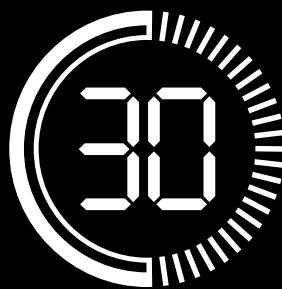


\$47



MINUTE MARKETER

Social Media Contests

11 tactics for using social contests to improve brand awareness and engagement



 marketing sherpa

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30-Minute Marketer

Social Media Contests: 11 tactics for using social contests to improve brand awareness and engagement

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US \$47.00 / ISBN: 978-1-936390-62-5

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TACTICS YOU CAN LEARN OVER LUNCH

Welcome to *30-Minute Marketer* – a resource from MarketingSherpa featuring bite-sized tips for busy marketers.

In this report, we show you how to use social media giveaways to boost your brand awareness.

“Bribe them and buy them was an old-school marketing technique to acquire customers when the value proposition of a product just wasn’t strong enough to pull in enough interest of its own,” Daniel Burstein noted in the MarketingSherpa blog post, “[Social Media Marketing: 7 steps for using contests and sweepstakes to promote your brand.](#)”

Contests are the ultimate (legal) bribe for getting people to notice your brand. Most everyone loves getting something for free—more so if there’s the added excitement of winning a prize. This is why giveaways can be a great way to get people engaged with your brand and excited about your products. Now, social media offers many new opportunities, both for companies that want to host contests, and people who want to enter them.

In this report, we'll show you:

- Why you must know the laws and rules
- Tips for picking the best prizes
- Ways social media helps build buzz about your giveaway
- How to encourage viral elements

We know you're in a hurry, so let's get started. We're eager to share these tips on how you can use fun giveaways to promote your brand.

Bobbi Dempsey
Editor, *30-Minute Marketer*

About *30-Minute Marketer*

MarketingSherpa's *30-Minute Marketer* is designed with you, the busy marketer, in mind. We provide quick, simple tips that you can put into action right away.

For each *30-Minute Marketer*, we scour the vast MECLABS library of marketing research, from MarketingSherpa case studies and benchmark reports, to MarketingExperiments optimization tests and analysis. We highlight tips to help improve your marketing performance right now ... or, at least, by the time you're done with lunch.

Social media can be a great way to host a contest or sweepstakes. Please note, while these terms are often used interchangeably, technically the winner of a sweepstakes is decided by random chance, and a contest is decided by skill and competition.

A big benefit is that it is very easy for your customers or fans to promote your giveaway to their networks by simply liking, sharing or re-Tweeting a link or update. One downside: the social networking site will likely have strict rules about the type of contest you can hold on the site, and how you can run it. Facebook, for example, recently [updated its rules](#) regarding contests.

Giveaways done in this manner can also be a smart tactic for companies that are having a tough time building a following for their corporate social media accounts.

“While many Facebook pages and Twitter accounts offer strong value (news, humor, insider information, etc.), the average corporate account can find it challenging to develop a following without an incentive,” Daniel Burstein noted in the MarketingSherpa blog post, [“Social Media Marketing: 7 steps for using contests and sweepstakes to promote your brand.”](#)

Many marketers find that contests or sweepstakes make for an effective incentive. “Some of the main benefits of a social media-based contest are fast time-to-market, immediate responses/results, low-cost and no-cost program options, and measurable ROI,” said Sandra Fathi, President, Affect. “I have yet to find an organization — business-to-business or business-to-consumer — that would not benefit from some type of online contest.”

Tactic #1: Follow the law

Before you even begin to start planning any sort of giveaway, you must make sure you know how to avoid getting into trouble. In addition to rules set by the social networking sites, there are many laws regarding contests and sweepstakes, which vary by state. For example, you often must have official rules that delineate how you will pick a winner.

