

Elevating Earthsong Handsoap with Pinterest-First Strategy

By Whitney D. Harris

Earthsong Handsoap is an eco-friendly, cost-effective hand soap line coming to market soon. The owner reached out in search of a social media plan that would maximize their small staff while appealing to a broad target audience while prioritizing teachers, families, college students, and traveling retirees. On the surface, the best plan for marketing Earthsong Handsoap is through the Facebook Business application complete with Instagram (FB/IG). But by the end of this essay, I will show why Pinterest is the better application to invest resources in initially, particularly if Earthsong Handsoap is looking to expand its reach without overextending its staff. Pinterest decomposes web pages into the objects embedded in them, allowing users to pin photos into collections called boards which serve as big catalogs of objects.

Choosing Pinterest over FB/IG will be difficult because FB/IG is algorithmically enticing, providing convenient access to Instagram (IG) and analytics, while producing innumerable placement opportunities across both platforms. If Earthsong used this platform, staff could target audiences by identity (for example, people that share they are teachers, students or retired in their profiles have self-identified), interaction with other businesses on FB/IG, interaction on other social media networks, and how the audience interacts on the internet at large. Essentially, the team could make selections during ad generation to single-out teachers, college students, and people that recently interacted with AARP or traveling channels. People fitting these parameters would be exposed to Earthsong Handsoap (via advertisement) at times and in locations determined by FB/IG algorithm. IG shares direct access to Facebook Business Manager, which means that the staff at Earthsong could create one advertisement and post it in

multiple places with a few simple clicks. The FB/IG conglomerate also provides numerous placement choices for ads; Earthsong could reach customers through their FB Feed, FB Stories, FB Marketplace, IG Stories, IG Feed, IG Reels, and the IG Explore page. However, even with these benefits, building a responsive and engaged community on FB/IG that will efficiently promote Earthsong Handsoap for the long haul could be challenging with limited staff.

In reality, Earthsong staff will spend more time than the surface suggests generating legitimate sales conversions, fostering return customers, and building brand loyalty on FB/IG. The efficiency of a small staff will be impeded by a range of factors that outweigh the benefits of excellent advertisement placement and more sales-oriented algorithms. The fact is that ad placement is so good on FB/IG that ad-adverse users and consumers tend to avoid the ads altogether, or they click accidentally on products they are not interested in (Edelman, 2020). Earthsong's product will also face competition with computer-facilitated advertisements for companies that are similar to theirs. According to Tim Hwang's new book, *Subprime Attention Crisis*, the multibillion dollar digital advertising industry is based on myth and "microtargeting is far less accurate, and far less persuasive, than it's made out to be" (Edelman, 2020). This means that the combination of aggressive algorithms and ad placement might be more of a hindrance than the surface initially suggests. Furthermore, an increase in Earthsong's advertising dollars spent on FB/IG might also involve a simultaneous increase in time-consuming, community-building functions for the Earthsong staff.

One way to ensure that advertising dollars are appropriately spent is to partner them with superb customer service. That is a tedious part of any marketing plan, even more so on FB/IG. But, why is it particularly persnickety to provide superb service on these platforms? Because, in order to build a positive online presence, it will be essential to respond to customer queries

almost immediately, to share user-generated content multiple times per day in multiple formats to appease the ever-evolving algorithms, and to engage with consumers via direct messages, within relevant FB groups, via the influencer market etc. (FB groups in particular have a lot of power in the consumer marketplace. FB's algorithm prioritizes posts from groups on which a user is regularly active and by FB's estimates, 1.4 billion people use 10 million groups on FB monthly)(Sethuraman et al., 2019). These are enervating tasks that are likely more appropriate for a full-time social media manager. Additionally, in order to fully optimize IG as a platform independent of the FB Business Manager, trends would suggest engaging influencers.

According to Wired Magazine, the term influencer is shorthand for “someone (or something) with the power to affect the buying habits or quantifiable actions of others by uploading some form of original—often sponsored—content to social media platforms...” (Martineau, 2019). Including influencers in marketing on IG would extend Earthsong's reach among college students and extend revenue opportunities. IG influencer marketing is a slightly different beast than FB group marketing. It involves possibly hiring more staff members to assist the social media manager mentioned previously. But by optimizing influencer marketing on IG, there is potential to tap a large young adult travel community that could be an unexpected source of revenue for Earthsong Handsoap (the #travelgram has 138,851,135 posts as of 1 March 2021). Many influencers may take their payments in Earthsong Handsoap, but that won't fully compensate for the time staff spend managing personnel and making sure they post to Earthsong brand standards.

