Case study

If content is king, conversion is queen: The dilemma of Dona Diva

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Abstract

This work presents the real story of Dona Diva, a semi-jewelry company operating in e-commerce and serving the entire national territory, both in wholesale and retail. This study focuses on highlighting the digital marketing strategies implemented by the company's founders and its marketing and sales team. Within this context, the primary objective is to investigate the importance of digital marketing and social media in showcasing the advantages and disadvantages (especially when misapplied) of these marketing and communication channels between the company and its customers. The central dilemma of the case is: *How can content be created for two distinct channels, with different characteristics and interests (B2B and B2C), to drive e-commerce sales for both?* The case was built using primary sources, through interviews with the company's founders, as well as secondary sources. The names of the founders, the company, and the originality of the story were faithfully preserved throughout.

Se o conteúdo é rei, a conversão é a rainha: O dilema da Dona Diva

Resumo

Este trabalho apresenta a história real da Dona Diva, uma empresa do ramo de semijoias que opera no *e-commerce* e está presente em todo território nacional, tanto no atacado quanto no varejo. O foco é apresentar as estratégias de marketing digital utilizadas pelos sócios e pela equipe de marketing e vendas da empresa. Neste contexto, o principal objetivo é investigar a importância do marketing digital e das mídias sociais para expor os benefícios e malefícios (quando não aplicados de forma correta) desses canais de marketing e comunicação entre a empresa e seus clientes. O dilema do caso é: Como gerar conteúdo para dois canais distintos, com particularidades e interesses diferentes (B2B e B2C), para vender por meio do *e-commerce*, para ambos? O caso foi construído a partir de fontes primárias, com entrevistas com os fundadores da empresa, e de fontes secundárias. Os nomes dos sócios, da empresa, e a originalidade da história foram mantidos fiéis em todos os momentos.

THE CASE

This case depicts the true story of Dona Diva, a company in the semi-jewelry sector that operates in e-commerce and serves the entire national territory, both wholesale and retail. Claudia and Jordan are the founders of Dona Diva. Initially run through sales representatives, the business received a significant investment in 2014 to focus on e-commerce sales. Later, this channel became exclusive. The company also began selling through three different marketplaces, but after three years, this model was discontinued, shifting exclusively to their own website. This decision alone posed a major challenge: selling and managing two segments through a single channel. Retail and wholesale require completely different approaches, in addition to the operational processes involved.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a dramatic increase in sales. However, with the reopening of businesses, a state of alert settled at Dona Diva. In the search to serve both wholesale and retail, the dilemma emerged: How to generate content for two distinct channels, with distinct characteristics and interests (B2B and B2C), to drive sales through e-commerce in both segments?

It was a Wednesday, right after breakfast, when Claudia seemed deep in thought as she got ready for work. After a few minutes, she sat on the edge of the bed and began to confide in her boyfriend, Jordan:

- *To be honest, I have been unhappy with the college I chose for some time now. Law no longer feels like the right fit for me, and I am not happy with my job. I feel frustrated about it.*

- *I completely understand, Claudia. I am finishing Civil Engineering, but it is not really what I want to do professionally...*

- *As you know, part of my income comes from the jewelry I make and sell to my friends and family. My dream has always been to have my own business, to keep selling jewelry or something related to accessories, fashion, I do not know, the possibilities are endless.*

- *Yes, I know, and I have always supported you.*

- *I have been thinking about it. It may sound crazy, but what if we took this idea further?*

- *What do you mean? Tell me more.*

- *What if we turned this hobby into a full-fledged business?*

- *Wow, which is a lot to take in... It is an amazing idea to venture into entrepreneurship, but we will have a lot of work ahead of us.*

- *Yes, I know! But if you are by my side and we do this together, it will be my greatest professional achievement.*

- *I will always be by your side but let us think about the possibility. There will be a lot of work if we really make this happen..*

The following week, Claudia continued researching the jewelry market, gradually moving into the semi-jewelry sector. Despite the challenges and questioning herself multiple times about whether she was ready, her dream of having her own company spoke louder.

After some time spent researching, reading, and planning, she called Jordan to talk.

- *Jordan, it is time to start the work. I have researched local suppliers, I know the sales model I want to follow, I have dropped out of my course, and I am committed to this and making it work!*

- *Wow, Claudia, you really put a lot of work into this... I am being honest; I am still a bit apprehensive... But if this is what you want, let us do it together. I can help with the design of the pieces, photos, marketing, and even the financial side.*

- *Great, Jordan! For now, it is just going to be the two of us, so we will have to "make do with everything" to manage it all, but we will make it happen!*

And so, the first step was taken toward a company with an innovative proposition. From a hobby and disillusionment with a university course to entrepreneurship and the creation of an innovative business in many aspects.