“While social media contests can be quick and simple to take part in, and can even be fairly simple and inexpensive to implement, we feel official contest rules, preferably legally reviewed, should always be made available to avoid any misunderstandings when it comes to choosing a winner and rewarding that winner,” Matthew Gillespie, Director of Trade & Sales Planning, Cedarlane Natural Foods, said in Burstein’s blog post.

After researching all applicable laws, Cedarlane has run two types of contests—a simple contest with a smaller prize, and a more complex contest with larger prizes—that have helped them double their email database while also boosting their social media and Web traffic. As a bonus, the contests also helped them gain valuable insight into customer preferences and motivations, which was very helpful in planning new product launches.

Tactic #2: Pick your prize(s) carefully

This is where the incentive comes in that drives your audience to act. One major consideration is your target audience.

"If the goal is to generate leads for a technology networking product that IT administrators would purchase, then offering a \$15,000 cash prize might attract thousands of general consumers – but they are not the right target audience," Fathi said. "If we offered a prize that would be specifically appealing to an IT admin, such as an extreme gaming console or a chance to meet the CEO of a high-profile technology company, my leads will be more targeted and valuable."

Tactic #3: Use your own products as prizes

Perhaps the best way to use a contest to promote awareness of your products is to give entrants a chance to win those products. Not only will the contest allow you to help create excitement about the products, but the winners will most likely rave about the items after they receive their prizes.

This strategy worked for Moosejaw, an online retailer specializing in outdoor apparel and gear. The MarketingSherpa article, "[Brand Building: How to Mix Offline with Online to Drive Targeted Entries to Video Contest](#)," explained that the company wanted to reward their loyal group of highly engaged, under-30 customers. But, they also wanted a campaign to encourage more customers to connect with the brand through multiple channels – in hopes of creating more of the repeat buyers they were seeking.

The team created a sweepstakes promotion called "20 Days of Decent Giveaways." They ran the effort through social media channels to encourage the audience to connect with the brand there and share the information with friends. They mostly selected prizes from products they sold, particularly products they planned to promote in the upcoming season. Any excitement the event generated about those items could encourage future sales.

Brand-appropriate fun items can also make for good prizes. The Moosejaw team's business approach and brand is somewhat nonsensical, which their audience loves, says Gary Wohlfeill, Creative Director. Keeping with this brand approach, prizes such as a fabled wooden squirrel and a random inflatable zebra were included in the giveaways.

Tactic #4: Make sure you have sufficient staff

"It's highly likely that the marketing department, sales department, legal department and PR team will all be involved in a successful contest," said Sandra Fathi.

If you don't have resources in-house, you may need to outsource. While a sweepstakes will be far easier (since the winner is based on random chance and not some sort of judging of skill), you will still likely need some help administering the sweepstakes, especially from the legal department.

The Moosejaw team also realized the importance of having team members ready to take an active role in the promotion. Their contest generated a deafening buzz on the team's social media pages. People asked questions, begged to win prizes and talked about the products and the brand.

Having team members to respond to these messages was essential to keeping the process running smoothly and the audience happy. Dedicating at least one person to manage each social channel is recommended.

Tactic #5: Target the right entrants

In the MarketingSherpa article, "[Social Media Marketing: Viral sweepstakes targeting moms grows Facebook audience 4,488%](#)," Adam T. Sutton shows how the marketing team at The Sugar Association was frustrated that the association's profiles on Facebook and Twitter had not received much traction. The marketing team regularly shared content and tried to engage the audience, but its follower counts had not broken 200 on either network.

"We needed to do something to not only increase our number of followers, but to make sure we were reaching the right kind of followers, meaning people who were actually interested in our content and would engage in the dialogue," says Andrew Briscoe, President and CEO, Sugar Association.

The right followers were U.S. moms ages 25 to 47. The marketers crafted a 12-week sweepstakes to give away shopping cards and other prizes in hopes of building audiences in Facebook, Twitter and the team's email program. The main weekly prize was a \$200 gift card, but the team promoted it as \$200 in "free groceries" to increase its appeal.