FB/IG have their own standards and motivations like all platforms. One ingenious way to keep people on their site and looking at potential Earthsong soap ads is by building the company's user preferences into the default settings. According to José van Dijck, “interfaces are

commonly characterized by *defaults*: settings automatically assigned to a software application to channel user behavior in a certain way” (2013, 32).¹ In that context, what user behavior are the defaults on FB/IG channeling? The defaults encourage users to stay on the respective platforms. IG only allows one live link on the IG Business Page, and users must have 10,000 followers for direct website access in IG Stories. All of this amounts to multiple clicks or swipes before the potential customer reaches the Earthsong website unless directed by advertisement. This keeps users scrolling their IG feeds endlessly and provides more opportunity for ad placement/exposure on IG, by keeping users on IG, a catch-22 that will keep Earthsong’s staff busy on IG. FB more freely integrates outside websites, but only does so fractionally. Unfortunately, that means Earthsong Handsoap staff would have to spend more time on the social media platforms engaging with customers too. There are multiple ways to solve these problems, including the integration of third party applications like HootSuite or Sprout Social. However, there is another option for social media promotion that could provide the Earthsong Handsoap staff with an engaged and loyal customer base that encourages sales among its target audience with significantly less staff involvement.

Pinterest is the most ideal platform for Earthsong Handsoap because the default settings and integration of promoted pins are guided by a Pinterest user interface that focuses on databasing. Unlike FB/IG, social sites with algorithms that encourage interaction through the creation of smaller affinity groups or liking posts with specific hashtags, Pinterest is more oriented toward searching, discovering, and saving — the combination of which is essentially databasing. Oracle Software Solutions defines a database as “an organized collection of

¹ See van Dijck, (2013), especially chapter 2.3, for more information on platforms as techno-cultural constructs. van Dijck is the president of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences and distinguished university professor at Utrecht University. Her work covers a wide range of topics in media theory, media technologies, social media, and digital culture.

structured information” (Oracle, 2021). The Atlantic Magazine refers to Pinterest as a “database of intentions” in the title of a 2014 article featuring an interview with the platform founder, Evan Sharp, about what the platform is and what it could become (Madrigal). Sharp expands on the database theory in the interview, stating that the user interface at Pinterest enables human activity that ends up creating “this crazy human indexing machine where millions and millions of people are hand indexing billions of objects—30 billion objects— in a way that’s personally meaningful to them” (Madrigal, 2014).

The Pinterest user interface algorithmically-encouraging databasing differentiates the way targeted advertising operates on the platform from FB/IG (think FB groups and IG influencers but more extensively discussed above). When a company creates an ad on Pinterest, the content in the advertisement stays available long after the paid campaign ends. Well-crafted, thoughtful pins have a long life and are constantly reshared. Promoted pins cost more upfront than a comparable advertisement on FB/IG, but they do not need nearly as much interaction from the staff once they are posted. Pinterest is not nearly as upfront about their algorithm as FB/IG, but that may free up staff to focus on creating compelling and re-pinnable content (Asalam, 2021).

One of the best parts of a Pinterest-first strategy is that the default settings on Pinterest facilitate and encourage off-Pinterest interaction by linking pins directly to websites. (A ‘Pinterest-first’ strategy because the very best strategy for Earthsong is to establish itself in a skeletal manner across all social media platforms. Choosing not to invest significant time and resources in FB/IG does not negate the importance of creating pages and dedicating half an hour a day to updating and interacting on relevant hashtags. Perhaps the Earthsong staff could rotate this duty as a portion of end-of-business activities.) Pinterest-first means that the staff could

focus on making beautiful pins, and when people click on the Earthsong promoted pin, they will automatically be taken to the Earthsong Handsoap website where they can interact, consume content, and buy products. That seems simple, but allowing community-building and management to manifest around Earthsong's website will increase efficiency for the business in a significant way. Writers and designers on staff can spend less time in FB groups being witty and engaging customers or managing influencers on IG and more time writing an engaging and purpose-driven website or native blog content. This could be anything from articles about the environment and eco-friendly ways to get dirty with kids to ways to be an eco-friendly project manager or gift-giver (always suggesting Earthsong, of course)! Another example of optimizing content would be a blog post on the website and corresponding Pinboards to spotlight ingredients used in the making of the product line, or visions of the founder and staff members for the future of the product. Yet, even more important, the demographic of users on Pinterest are a better fit for an eco-friendly, cost conscious hand soap company targeting markets dominated by women and mothers.