THE IDEA CAME TO LIFE

After much planning and effort, Claudia and Jordan launched Dona Diva. The year was 2010, and the process of manufacturing the pieces still took place at home, with sales being conducted online.

Starting in 2011, Jordan, looking to boost sales, recruited and selected a team of sales representatives to sell the brand's pieces in stores and through resellers. Initially, and for convenience, the work began in the states of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul, achieving a satisfactory and planned result.

After three years with this business model, some changes needed to happen. Despite still bringing in a good revenue for the company, Jordan began noticing increasing difficulty in attracting customers, as well as challenges in negotiations and shrinking profitability. This situation arose due to the growth of competition, both direct and from substitute products.

Strategic decisions became necessary. They faced a pivotal choice: either expand their sales territories by recruiting additional representatives or explore alternative sales channels.

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After three years of this business model, changes were necessary. Despite still generating a good revenue for the company, Jordan noticed it was becoming harder to attract customers, and the profitability was decreasing. This was due to the growth of both direct competitors and substitute products.

Decisions needed to be made. They could either expand their sales territories by adding new sales representatives and increasing the company's infrastructure or explore other sales channels. It was at this point that Jordan had an idea, which later proved to be successful. Although with very rudimentary techniques, he created a website, posted amateur photos, and included images from the catalog. He organized the information and other images, and although he did not know it at the time, he was creating a business model for the company. In 2014, e-commerce was still in its infancy in Brazil, with online stores like Netshoes and marketplaces like Mercado Livre still in their initial stages, with small results and almost amateur operations.

Despite the site being basic, with little interactivity and no digital strategy, the company began receiving a few emails from customers interested in the products and in reselling the brand. And so, the first online sales began, although it could not truly be called online sales yet since the site did not have the resource for that and was only a virtual showroom. Negotiations were done through email, but the management referred to it as online sales since it was done through a different channel than what they had been using. The sales process itself was still quite rudimentary, with orders made manually, and negotiations often took place over the phone. Another crucial point was that at the time, the only shipping option was via the postal service.

With the success of this virtual venture, a few months later, the company launched a fully structured online store where customers could place and finalize their orders directly through the site. It was a significant step forward at the time, both for the company and the sector, especially since there were few e-commerce platforms available. Much effort and continuous improvements followed, with learning, mistakes, and successes, gathering insights from other practitioners and always improving.

As sales from the digital channel grew, Jordan made a key decision. From that point on, all company sales would be conducted through the brand's website. This decision led to parting ways with all of the representatives. It was a new era, a new reality, a new business model for Dona Diva. With this change, the workload also increased, and Claudia needed support to help with sales, website updates, and product packing. The company began to expand its team.

At this point, 90% of sales were directed at independent resellers, and 10% to store owners, all conducted online. Store owners, due to their physical stores, were frequently approached by competing representatives offering equivalent products and did not feel the need to look for new suppliers. On the other hand, independent resellers needed to research and prospect suppliers in the market, contact them, and negotiate hard. This model worked well for them and also served as a marketing channel for Dona Diva. It is worth noting that this situation had not been initially planned, but with data monitoring by Jordan, the context was understood and worked upon to improve results. A new B2B segment had been found and was being explored by Dona Diva.

This business model remained in place for a good period, but in 2018, the market began showing a strong trend toward marketplaces. The partners referred to this period as "the era of marketplaces." Since the market was heading in that direction, the company felt the need to follow the trend and enter marketplaces.

This decision was crucial because entering this channel also meant the company would reach a new customer segment: end consumers, the customers of marketplace sites. This decision was not accidental, as the company sought greater contact with the end consumer, particularly in terms of receiving feedback on its products and maintaining a more direct conversation with buyers and end users. Up until that point, all information regarding these aspects came only from the intermediary contact with resellers, who provided their own analysis.

Dona Diva spent three years on marketplaces like Dafiti, Netshoes, and Mercado Livre. The company had good moments of revenue from this channel, reaching 20% of retail revenue from marketplaces. In the management's evaluation, this was a solid result, considering the company's essence had always been wholesale and reselling.

As sales expanded, the couple felt the need to increase the production space for their jewelry pieces, so they moved to a new location that could accommodate all production needs. The company inaugurated its new headquarters in the center of Brusque. This new space was the realization of what had been planned for years: no more makeshift home production, but a spacious area for inventory and production flow, making the administration of the company much easier.

