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Brand Audit Report: APPLE

When deciding what business to focus on for this assignment, we wanted to explore a company that was not only successful and high-performing, but also innovative and effective with their marketing strategies. As the world's largest information technology company with a market cap exceeding \$500 billion according to CNN's business site, Apple was our clear-cut choice for learning about how the strategies they have employed have made them so successful.

An American multinational technology company headquartered in Cupertino, California, Apple designs, develops and sells the world's most popular consumer electronics and software. Over the course of its existence, Apple has sold over one billion apple products across the world to millions of loyal customers. Their reach has transcended across countless fanbases and social media platforms due to the strategic market strategy efforts by Apple. In this paper we will delve into the company's social media strategy to gain insight of Apple's success.

We will first start with an analysis of the brand's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats on social media. The strength of Apple's social media presence stems from their large following of passionate consumers. This means that any time a new product or update is announced, there are millions of people who share and talk about it online with their networks, creating word-of-mouth. While the official Apple accounts do not post content, there are

certain accounts, such as @AppleSupport on Twitter, that interact with customers.

@AppleSupport is an effective customer service portal because it not only responds to individual customers through its tweets, but also posts pictures and videos that answer frequently asked questions, such as those related to specific iPhone functions. Apple also has accounts for some of its different services. Apple Music is on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram and regularly posts about the latest hit songs and news from the music industry. While it certainly has its strengths, Apple's social media presence is not without its weaknesses. As mentioned before, Apple does not post any content to its main accounts, despite massive followings. This means that followers of the brand usually have to get the latest news on new product from other sources. This also represents a major missed opportunity for engaging their audience. Most marketers can only dream of having the following that Apple does, yet it seemingly goes to waste. This weakness, however, opens the door to many opportunities. Apple, already having a dominant share of the market, has the potential to take even more of that share if they could utilize their following on social media. More specifically, there is a world of opportunity on LinkedIn. Apple's Mac computers are the go-to computers for many creative professionals who work in designing ads, products, and other works. The majority of these professionals are active on LinkedIn and are influenced by the posts they see from companies there. If Apple could establish more of a presence in this space by writing articles on the application of Mac computers to creative work, it could significantly boost sales in this market. Apple also faces a number of threats on social media. The new Mac and iPhone 7 have faced heavy criticism, which has led to large amounts of negative WOM. It remains to be seen as to whether or not this will affect sales, but it certainly does not look good for these new products.

Apple also faces competition from its close competitors in the smartphone market, Samsung and Google. Both of these companies have an active presence on social media engaging with their followers and growing their brand awareness. This is something that has the potential to greatly harm Apple as Google prepares to release its new phone, the Pixel.

When it comes to Apple's use of the Four Zones of Social Media, one could definitively say Apple has chosen the less is more approach. The company manages to keep the world on a string, awaiting every move, after the decades spent cultivating its loyal band of passionate followers. Many wonder how the brand has managed to not only build this reputation but also maintain it with very little to no social media presence at all. The reality of their unconventional strategy lies in the fact that Apple is such a force beyond anything else that they can essentially do as much or as little as possible, and they will still be in the number one spot of the most valuable brands in the world. From here we will delve into the marketing strategies and activities that we believe Apple has used to its advantage as a part of the Four Zones of Social Media.

The first of the four zones is Social Communities. In this zone, different channels of social media are the focus of how people engage and connect and form relationships by participating in activities with others who share the same interests or identification. In order for social media channels to be viable, networked relationships must exist. Through these relationships come the interaction and collaboration necessary for engagement. Anyone wanting to be part of an online community chooses an active or passive role. While both have their places, it is the active members of a community that create the content people want to talk about and share and it is their contributions that give social communities such a strong presence in the online