Tactic #6: Create a contest section of your Facebook page

Of all the social networking sites, Facebook probably offers the most options for customizing the way you present information to potential entrants. For its contest, the Sugar Association team directed all campaign-related traffic to its Facebook page. Visitors driven by the Association's promotional efforts were automatically routed to a custom page or "tab" on the association's profile.

EXAMPLE: SUGAR ASSOCIATION FACEBOOK GIVEAWAY PAGE

The screenshot shows a Facebook landing page for the "Gimme Some Sugar Sweepstakes". At the top, there's a banner with the "SUGAR sweet by nature®" logo, the sweepstakes name, and a photo of a family walking in a field. To the right is the Sugar Association logo. Below the banner, there are tabs for "Details", "Enter Sweepstakes", and "Invite Friends". On the right side, there are links for "About", "Official Rules", and "Privacy". The main content area features a large image of a man and a child walking in a field, with text describing the sweepstakes: "Win \$200 in Free Groceries Plus Grand Prizes Laptop or \$500 or iPad". Below this are "Enter Sweepstakes" and "Invite Friends" buttons. To the right, there are sections for "Prize Details", "Prize Eligibility", "Sweepstakes Starts", "Sweepstakes Ends", "Need more Details?", and "About the Company". A note at the bottom states: "NO PURCHASE OR PAYMENT NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN THIS SWEEPSTAKES. A PURCHASE OR PAYMENT WILL NOT INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF WINNING."

This tab acted as a landing page and had three sections:

1. Details – This default section quickly described the prizes and rules of the campaign and included:

- Image emphasizing entrants would receive a chance to win \$200 in free groceries and a laptop or iPad
 - Two buttons titled “enter the sweepstakes” and “invite friends” linking to the sections described below
 - Link to official rules
2. Enter the sweepstakes – This section asked for the name, email address, country, state and birthday of the entrant. It also asked entrants to “like” the sugar association on Facebook and provided a checkbox to opt-in to the team's email program.
 3. Invite friends – This section gave entrants a tool to invite friends via Facebook or email to enter the campaign (more on this tool below).

Tactic #7: Incorporate viral marketing tactics

The Sugar Association team hoped the people entering the sweepstakes would provide the primary promotional force for the campaign. To achieve this, the team gave entrants an incentive to refer friends to the sweepstakes. Anyone who convinced friends to enter would receive additional entries themselves.

The team encapsulated this incentive in a tool offered on the campaign's Facebook tab. This tool automatically displayed on the page after someone entered the sweepstakes. Visitors could use it to send invitations to friends via Facebook or email.

For Facebook, visitors began typing their friends' names into the tool. The tool automatically suggested names from their contacts on the network, making the form easier to fill out. After clicking the button labeled “send sweepstakes invitation,” a message from the visitor was sent to their friends encouraging them to enter and providing a link to do so.

Automatic updates

After someone entered the contest on the team's Facebook form, a pop-over message asked entrants to post a message on their Facebook walls (sending it to all their contacts). The message mentioned that the person entered and provided a link for others to do so. This simple tactic was one of the most effective ways the team found to promote the sweepstakes.

Other promotional efforts

Even the most basic contest won't be worth your efforts if nobody knows about it. Aside from the viral tactics mentioned above, here's how the team promoted the campaign:

1. **Facebook ads at launch:** The team bought targeted display ads on Facebook to kick start the campaign and help spread the word. These ads ran only for the first two weeks since the team wanted its viral tactics to do the heavy lifting. Total amount spent on advertising was about \$200.
2. **Homepage:** The team posted a simple graphic on the rotating display on its homepage. Clicking the image brought visitors to the entry page on Facebook.

3. **Social profile updates:** The team continually posted about the sweepstakes on its Facebook and Twitter profiles. These mentions at times highlighted a recent winner and typically linked back to the entry page on Facebook.

