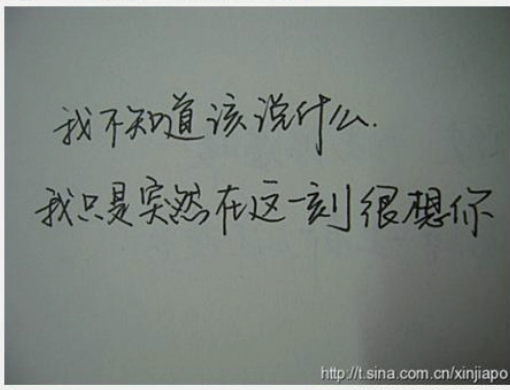
Engage netizens

The best way to generate interaction is to actively engage netizens, for example through votes and opinion polls and publishing the result, encouraging followers to post their own content on the company weibo or through starting a debate on interesting topics where participants are likely to have different opinions.



再不相爱就老了。你要不要勇敢尝试一次，就在今天，9.12 #示爱节#

收起 查看原图 向左转 向右转



<http://t.sina.com.cn/xinjiapo>

9月12日 11:21 来自新浪微博

转发(7588) 收藏 评论(1523)

Singapore Tourism Board carefully and proactively plans viral postings. On September 12, a date which in Chinese sounds like “I love you”, 示爱节, STB launched a Weibo campaign urging readers to say “I love you” to their close ones. By the end of 2010, this post had been forwarded over 7,000 times, connecting the Singapore brand to warm emotions, while at the same time engaging closely with its target audience.

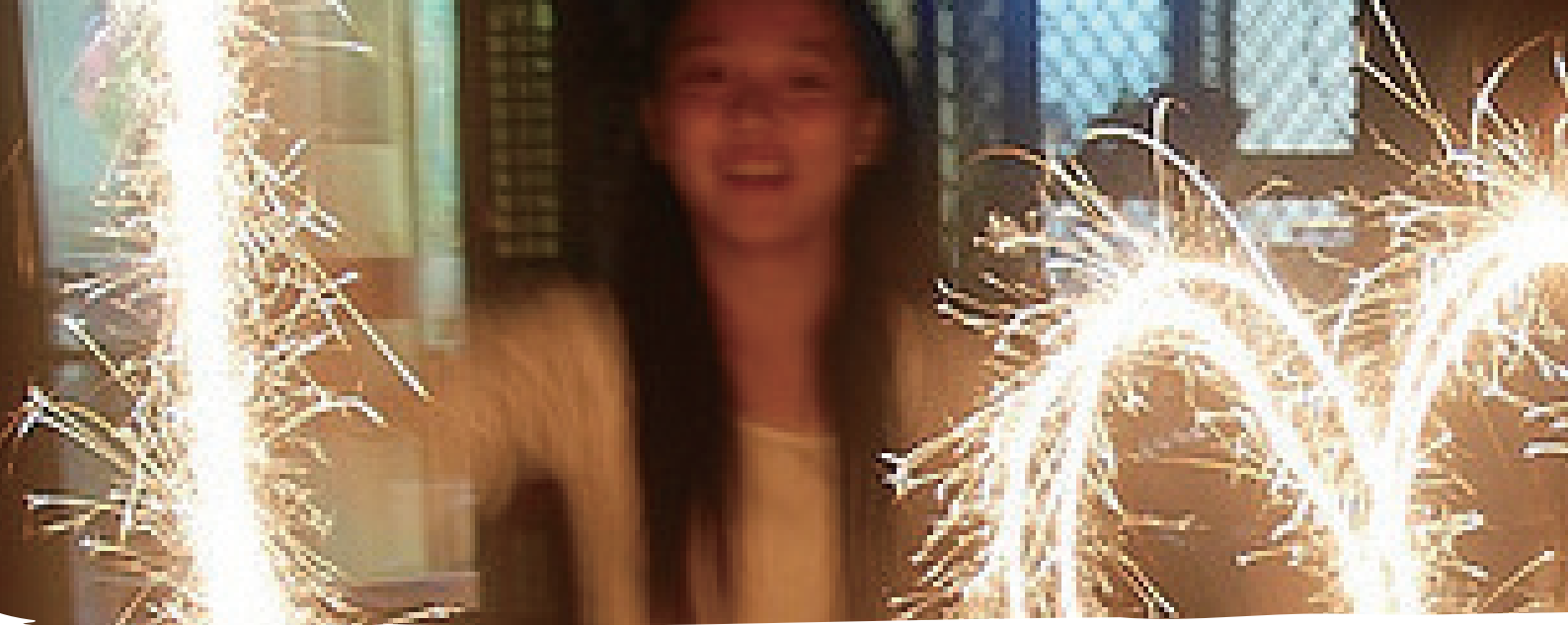
Leveraging consumer generated content is an effective way to gain followers as well as generating relevant content. IKEA, for example, constantly encourages readers to upload their own pictures and comments while integrating with the brand and offering. Below, picture of a reader mimicking an IKEA product.