world. Any company is wise to elaborate and expand upon these communities to the best of their advantage. Companies utilize social media by creating the most effective social media strategies for their brand by reacting to their audience that gathers conveniently in the same spot across Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Apple's approach to the social media game has been unconventional to say the least. You would think the world's most valuable brand would dominate all social media vehicles, but, then again, Apple isn't one to follow the status quo. Whereas companies like Coca-Cola, Samsung and Starbucks are very hyper-social using media as their number one promoters, Apple simply has a blasé attitude towards the whole thing entirely. Facebook is the largest social media networking site in the world with over 1.79 billion active users, but do you see the account @Apple there? While the brand does have a sizeable following on Facebook pages for different sections like Apple Music and iTunes, the company's namesake page does not exist on the site. The same goes for Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat – three of the biggest social media platforms nearly all of their customers are using. While it may seem ludicrous for a company to not use such an easy, give-me platform to their advantage, the strength of Apple's brand allows them to break the rules other marketers have no choice but to follow. Apple's combined reach on Twitter totals to over 20 million followers, over 2.8 million followers on Instagram, and over 31 million likes on Facebook. Impactful as these numbers are, the more impressive fact is that Apple has achieved this amount of reach without having an official page on any of the sites. The lesson this anomaly ultimately teaches us is that Apple is in no way hurting for engagement with their customers.

The second of the four zones is social publishing. In this zone, social publishing sites such as blogs, YouTube, Flickr and Picasa aid in the dissemination of content across a broad audience. In the case of Apple's use of social publishing, the theme of limited use was also present. Apple has an official YouTube channel which boasts thousands of videos under numerous categories. From hype ads of the newest product releases to how-to-use tutorials to informational videos Apple has gained a strong following of over 4 million subscribers on the site. Also, on Apple's owned media site can be found Apple Support Communities. Support Communities is an official site people treat as a blog to post information and questions pertaining to Apple products that others search for. By logging onto the site and searching under which category you are interested in learning about, you will find a community of hundreds of people who are in your same shoes and teach the answers you are looking for. The purpose of social publishing strategies is to increase exposure to the brand's message and to increase traffic to its owned media sites. Apple may be unusual compared to other companies when it comes to its use of social media presence, but its strategies with social publishing have been on point thus far.

The third zone, social entertainment, is the group of vehicles that allow for people to play and interact online. These channels include social games, gaming sites as well as entertainment communities. We've seen the magnitude these online games have had on user impact with Myspace, Candy Crush and Farmville. These examples, however, are part of past movements where the shift now has been towards gaming apps. While Apple is only the creator of a few games, it is the one responsible for giving us the ability to possess any games at all. The App Store is the means through which most smartphone users download their entertainment,

and since its creation has had over 100 billion apps downloaded according to the research website, Tech Times. The iPhone has created the demand for mobile games and many studios go to Apple first to publish their games because of it. Apple has made one of the most appealing features of its products the iPhone and iPad that it is an entertainment zone for people of all ages. The App Store boasts over 2 million apps that are downloaded by the tens of thousands daily according to statista. As of September 2016 over 140 billion apps have been downloaded through the App Store alone. The percentage of games is unclear, but it is safe to say Apple's reach as one of the top social entertainment vehicles is in no way winding down in the foreseeable future.

The final zone of the Four Zone model is social commerce. This zone refers to the buying and selling of products and services through online sites. Such examples would be Groupon, LivingSocial and TripAdvisor. You may think these are big name businesses, but quite arguably, Apple's iTunes trumps them all. Back in '08, iTunes was averaging over \$3 billion in yearly revenue from music sales. Since then, sales have been topping that in individual quarters alone according to Fortune's website. However, Apple realizes they will soon face a steep decline in iTunes's relevance as we make the transition to subscription-based music streaming. Apple is well aware of the rise and fall of trends though and has been preparing for the shift with the introduction of Apple Music in mid 2015. After a little under a year and a half, Apple has grown the streaming service to over 17 million subscribers. Revenue from iTunes and Apple Music is in the billions and not looking to slow down anytime soon.

Apple is used to think differently in all areas of the business. This is the guide line of the marketing strategy of the tech giant. When Apple was incorporated in 1977, the investor/advisor Mike Markkula assembled a 3-point marketing philosophy based in three points : empathy (we know exactly what our customers want), focus, impute (Apple's packaging is one of the best). Another great quality of the company is that they keep it simple.

Furthermore, concerning their social media strategy, the company is playing in its own way. Even, if it has been proven that social media is important leverage for your company. Apple has a really limited presence on the social media. Right now, the company is not present on most social media platforms. Apple is actually legendary for its avoidance of engagement especially for a tech company.

