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STUDY: ONLY 1% OF FACEBOOK 'FANS' ENGAGE WITH BRANDS

Not Many Fans Are Creating Content, But That Might Not Be a Bad Thing

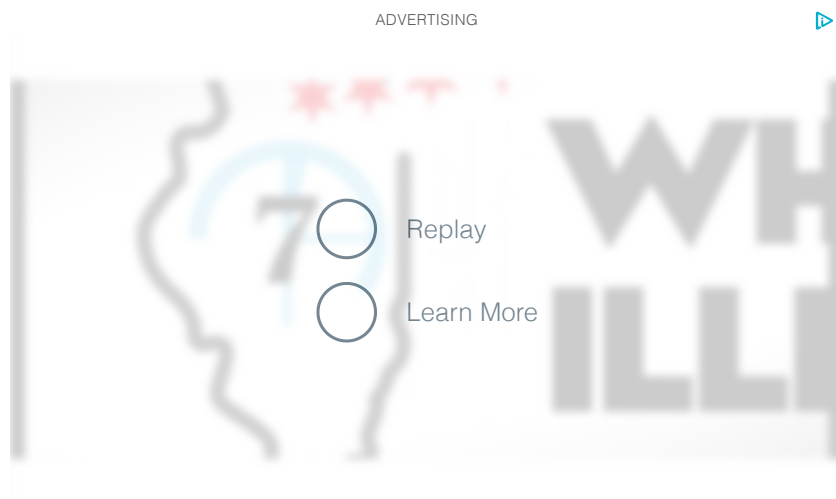


By [Matthew Creamer](#). Published on January 27, 2012.

For a few years now, brands have been touting frothy Facebook "like" numbers as evidence of their social-media acumen. But how many of those fans are actually bothering to take part in conversation with brands?

Not too many, as it turns out.

Slightly more than 1% of fans of the biggest brands on Facebook are actually engaging with the brands, according to a study from the [Ehrenberg-Bass Institute](#), an Australia-based marketing think tank that counts [Procter & Gamble](#), [Coca-Cola](#) and other major advertisers as its supporters.



To get to these findings, the researchers used one of Facebook's own metrics, People Talking About This, the awkwardly-named running count of likes, posts, comments, tags, shares and other ways a user of the social network

can interact with branded pages. It was unveiled last fall as a way of giving advertisers a sharper look at the level of activity on their pages.

Researchers for the institute looked at this metric as a proportion of overall fan growth of the top 200 brands on Facebook over a six-week period back in October and they found the percentage of People Talking About This to overall fans to be 1.3%. If you subtract new likes, which only requires a click and in the minds of the researchers are akin to TV ratings, and isolate for more engaged forms of interaction, you're left within an even smaller number: 0.45%. That means less than half a percent of people who identify themselves as like a brand actually bother to create any content around it.

You might assume these are damning numbers. But this isn't necessarily the case.

"I don't think it's a bad thing," said Karen Nelson-Field, senior research associate for Ehrenberg-Bass Institute who describes herself as a "Facebook advocate." "People need to understand what it can do for a brand and what it can't do. Facebook doesn't really differ from mass media. It's great to get decent reach, but to change the way people interact with a brand overnight is just unrealistic."

In the background here is the thinking of Andrew Ehrenberg, the late mathematician who was highly skeptical of conventional marketing wisdom. In dense statistically-oriented papers, he cast doubt on concepts such as brand loyalty and was never sold on the persuasive power of advertising. Now his disciples advocate achieving broad reach through mass media. Brand growth, they maintain, is attained not by reaching a few loyal fans but a larger number of light and medium buyers. In this understanding of the marketing and media worlds, social is just another media channel useful for its reach rather than any notion of engagement.

This research jibes with that thinking, as does a separate study from Ms. Nelson-Field looking at the distribution of buying behavior among Facebook fan bases. In that study, she used web-based consumer panels to examine the behavior of Facebook fans of two unnamed repeat-purchased brands, in the chocolate and soft-drink categories. The key finding was a much greater occurrence of heavy buyers in the Facebook population than in a more general population of customers. The study also found that purchase frequency didn't increase after someone became a fan.

In other words, Facebook fan bases skew toward heavy buyers rather than the more casual shoppers that a brands needs to reach in order to grow. Again, unless you're someone who believes marketing on Facebook alone constitutes a full strategy or you're lining up for the inevitable Facebook IPO, this isn't all bad news. Facebook does provide good reach and its audience of loyal fans is good for market research and word-of-mouth advocacy.

If there's an overall caution, it's against, in the words of Ms. Nelson-Field, "putting a disproportionate amount of effort into engagement and strategies to get people to talk about a brand, when you should be spending more time getting more light buyers."

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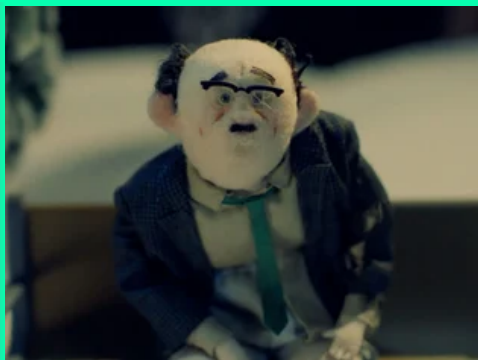
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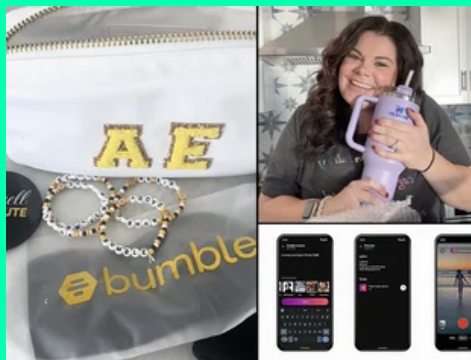
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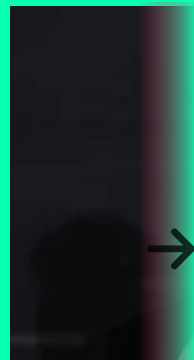
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