Tactic #8: Get familiar with Pinterest

Pinterest may be new to the social media landscape, but it has quickly gained popularity, with a large group of users, many of whom check the site obsessively and spend hours visiting various Pinterest pages.

With its focus on images, Pinterest can be an especially good fit if your company and/or your contest contains strong visual appeal. In the MarketingSherpa article, "[Social Email Marketing: Contest adds 200% more Pinterest followers and engagement](#)," the team at UncommonGoods—a retailer of creatively designed products—thought Pinterest aligned well with its customer base.

The company was already active on the site, and had followers who often shared its content. The marketing team saw this as an opportunity to spur growth, and launched a contest.

Pinterest basics

On Pinterest, users can create categories of content called "boards," and "pin" images to them. The "pins" typically link to a webpage, and a user can "follow" other people to see their pins. For example, the marketing team at UncommonGoods has a design-savvy audience that follows its pins. The team often posts images that link to a product page, blog post or another design-related website.

Visibility

UncommonGoods links to its Pinterest profile, and provides "Pin It" buttons throughout its website, including these four locations:

- Homepage
- Persistent footer
- Product pages
- Company blog

EXAMPLE: UNCOMMONGOODS HOMEPAGE

The screenshot shows the homepage of UncommonGoods. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for "home & garden", "dining & entertaining", "office", "leisure", "jewelry & accessories", "for her", "for him", "for kids", and "birthday". A search bar is also present. The main banner features the text "See them Light Up!" and "Find birthday gifts they'll be talking about a year from now." Below the banner, there are several promotional boxes for different gift categories: "DOUBLE WINE TOTE", "CHALK IT UP", "Bike Chalk Trail", "Happy Birthday", "Bike Chalk Trail", "It's Party Time!", and "BIKE LOVERS Design Challenge Finalists". On the right side, there are sections for "CATALOG" (with a "Sign up" button) and "EMAIL" (with a "Follow me on Pinterest" button circled in red). The bottom of the page includes a footer with links for "About Us", "FAQs", "Request a Catalog", "Customer Service", "Shipping Options", "Print an order form", "Feedback", "Browse Online Catalog", "Catalog Unsubscribe", "Email Unsubscribe", "Blogger Review Program", "Corporate Orders", "Gift Certificate", "Follow us on Facebook", "Follow us on Twitter", "Follow us on Pinterest", "Subscribe to This Just In", "Terms & Conditions", "Site Map", and "SIGN UP FOR OUR EMAIL - more info". A Google Trusted Store badge is located at the bottom right.

Pinterest is often used more than twice as much as other networks to share a link to a product page on UncommonGoods, and it's often the only network to reach triple digits. "We came to discover that our customers really respond to Pinterest," Germaine says.

EXAMPLE: UNCOMMONGOODS PRODUCT PAGE

The screenshot shows the UncommonGoods website product page for a "PENGUIN PILLOW" priced at \$45.00. The page includes a sidebar with categories like home & garden, dining & entertaining, office, etc., and a "RECENTLY VIEWED" section. The main content features a large image of a black and white crocheted penguin pillow. Below the image are smaller thumbnail images and social sharing buttons for Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest. A red circle highlights the Pinterest button, which has 582 pins. The product details include a "handmade" badge, a rating of 4.7 from 3 reviews, and a "Read 3 Reviews" link. The purchase process is shown with a "Quantity" dropdown set to 1, a "Send To:" field containing "me", and a large orange "ADD TO BASKET" button. A "product story" box contains a brief description of the pillow and its origin.

Here's how the contest worked:

- Entrants had to create a Pinterest board titled, “UncommonGoods Backyard Party.”
- They had to pin images to the board that matched 20 topics the team listed in the contest rules. One topic, for example, was “backyard game.” Entrants could add more than 20 images if they wished.
- They also had to pin the image of the contest rules to the board.

The pinner with the best board (as chosen by the team) received a gift certificate. The certificate’s dollar amount started at \$50, and increased by \$50 for every 50 entries. A limit was set at \$250.

