

Marco Magnaghi

Title: Business innovation manager (former)

Company: Amadori

Size: 1.2bn euros revenue; 7,000 employees (2011)

ADAPTIVE: Getting results by trying, tasting and trying again

Running a successful social business is a lot like perfecting a recipe. You have to try new combinations, see how the mix works and adjust until it is right.

Just ask Marco Magnaghi, who until recently served as business innovation manager at Amadori. He pioneered the Italian food company's online outreach to customers, serving up everything from bake-offs and recipe guides to microsites aimed at younger users.

Using social technologies to win customers made perfect sense, says Mr Magnaghi, who has had a robust appetite for technology and communications ever since his father introduced him to a computer at age five.

"Food in particular," he says, "talks about ourselves, our culture, history, our daily habits and our free time. It is ancestral as well as contemporary. It is perfect to be described through social media."

Back in 2010, a major challenge for a budding social business lay in evaluating whether social initiatives were successful or not. Few benchmarks were available by which to judge them; no one knew if, say, adding 5,000 Facebook followers in a site's first week was an encouraging or discouraging result.

So he focused on creating a voice for the company that would connect with social media users and ran tests to see what content hit home and what missed. The goal was to be "able to understand what consumers and users wanted to know", so Amadori could give it to them, says Mr Magnaghi, who is now chief digital officer at Maxus Italy, a media agency of GroupM, a unit of the global advertising agency WPP.

Success, he believed, would come from knowing and engaging customers and differentiating Amadori from rivals. The food business competes for eyes and ears in an enormous media landscape—television, print and online—that is rife with celebrity chefs, movie stars and ubiquitous food bloggers. "The risk," Mr Magnaghi says, "is just being part of the mass, not emerging as relevant to the eyes and stomachs of consumers."

He teamed up with marketing and IT colleagues to cook up something special. To market a new sausage product called “Evviva”, they created a microsite where people could upload funny videos and then gave makers of the best videos acting roles in TV commercials. Later, they used the site to promote and manage invitations to a beach party tour, where Evviva was served at beach-side happy hours, barbecues and brunches. Then they posted funny photos and videos from the events on the site.

The team made a few wrong turns, but gained useful insights and adapted. “We always wanted to work on the process by trial, learning and repetition,” Mr Magnaghi says.

Today, the major challenge is to convert webpage views, fans and followers into revenue, he says. Marketers are getting there by using troves of data about consumers to tailor communications in digital and traditional media, but Mr Magnaghi urges restraint. “Companies must learn not be intrusive,” he says. “That’s the fastest road to irrelevance.”

The road to revenue, he believes, lies in old-fashioned methods of selling to consumers within new digital venues. Amadori is a family company that has catered to families for decades. It aims to build new relationships, foster loyalty and keep its venerable company as young as its customers. “I’m not saying that having many fans is not a result,” he adds. “That’s fine, but today we can do so much more than that.”



Marco Magnaghi

Former business innovation manager, Amadori

Social business leader