Indeed, Apple doesn't have official account on majors channels that customers use to talk about it. There is not even a Twitter official @Apple account (it's only an early-bird egg avatar and not sure it's related to the tech giant) and the Facebook page twitter have many engagement but present no content at all. The company best presence on the social media is throughout fans who shares articles from the website or create non-official account in the social media platform in order to talk about all the possible innovations or news from the company. However, when you look deeper, the company controls several accounts under different terminology : first, there are plenty of branches of the apple trees which have official accounts such as @itunesmovies @appstore @ibooks or @itunesmusic dedicated to its product and services. Then, on some specialized social networks the company created a presence such as

Youtube or LinkedIn (jobs) but we can say that they are following a one way strategy by disabled comments on the video.

Finally, Tim Cook, Apple chief executive, is also considered as the voice of the company on twitter with his Twitter account which count more than 1 million Fans. For example, he tweeted in March a picture of him using the smartwatch which generated more than 4000 interactions by users. He also has an account on Weibo (chinese platform) under his name and releases news about the brand. On the other hand, Apple is known to have an impeccable marketing and the culture of the company is so strong that you immediately recognize when a product belongs to the brand. Their leadership and vision are providing them the opportunity to be an one-way communication because they have fans who will adhere to the message and do the work of shares it on social media. And actually, when you look at the ranking of symosos, it appears that apple is part of the top 3 brands with the most social media mentions with his two competitors : google and microsoft.

- Apple's LinkedIn Account

Apple inc's existing LinkedIn profile holds true to its ideals of simplicity and minimalism. Apple's official page boast a whopping 3 tabs. 1st of which displays an Overview containing a basic description of what the company prides itself in and what they are trying to achieve. This is followed closely by basic information about the company's location, employee numbers, website information and, and target industry. The second being a current job listing tab displaying all the current listings around the globe. The third and final tab, titled "Life" displays a short video and side paragraph highlighting the diversity of the apple workspace with a link

down on the bottom transporting you to Apple's official employment page. It was apparent to us that Apple had taken a very straightforward employment approach to its LinkedIn profile, which is fine and has worked for them but we also felt that there was a missed opportunity here with the given approach. Apple is a world stage company boasting countless events and information that even this professional community can have a hard time staying up to date with. LinkedIn is a perfect avenue for Apple to use to display more detailed information behind things like its products and events. Given LinkedIn's professional and business to business linked atmosphere, it would allow them to tailor information that may be otherwise skipped by the general public. Positive In-depth reviews from leading influencers or in-house, coverage on special apple showcasing events that they hold around the world, or other basic company information the company would choose to post. This would give people a central hub for the latest information straight from Apple inc. The focus wouldn't necessarily be an advertising opportunity for the company as much as it would be a place to keep its consumer base informed and engaged with the company's activities. But that in itself would create an increased buzz side effect around the company name on the media platform, giving them 2 opportunities for the price of 1.

- iTunes Instagram: giveaways, contest, artist promotion events.

iTunes already processes a fantastic Instagram page sporting beautiful pictures and videos referencing a variety of media. They get their subscriber base excited about upcoming shows, events, and various artist content. The pushing of their various content is effective and does generate solid amounts of buzz and engagement. Instagram is a leading social media avenue when it comes to visuals and engagement from users even beating out facebook, so to us it this made the perfect choice to generate more through a contest, giveaways, and similar

content. In the grand scheme of things, iTunes wouldn't need to change too much from what they are already doing on the page. When they usually post they are highlighting a key event, show, artist, but the twist is now they will be promoting conversation or interaction directly. For example running an event for a new show or movie offered on iTunes could be pushed normally as any other has been showcased before, visual wise. But now they could ask what followers think and feel about the new release or ask them to share some of their favorite things about the show and reward the top one or two with everything from a tangible reward to a simple shout out. This gives people more incentive to post more on your content and in more detail. Campaigns like these tend to increase engagement on average over an audience by about 34% (kickofflabs.com).

- Apple Support making a transition to facebook.

As of right now, Apple Support does not have an official facebook page to address consumer issues or provide crucial tips and other information to facebook's wide number of users. Their Twitter account is very successful with over half a million followers in just over a year's time. It's an impressive customer reach for just a support and tip based page. We feel that they could spread this success to other social media platforms as well, the main one being Facebook. Facebook by the end of 2015 boasted over 4 times as many registered users as twitter, with at least 2 times the percentage of internet users in all categories across the board (www.pewinternet.org). Meaning there is more engagement potential with Apple's target base on facebook. However, there are pros and cons to both platforms in this regard. With Twitter, you are able to more readily control the stream of information and complaints as compared to facebook. The sheer amount of complaints and daily request the company could receive could be a large and daunting task to add on to their customer support infrastructure. Apple support

has the infrastructure to support and effectively utilize this social media platform for that purpose. But to do so successfully could have much larger positive repercussions for the company. Half a million compared to the multi-millions of followers in proportion you could have on facebook gives the company a large avenue to extend its customer support and in turn increase its reputation.