Viral tactics in the rules

The first board users see after they log in is a “following” board. It displays images from everyone they follow on the network.

People who entered the contest had to create a new board and pin images to it. This sent the images to their followers, which both added a viral element to the campaign and helped reach people who did not follow UncommonGoods on the network.

Use a dedicated email

UncommonGoods tried contests on the network before. However, the campaigns increased activity but did little to grow the audience. In response, the team tried something new: a dedicated email.

Here are the features of the message:

- **Unique design** – UncommonGoods values creative design and this philosophy extends to the company’s email marketing. The team strives to give each email a fresh look. “We don’t have a template,” Germaine says. “We want our customers to not know what they’re going to get when they open the email. Every one is a little different.”
- **Pinterest header** – The email’s headline banner declared “Happy Pinning” in the colors and font used by Pinterest. This quickly communicated the topic of the message. The right portion of the banner mentioned the contest with this text: “Pin for the Prize, Details Below.”
- **Visual layout** – Pinterest is centered on images, and has a strong visual appeal. The site’s pin boards are displayed as collages, for example. The team took a similar approach in its email. The body resembled a Pinterest board. It featured 17 large images but very little text. Each image linked to a pin on the network.
- **Popular pins** – The team selected the 17 pins by popularity. Each pin either had attracted a high-level of activity on the network, or was a newer pin with a strong start. “We did some research on what items people were really responding to. We wanted to share them with other people in our email community who might not be as active on Pinterest,” Germaine says.
- **Contest banner** – Below the body of the email and before the footer was a display ad that promoted the contest. The ad looked similar to the image of the contest rules on Pinterest. Clicking this ad brought readers to the contest image on the network.

The team sent the email to all subscribers who receive its promotional emails.

Challenge of email design

The amount of information the team had to squeeze into this email was one of the larger challenges of the campaign, Germaine says. “We’re calling out a lot of items. We’re doing those calls-to-action throughout the email to get you onto the site, and we have the contest we’re advertising,” Germaine says. “It was a lot of information to tell in a concise and compelling way without having information overload.”

While some marketers may balk at using such a high number of images in an email, the message was designed to appeal to people in the company’s database who enjoyed Pinterest. It did this by mimicking the look of a Pinterest board.

Overall, the team felt the campaign was a success, Germaine says. “There was an increase in pinning, especially the items that were top pins. ... And because of the contest, we received more followers.”

Tactic #9: Promote contest through multiple channels

By using a multi-pronged strategy, you increase the visibility of your contest, and also reach a wider audience, increasing your brand awareness opportunities.

In the MarketingSherpa blog post, “[Social Marketing: Twitter contest boosts followers 43%](#),” Adam T. Sutton describes how the team at Kobo, a global e-book retailer, used a contest to help boost their Twitter following. Neil Bhapkar, Online Marketing Manager, Kobo, said that while he did not consider Twitter to be his team’s most impactful channel, he felt that holding a contest on the network could help boost followers while further engaging Kobo’s online audience.

“I would call it efficient because it’s not overly costly,” Bhapkar says. “It’s a unique way to push the envelope in how we’re engaging with our customers and getting them to spread the word about Kobo.”

People who entered the contest had a chance to win one of three Kobo e-reader devices. Although the focus was on gaining Twitter followers, the team used several avenues to promote the contest. The contest lasted 10 days, during which the team promoted the contest in the following channels:

Email

Just a few hours after announcing the campaign on Twitter, the team sent an email to its house list describing the rules and linking to the landing page. This was the only email sent to its list for the effort. The team’s parent company, Indigo Books & Music, also added a button in its email newsletter linked to the contest landing page.

Homepage banner

The team posted a large image on its homepage, just below the fold, mentioning the campaign and linking to the landing page.

Social media

The team launched the contest on Twitter using software from Offerpop, through which they also monitored its progress. The team reminded Twitter followers about the contest about five times over the 10-day span.

