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MAKE A UGC PHOTO CONTEST!

How To Get User-Generated Content thru Online Photo Contests

01 - Make A Photo C...   Share

Tell me if you've had this experience at your company…

Members of the sales team get together for a meeting or teleconference. The VP of Sales and Marketing asks everyone:

"Did you get any good "install photos" from the job sites you visited?"

** *Somewhere a cricket chirps*. **

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Let's just say, it's probably not your Sales Team's highest priority to go find installation photos. Which is totally understandable – they're busy making sure customers are happy, putting out fires, and making sure they hit their quotas. (Which, by the way, pays *your* salary!)

But if your VP of sales — or any manager or C-suite executive at the top — asks for "install photos" (especially more than once)… There's probably a darn good reason behind it.

In the case of my biz, we all knew the opportunity was there:

- We've been around a while.
- We make some really awesome and unique time-saving products.
- We knew these products were being used on some really high-profile airport, hotel and casino jobs.

And… Contractors *love* taking pictures of their handiwork. (Just search #ConduitPorn on Instagram.)

So, why don't these install photos make it back to our company?

It's simple, really…

**THERE WAS ZERO INCENTIVE
FOR CONTRACTORS TO
SEND IN THEIR PHOTOS!**

If you're an industrial marketer, and you sell physical products that get installed in buildings, or as components of other machines… I'll bet there's a ton of stunning field photography of your products floating around out there.

This **user-generated content** **(UGC)** could be worth thousands of dollars to your org — as marketing collateral for your catalogs, flyers, website, or case studies.

Just one of these unique photos (or videos) can literally make a big sale all on it's own — especially if it **demonstrates a common problem being solved by your product**.

Even **a tough decision-maker will sit-up and take notice** if you show your product being used successfully by a peer (or even better: a competitor!).

How We Started an Official UGC Photo Contest

At my company, we have been running a very simple photo contest for a few years now.

I hit upon the idea in 2018, when I attended my first NEMRA (National Electrical Manufacturers Association) Convention.

If you haven't been to one, these events look like a game of speed-dating between manufacturer's and their contracted sales reps. Rep team enters your booth. You talk business and sales figures for 20 minutes. Rep exits your booth to see the next manufacturer on their line card.

Anyway, between seeing one rep firm and then next, I was talking to one of our regional sales managers from the East coast. And he had this really interesting idea:

"We really ought to have some kind of photo contest. We could offer a ball cap and a catalog to anybody that sends in their photos."

I thought about that for a second. It was actually a really, really good idea.

Later on, I pitched it to our upper echelon… And they approved!

So then we started looking into ways to set up the photo contest…

First we **honed the offer**, which was a $100 Amazon Gift Card for the grand prize; and a hat and catalog for the door prize.

Second, we **chose timing and duration** for the photo contest. It made sense for us to hold the photo contests once every quarter: Fall, Spring, Summer, and Winter.

We went quarterly for two reasons:

1. There would be a nice long period for people to submit photos.

2. The contest periods run parallel with fiscal quarters. This made it easy to remember when the clock on one contest was about to expire, and to prepare the next one.

So, why didn't we just have a photo contest that runs continuously throughout the year?

Simply put: we wanted to motivate people to upload their photos quickly, and not procrastinate. A simple countdown does the trick nicely.

Once you figure out your offer and schedule, it's time to **figure out the tech**.

In-House UGC Platform: Worth the effort?

We knew we needed some way of housing all of the photos online.

It had to be a dead-simple way for contractors to dump their photos and leave their contact info — with the least amount of friction possible.

We first explored **an in-house solution** for the photo contest platform. It would involve coding a webform with a file uploader. This form might live in a blog post or its own web page.

The advantage of going in-house would be:

- A URL that stays static (doesn't change). This is important when creating QR codes or printed flyers – you want those puppies to last.

- It's on your company's website (or subdomain). It looks legit!

- Don't have to add yet another 3rd party software provider to your tech stack. (Who needs another site you have to remember passwords for?)

But there was one big snagaroo with the in-house solution.

The IT people said that coding the webform would take a very long time. We'd have to do a lot of user testing. And **fix a whole lot of bugs ourselves**.

No, thank you!

If you want to set up your own photo contest platform… But you don't want to do all the coding yourself… Go get you a **3rd party software provider**. Yes, passwords and credit cards and learning a new system. Blah blah blah. But you'll be saving yourself a lot of headache… and, best of all… You pay someone else to deal with all the bugs!

So just hop onto Google, Bing, Yahoo, DuckDuckGo, NetScape Navigator or whatever… Type "Photo Contest Platform." That'll get you started.

One thing I learned about these platforms:

There's a WHOLE LOT of other features we <u>did not</u> need!

Integration with email marketing.

Integration with social media sharing campaigns.

User account creation for returning customers.

Oodles and oodles of shiny graphs and dials.

And some of the software products were really full-on marketing hubs, in which 'photo contest platform' was just a teeny-weeny bullet point in a long list of features.

I put together a spreadsheet with all the collected bids from the different software providers. Some of them went as high as $1,000 to $2,000 a month!

So which software provider did we go with?

We ultimately chose a company called RewardsFuel.com. They were the third lowest bidder, I believe. And I would HIGHLY RECOMMEND them if all you need is a simple photo contest platform.

