

Laity Minute October 2019

I just bought my first pack of Pumpkin Pop Tarts. (Yes, they are good.) I hope pumpkin muffins and donuts are in my near future. If one wants to get really adventurous, then how about some pumpkin Cherrios and pumpkin SPAM? I am one of those people who live for those few weeks in the fall when pumpkin products are plentiful. And I'm not alone. Even Starbucks's Pumpkin Spice Latte (PSL) has its own account with 105,000 followers. Starbucks itself has about 11.5 million followers.

To put that into perspective, the United Methodist Church Twitter account has 12,000 followers. The United Methodist Women Twitter has a little over 13,000.

As I scrolled through the Starbucks Twitter feed, I have to admit I had a few laughs. Marketers know that humor tends to generally work well with consumers, and this one is no different. Starbucks has mastered how to engage with consumers in a way that makes them listen and respond. They have built a loyalty so fierce, that even when the price of their coffee jumped a few years ago, nobody seemed to care. And they also don't care that their PSL has 50 grams of sugar.

I have followed the UMC Twitter feed long enough to know they throw some humor in here and there. The feed also posts some quizzes and fun facts. There are numerous motivational quotes as well as Bible verses. Many amazing stories are told, too.

So why do we only have 12,000 followers and a coffee place has 11.5 million? Are we not as awesome as a PSL? A PSL doesn't go on mission trips to feed the hungry, right? When was the last time a PSL held a rummage sale?

If there is one thing that marketing students learn about social media, it is that the number of followers is actually quite useless. Starbucks can have 11.5 million followers, but that doesn't mean they are all faithful. It doesn't mean they are all out there advocating for the brand. It doesn't mean they are talking to their friends about it either. Yes, some of them do, of course, but it is usually a small percentage of the total number of followers. Even though the UMC number isn't huge, that's ok. It's not about clever tweets or who posts the best image. It's about following something that may be even bigger than a Starbucks Trenta (that's 31 ounces, by the way).

So, enjoy the pumpkin season. Partake of the PSL if you like. I sure will. But, also keep in mind those 12,000 UMC followers are following something much more valuable than anything a PSL could ever offer.