好有感染力的笑容，在电脑前看到让人不禁一起微笑。希望以后你会一直在宜家找到快乐逛的开心。

@MTcheng : 宜家私提提 @ 原文转发(5) | 原文评论(6)

收起 查看原图 向左转 向右转





● **Microblogging Tip:**

Incentives matter. Providing incentives is a fast and cost-efficient way of quickly gaining popularity. This will help attract fans during the launch stage of the weibo. As you enter the growth period, incentives can boost your fan base. When choosing incentives, pick something that will communicate your brand values. For the professional service firm looking to attract top students, a lottery ticket might be appealing to the target group, but is not in line with brand messaging: success is not about "luck". A smart briefcase, or a branded booklet with career advice from seasoned professionals, will be more effective choices.

Difference between a weibo in China and the western Twitter

Even though the weibo is similar to the western Twitter, there are several differences to consider:

1) For Twitter, the replies and comments appear independently in the feed. On a Weibo, they are listed under the entry, like a traditional blog. Therefore, an entire discussion around a specific entry can be seen in one place.

2) While Twitter recently launched so called "verified accounts" for brand and celebrities, they are a pre requisite for marketing via a weibo. When verified, a "v" will appear in the user's weibo entry, signaling that there are commercial interests behind the weibo.

3) In China, the microblogs are connected to other platforms with a huge number of users. This gives the weibos automatic exposure to a much bigger audience. The connection to the

other, older platforms also guarantees acceptance from the government.

4) The weibo offers a more elegant solution when sharing pictures and videos. The visual attachments can easily be viewed without leaving the weibo page, something that has proved very valuable for marketers.

5) In general, there is more interaction on a weibo compared to a Twitter account. In China, weibo users regularly comment on brand- and celebrity accounts.

6) For navigation and search, the portal pages of weibos are more comprehensive than that of Twitter. There is a lot of information listed for marketers to use, such as how popular certain weibos are, how to find weibos that treat specific topics etc.



Insight 6: Engagement is the key to success

If you want to maintain reader interest, you need to reply to their comments; nothing is as off-putting as trying to engage in communication when you don't get a response. But engaging consumers in a timely manner is important for another reason as well: shaping and channeling the conversations that take place online. It is easy to assume that as long as your target audience keeps talking, your microblogging effort is in good shape. But if you don't

participate, you lose your opportunity to influence the flow of information and to develop a deeper connection with your audience or even make them into evangelists. People will discuss your brand with or without your participation – the whole point of having a weibo in the first place is being able to learn from, and engage with, your stakeholders in a forum that they love.



Ernst & Young, one of the world's leading accounting firms, is a sophisticated user of microblogging in China. The company uses its weibo to engage with future employees and other stakeholders. Followers post questions, raise concerns and ask career related questions. Ernst & Young has put in place a rapid-response system to ensure that every important post receives a reply from a firm employee. In some cases, the firm contacts weibo respondents directly through a phone call. The illustration to the left shows a student's post, outlining how moved he was by Ernst & Young's concern. He is praising the company as best-in-class on online communication. Other netizens echoed the post with further positive comments about Ernst & Young.



A weibo can be the start of a new friendship with your stakeholders

Starting a weibo is a long-term commitment; it is similar to engaging in a friendship. Online communities are based on trust; and trust is built on professionalism, reliability and a real concern for the feelings and needs of the other party. Done right, a microblogging initiative is a unique opportunity to establish a truly engaging dialogue with your key audiences.

Eastwei MSL regularly publishes Executive Whitepapers with insights and comments on trends, the industry and society as a whole. To get information from Eastwei MSL or to subscribe to future whitepapers, as well as to contact us for any other matter, please send us an e-mail on contact.us@eastweimsl.com or call us +86 21 5169 9311 (SH) or +86 10 5979 5558 (BJ).

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March 2011
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