UGC Photo Contest Platforms

COMPANY	PHONE	EMAIL	PLAN	SUBS / MO	COST / MO	COST / YR
360 PHOTO	CALL	-	-	-	VARIABLE	VARIABLE
AWARD FORCE	CALL	E-MAIL	STARTER	UNLIMITED	$116	$1,390
EASYPROMOS	-	E-MAIL	BASIC	5000	$29	$348
MAKE MY CONTEST	-	E-MAIL	-	-	$17	$200
QUALIFIO	CALL	E-MAIL	CUSTOM	UNLIMITED	$2,618	$31,416
REWARDS FUEL	-	E-MAIL	PROMOTER	UNLIMITED	$16.63	$200
SECOND STREET	CALL	E-MAIL	-	-	$500	$6,000
SHORT STACK	CALL	E-MAIL	BUSINESS	10000	$99	$1,188
SUBMITTABLE	CALL	E-MAIL	STARTER	UNLIMITED	$834	$10,000
VOTIGO	CALL	E-MAIL	STANDARD	10000	$240	$2,880
VYPER	-	E-MAIL	PRO	10000	$25	$300
WISHPOND	CALL	-	-	1000	$49	$588
WOOBOX	CALL	E-MAIL	BASIC	1000	$37	$444

But it wasn't just price that made us choose RewardsFuel.com. And this important 'X' factor should be a top consideration for any low-cost software you buy…

Tip for Choosing "Cheap" Photo Contest Platforms: Test Their Customer Service!

There are times (like mine) when you really just need the lowest bidder… Especially when consequences are negligible. So when you scrape the bottom-of-the-barrel for any type of marketing software, heed these three cautions:

1. **The company might not last very long**. There's likely one entrepreneur behind the scenes running multiple software companies to see which sticks. At any time, you could lose this platform and have to look for another solution.

2. **Company could get acquired at any moment**. That's great news for the tech bro who owns the software. But potentially bad news for you, as your monthly price might go up.

3. **Company has terrible (or no) customer service**. Imagine you buy your photo contest platform for dirt cheap. You're ready to launch it… But there's a bug. Or a promised feature isn't there. And the only people you can complain to is a poorly-programmed chat bot, or some Indian guy who takes 24 hours to respond to an email.

There's not much you can do about #1 and #2.

But you *can* do something about #3. And that is to ask their Customer Service a question. It can be any question, really. But see how they respond, who responds, and how quickly they respond.

That was the real kicker for me with RewardsFuel.com. I had a question about pricing tiers, so I emailed their general inbox. I had low expectations. I figured I'd get some automatic, canned response like:

"We will get back to you in 24-48 hours".

Oooh! Can they make a fancy "ticket number" just for me?

What happened instead was miraculous in this day and age…

Less than thirty minutes later, I get a response. She's a real person. She's based in North America. And… She's the owner and designer of RewardsFuel.com! So she not only has the technical expertise — she can make things happen!

(Which reminds me I gotta give her a review! Hopefully y'all can hold me accountable.)

And once we started using the platform (which I think had only recently launched) we did run into the odd glitch here and there. And sure enough, she fixed it!

So how has our user generated content experience been going?

For 2-1/2 years, our company photo contest has been going strong. It's not heavily hyped or marketed in comparison to other activities. But **we're consistent**, which is a good thing because we'll always have a need for good install photos from the field.

And for you 'selfish' attention-seeking marketers out there… Here's the bright shiny bullet point you can add to your resume:

'Introduced first-ever User Generated Photo Contest, leading to [results].'

So if your company doesn't have a UGC strategy in place, it's relatively easy for even a junior marketer to implement quickly. And then you get to be the 'innovator'.

Staying Out of Trouble: How to Write Terms & Conditions for your UGC Photo Contest

Last thing I'll just say about photo contests (or any kind of contest that you do) is to **have really dense Terms and Conditions***.

I know that sounds a little bit shady. But when it comes to contests — *especially* if you're a bigger company — you can get into some real hot water if you don't get the legal language right.

The two big elements you want to cover in your Terms & Conditions has to do with:

1. Taxes on prize winnings.

2. Ownership / copyright of submitted material.

For instance, a $100 cash prize may or may not be taxed, depending on the participant's state or even county. There might be other tax stipulations you don't know about.

In terms of ownership / copyright, try to hammer home that **your company owns all of the photos / videos that get submitted.** That by sending in their photos, contestants agree to allow your company to do *whatever the heck it wants* with 'em.

Just imagine you get an amazing photo of your product installed in the field. You share it on social. Use it in print campaigns. Put it in the catalog. Then along comes the original photographer, and he's like, "Hey, you're making money off of MY photo. Take it down or pay me royalties!"

Luckily, RewardsFuel.com actually had its own generic terms and conditions template. So I just took that template, read through it, and added a little bit more language to tailor it to our company and contest goals.

I'm sure whatever UGC platform you use will offer similar templates – or you can search Google for templates.

Now go out there and get you some photos! And tell me what solutions YOU used in terms of software and strategy!

P.S. *I'm not a lawyer, so make sure you talk to YOUR general counsel on Terms & Conditions. This blog is for pure entertainment, I'm not giving legal advice. Do I really have to say all that? Huh?