- Official Apple inc. Instagram page

Apple inc. Instagram presence is at best conservative. There are a couple profiles showcasing about 5 - 10 pictures each of now outdated products. This is another missed opportunity for the core company to showcase itself and project itself how it wants its audience to see it. Apple makes stunning products and creates a professional, clean, technologically relevant environment around itself that most other companies envy. Visuals and form are a big part of what Apple as a company is and is showcased in everything from their products to their company message. Posting visuals of new products or their world class ios software would aid their awareness and get people excited about the company as a whole. Showing real life application of their products with consumers would not only market themselves but create something the average consumer can relate to. Instagram would allow them to brand themselves exactly how they already choose to in any particular situation. Let the picture do the talking with little to no text or aids further emphasizes the Apple message. Displaying those products or lifestyles on a platform based solely off of visual aids can do wonders for a company's overall awareness and perception.

- Apple inc. Instagram ads

A stronger Instagram presence again would be beneficial to Apple not only for brand awareness for new audiences but for advertising as well. 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual, so attention grabbing photos is a must to catch an ever moving consumer. Apple has a great advertising opportunity here because they have no shortage in stunning visuals of their products, events , and lifestyles they promote. Displaying the practicality, form, and function of these products and ideas in a visual format makes the consumer want to engage and explore more so if they didn't have that visual stimulation and found it another way. One advantage that Instagram can offer Apple over other giants like facebook is that all the content you post will be displayed to the consumer with no fear of your ads being blocked. This gives little obstruction to overall engagement between the company and the user. Instagram has a great mobile platform built especially on Apple's own ios software. As more and more people commit to mobile media the potential for people to see and engage these ads grows.

- Apple inc. Youtube Influencer - Jonathan Morrison

On YouTube, Apple's page consist primarily of past video advertisements from both tv and the web. Product info videos are far and in between but do also exist. Apple is great about showing real people doing real things with their products in sometimes a humorous way and in a variety of settings. This makes their videos interesting and relatable. We wanted to take that and push that even more. We wanted to promote an influencer for the brand showing how a real person uses apple products on the day to day in their community. The series would be a month or so in length and the sponsor would be fully equipped with Apple products and would be in a vlog (video blogs) format. We chose YouTube because it is a dominant site that people use to get useful information on products before they consider buying. they specifically would show the positives and possible learning curves of the products giving viewers tips, information,

recommendations, and overall relatability. We chose an established YouTuber, Jonathan Morris who is the creator behind the technology based channel called “tld”. He has Just over 1.7 million subscribers, and regularly promotes and reviews Apple products on the channel. We think he’d be a great fit for the position because he's already knowledgeable about the products and could inform his wide viewer base on how these products work, their intended purpose, what situation they work best in, and who they would work best for. All these things are very relevant to return buyers for Apple and even newcomers looking to see if Apple is the brand for them.

