



How Applebee's Brings The "Neighborhood" To Life With Social Media

The Challenge



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Applebee’s is the world’s largest casual dining chain with over 2000 restaurants across North America, South America and the Middle East. Over 95% of these locations are franchised and vary in size from 4 to 350+ restaurant locations per franchise group. All franchises operate with differing management and operations structures, POS systems, and marketing support. System wide, Applebee’s core menu and branding are consistent through all media outlets but franchises have the freedom to host local events that are “Neighborhood” specific. Every restaurant, strives to make an individual connection with its local community and support charity efforts that matter to their neighborhood.

In 2010, unofficial local Applebee’s restaurant Facebook pages began to pop-up organically across the country. Facebook enabled the local restaurants to talk about their neighborhood events and late night parties. Instead of shutting these accounts down, the franchises empowered restaurant managers and encouraged them to build digital connections with their guests to increase the likelihood of a visit to their neighborhood restaurant. However, there needed to be governance in place to protect branding through photo approval, monitoring of employee activity and guest comments. The challenge; do it in less than 10 minutes a day and limit distractions to the operation’s teams.

The Solution



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Applebee's leveraged Expion's Social Media Management Software. Expion's software can be configured to work within the structure of each franchise's operational hierarchy. In addition, it can audit their franchise's employees and create specific keyword scans to follow regulations for food and beverage marketing. Applebee's felt Expion was a perfect fit. Add the benefit of billing by franchise and you've created unique companies from a P&L view, but linked data from a sharing of best practices to benefit overall marketing. As word spread amongst the franchise groups, this local social media trickled up from the bottom vs. being mandated from the top down.

Once Applebee's Services Inc. realized that they could glean intelligence from these local pages, they were also on board to pull in the brand page and combine all the data into one resource. The franchisor was also seeking a distribution system to share images and content for upcoming campaigns as they started to learn what was working and what was not. Both at the paid and organic levels, the National budget could be leveraged to give tested and proven advertising and content down to each marketing manager via the Expion library for use in under delivered markets. "Facebook is so dynamic in both features and metrics, it's hard to keep everyone in the loop." Says Jill McFarland, Applebee's Social Brand Manager, "Expion gives me the ability to share, but also the ability to learn what others are doing across our system."

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The Result



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By allowing the brand page, 1550 local pages and 5000+ local users, Applebee's has been able to create a rich database to glean insight regarding service and menu offerings. They have also created a connection to over 3.8M fans on the Brand level and 800K fans across the local pages with less than a 10% overlap of fan penetration creating unique connections. Demographic data across different regions can assist with stronger targeting on other media sources to maximize the spend for each campaign and resonate to the target audience reflected through social media.



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