“Whenever the launch happens, there’s a first burst of activity and then it flattens,” Bhapkar says. “The best way to reinvigorate it is by tweeting to our follower base to remind them of what is happening.”

The team also mentioned the contests to its Facebook followers.

Paid search

The team ran paid search advertising in Google for branded keywords such as “kobo ereader” and linked the ads to the contest landing page.

The contest resulted in a 43.5% increase in Twitter followers, and reached about 500,000 Twitter users with Tweets related to the campaign.

Tactic #10: Enlist users as judges

Sweepstakes are a random drawing, but for contests, there are many ways to choose a winner. Public voting is an especially popular choice.

And, for good reason. You can outsource some, if not all, of the judging (although you should still have a team vet all entries for appropriateness) and use social networks to help drive attention to your contest. Keep in mind, though, that entrants with a sexy or controversial slant will often garner a lot of votes, but may not necessarily be something you want to represent your brand.

Tactic #11: Embrace the “sweepers”

There is a hardcore group of sweepstakes fanatics who hunt for these promotions through blogs and social networks. The Sugar Association team refers to this group as “sweepers.” They typically enter sweepstakes only to win and abandon the company once the campaign ends.

However, if the typical sweeper also fits your target demographic, this doesn’t have to be the case—and in fact the ability to grab these consumers’ attention can work to your advantage. The Sugar Association found that the demographics of a typical sweeper almost mirrored those of the team’s targeted audience. Both groups were typically online moms age 25 to 47, the team said.

Keeping the “sweeper” phenomenon in mind, the team anticipated a dip in the results after the campaign but hoped the similarities of the two audiences would keep the drop to a minimum.

The team successfully reached its target audience, with 73% of the entries coming from females. This helped the team minimize the post-campaign drawdown wrought by the exodus of “sweepers.” Facebook “likes” fell by fewer than 200 in the month following the campaign.

“The 90-day campaign gave us a solid foundation to build upon. Once the sweepstakes were over, we continued to work to maintain the followers that we gained,” Briscoe says.

Useful Links and Resources:

[MarketingSherpa Article: Social Media, Online Videos and Contest Change Brand Perception: 7 Steps that Connected with Prospects and Increased Leads 30%](#)

[MarketingSherpa Article: Social Media Giveaway Campaign Lifts Sales 15%: 6 Steps](#)

About MarketingSherpa LLC

MarketingSherpa is a primary research facility, wholly-owned by MECLABS, dedicated to determining **what works in marketing** via exclusive case studies, surveys, and results data analysis. Then we publish what we learn so our community of marketers and weekly readers can improve their results and train their teams.

Praised by *The Economist*, Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge Site and Entrepreneur.com, Marketing-Sherpa is distinguished by offering **practical, results-based marketing** information researched and written by a staff of in-house reporters.

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The screenshot shows the homepage of MarketingSherpa's website. At the top, there's a red header bar with the text "View with Images | View Mobile Version". Below it, the "Inbound Marketing" logo is displayed, followed by the subtitle "Social media, SEO, and content marketing". To the right of the logo is the "marketingsherpa" logo. A navigation bar below the header includes links for "New Case Studies", "Members' Library", "Research", "Events", and "Training". On the left side of the main content area, there's a featured article titled "Social Media Marketing: Brand-powered social site is 4th-largest traffic source for nonprofit". The article discusses how a nonprofit organization launched a branded social network with 23,000 users. Below the article is a "Read more" link and a note about open access until August 28th. A HubSpot sponsored sidebar on the left contains text about Facebook being a popular social network and a link to download a free ebook. On the right side, there are sections for "Connect with us:" (links to LinkedIn, Twitter, RSS, Facebook, and YouTube), "Research:", and "B2B Summit 2011 Final Agenda". The agenda section includes details about the event dates (Sept. 26-27 in Boston, Oct. 24-25 in San Francisco) and lists keynote speakers like Flint McGlaughlin, Kristin Zhivago, and Jay Baer. A "Reserve Your Seat" button is also present.

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