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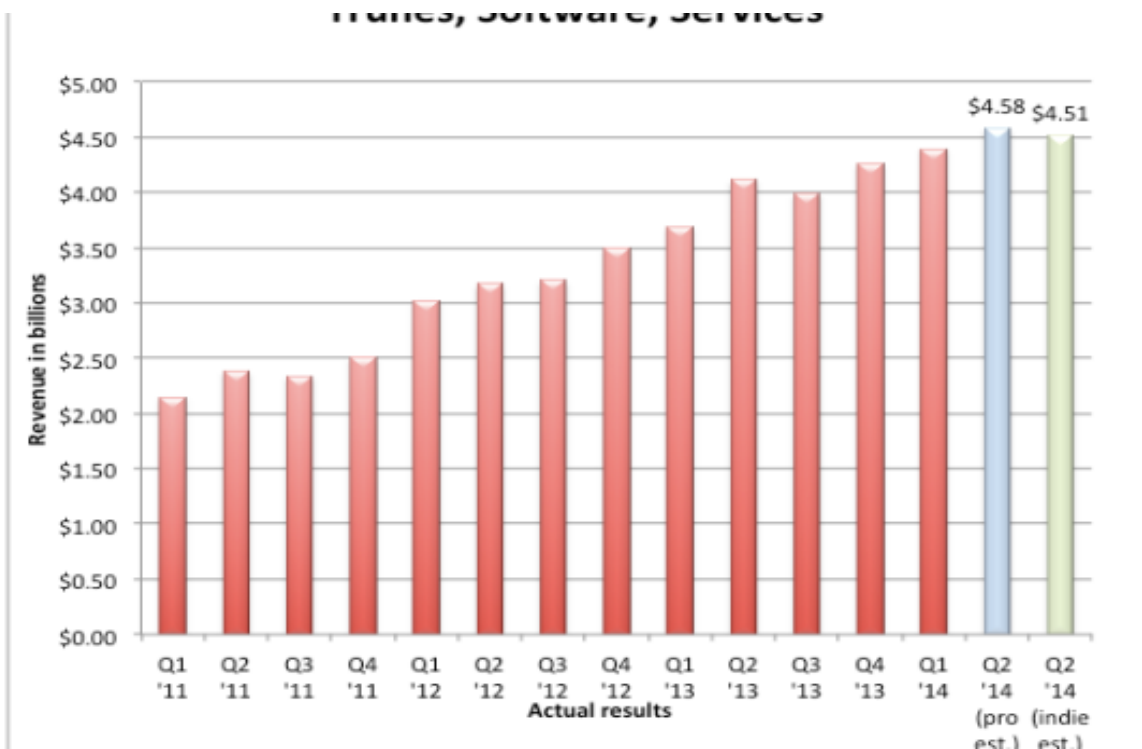
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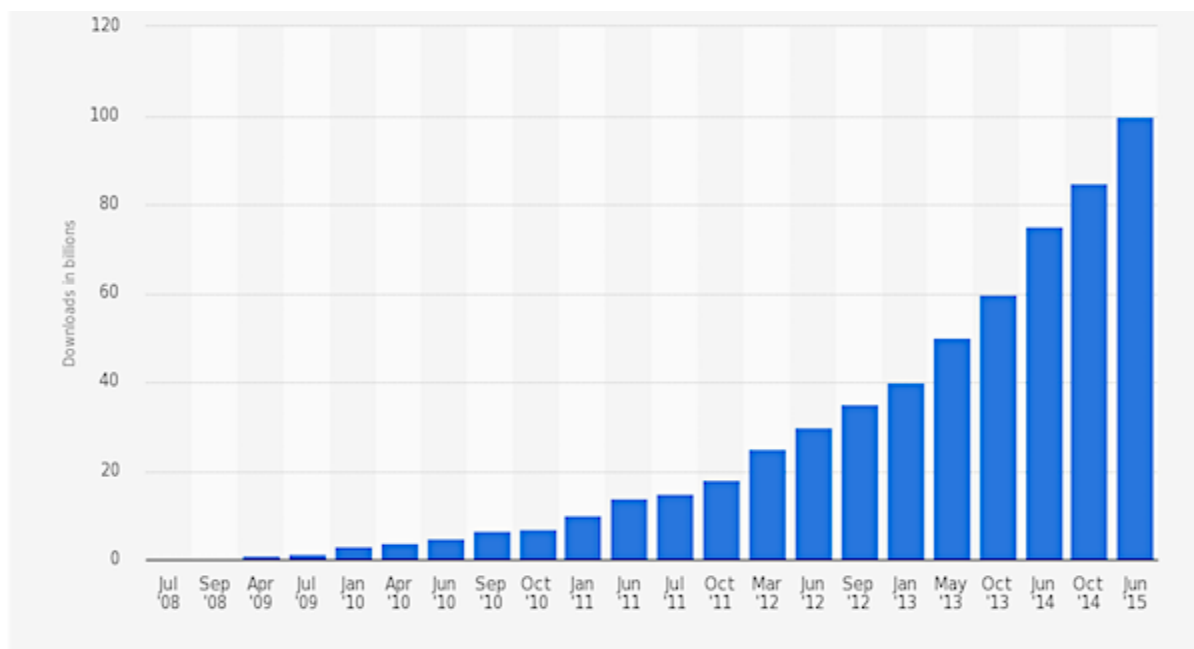
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This chart displays the total number of apps downloaded per year since the App Store's inception in '08. Retrieved from <http://businessofapps.com>