Earthsong Handsoap hopes to reach teachers, families, college students, and recent retirees interested in travel and eco-friendly, cost conscious solutions. Pinterest is uniquely situated to reach each portion of this audience by connecting with an eco-sensitive, international base and American women. According to Statista, the app supports over 416 million active monthly users, with the largest user base outside of the United States in Germany (to compare, FB/IG has close to 2.8 billion monthly users and the largest user base in the world is in India)(Statista, 2020). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes Germany is the third largest economy in over 200 participant countries and proactive in developing ambitious environmental policies (2012). This suggests that, in addition to targeting

women and mothers, Pinterest could begin community-building with an eco-conscious and sensitive international base as a secondary audience with no effort from the Earthsong staff. 71% of pinners are women and reportedly 80% of American mothers that use the internet use Pinterest (Clement, 2020). The exposure to women, and mothers in particular, could give Earthsong access to a good portion of American household purchasing power. There was a widely publicized study by the Mom Complex in 2017 that estimated mothers control 85% of household purchases and have spending power of \$2.4 trillion (Carter). Essentially, a mother buying Earthsong Christmas soap for the holidays could influence daughter to buy more and/or re-gift at the dorm for the end-of-year celebration and so on. Ultimately, the idea is to give Earthsong the opportunity to reach families and college students. It is even plausible that retiree communities in touch with daughters and daughters-in-law are also influenced by the same purchasing pattern suggested in the previous example. The most popular searches on Pinterest are ‘holidays’, ‘food and drink’, and ‘home decor’, as opposed to FB’s global popularity for news and politics (Asalam, 2021; McLachlan, 2021). As aforementioned, FB’s default settings favor interaction on FB’s platform. By focusing on Pinterest-first, the staff could have more time to develop website content and engaging re-pinnable content.

Earthsong can create many scenarios for why consumers need their soap when preparing for Ramadan or Passover, trying new recipes for Lent, decorating Easter eggs, hollowing Halloween pumpkins or preparing recent retirees for safe, off-season vacation travel. There is a decent chance these ads will connect, considering that the platform reports that 50% of pinners make a purchase after seeing a promoted pin (Asalam, 2021). And even more importantly, 77% of pinners discover and purchase new products through Pinterest (Asalam, 2021). Part of this could be connected to Pinterest’s intended function as a database (Madrigal, 2014). As such,

investing more time in crafting exemplary website content with corresponding promoted pins could give Earthsong's smaller staff a big bang for their buck. Pinterest will facilitate community-building on Earthsong's home platform, which will potentially increase sales and make Earthsong's website a place to advertise complementary goods (for example lotion). Additionally, because Pinterest is not a social site, staff would spend less time responding to comments generated by the many potential ad placements, and customers can be directed to the Earthsong Handsoap customer service inbox on the website.

Since FB/IG are such large platforms, it is impossible to write a social media strategy without considering them. However, a small staff can begin a content-based, promotion-less presence on FB/IG and focus on community-building through Pinterest as a first step. Once Earthsong has developed a faithful Pinterest following and active website, it can incentivize customer engagement on their semi-latent FB/IG accounts. Sharing posts, using hashtags, sweepstakes, and featuring customer hauls are ways to extend the community further. The possibilities are endless when it comes to finding customers in the billions of global social media users. The perfect social media pitch would be to launch a Pinterest-first campaign, accompanied by an FB/IG presence that prepares for a future of sponsored content on those platforms, when Earthsong's owner is ready to scale up. As Earthsong Handsoap, LLC grows to take over larger portions of the eco-friendly, cost conscious hand soap market, they may find it hard to be legitimate without strong followings on all the platforms mentioned above, other big dogs in the social media game like YouTube, Twitter, and LinkedIn while optimizing influencers on emerging platforms like TikTok. But by starting on Pinterest, Earthsong's staff would have the opportunity to develop superior website content that will generate its own advertising income (via complementary goods) and disseminate re-pinnable content that directs more customers to

the website to consume that superior content. This develops a positive feedback loop that is immediately operational and scalable.

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