Alongside the move, there were also new hires to expand the staff. With the growing demand, employees were hired for production. Claudia was dividing her time between developing the pieces and fulfilling orders. With the rise in demand, a commercial department was created to manage customer service, order picking, and shipping, and the company started to take shape, with specific departments and roles.

However, after about three years, marketplace companies began registering and operationalizing many producers and even resellers offering products with no quality standards. This had a significant impact on Dona Diva's sales, causing a sharp decline and making the operation expensive and unprofitable. Once again, a decision had to be made, and Dona Diva ceased operations on all marketplaces. This decision meant that the only sales channel would return to the company's own website, for both retail and wholesale. This, in itself, was a huge challenge: managing B2C and B2B through a single channel. And so, it was done.

Once again, this decision seemed right, and in the post-lockdown period caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, around mid-2020, the company saw a significant increase in website traffic and sales, doubling both sales and revenue, which in turn led to an increase in the workforce.

THE REIGN DOESN'T LAST FOREVER

But as "all good things must come to an end" with the reopening of commerce and the return to normalcy, sales began to decline once again, and website traffic also saw a drop, reaching what the company considered to be an alarming situation. It was necessary to do something more, as the market had changed once again. Competitors quickly ramped up their marketing and sales efforts.

This raised several pressing questions, chief among them: How can sales for both retail and wholesale be effectively managed within the same environment? Additionally, there were questions about the frequency of posts, the content itself, and the entire working method needed to manage and increase sales for both segments.

The competition had understood that their products were good and attractive. They began capturing customers by dedicating efforts to creating eBooks, writing blog content, and using social media to grab the attention of potential buyers. It was clear that for retail, this approach made a lot of sense.

Claudia leveraged her writing skills to her advantage. As a strategy to attract potential customers—since leaving the marketplace she created her own blog and integrated it into the website. Several articles were published on several topics, but always related to style and semi-jewelry. Tips on how to wear accessories, how to combine them, fashion trends, and advice on product maintenance and durability. The company's focus shifted toward content creation and copywriting.

In the beginning, this strategy attracted a lot of attention from customers, but over time, Claudia realized that just the blog was no longer enough. They then started focusing even more on social media content, such as Facebook, Pinterest, and especially Instagram. Furthermore, this strategy worked well to attract retail customers but had a minor impact on the wholesale segment.

The layout of the Instagram page began to feature well-produced photos of the pieces, with professional production and lighting. Product details, along with usage tips, were added. This process led to more dedication and work, and with the increase in demand, it became necessary to hire more people to assist Claudia. Dona Diva then hired Gabriela, who, in addition to managing the social media, helped with photo production, writing posts, and responding to comments.

At first, the photos mostly displayed the products themselves, but it did not take long to realize that just posting product photos, like a virtual store window, was no longer driving sales. It was clear that consumers wanted more than just that. The partners dove deeper into reading and studies to improve their sales strategies. At this point, Claudia called Gabriela to discuss:

- *We need to create more engaging content that expands our customer base, especially the resellers.*

- *I understand, but do you think we are not on the right track?* – Gabriela asked.

- *Well, right now we are just displaying products; it is like a window display, but we are not really attracting attention or interest. We should create content akin to our previous blog posts—offering tips, insights, and advice. And we still have not reached wholesale customers. It has been a while since we opened a reseller account.* – Claudia explained.

- *Ah, I see. We need to influence, inform—more than just pushing for a sale.*

- *Exactly, conversion is crucial, but it is a result of the engagement we generate. We need to make consumers seek out our pages, and we can only do that if we offer something that makes sense to them, that adds value. Information, belonging, something important. And besides that, Gabi, wholesale gives us volume.*

- *And as they engage with our pages, we become more visible to them.* – Gabriela added.

- *Exactly.*

Claudia stood up, took a sip of water, and continued:

- *If you think about it, so far, we have been talking to them, giving them what we want them to hear, not necessarily what they want to hear or see... To really make the content, it needs to be useful. We cannot just try to push something on these customers. And we have the added challenge of attracting resellers too...*

- *Do you think we are pushing?* – Gabriela asked.

- *Hehe, at least trying...*

At that moment, Jordan entered the room, overheard part of the conversation, and interjected:

- *But digital marketing, or even content, is not just about social media. When someone has a question, where do they go? To Google! That is why we need to be there too... And from there, we need to lead them to the e-commerce site to convert them.* – Jordan interrupted.

- *I agree, but we already have our website. Isn't that enough?* – Gabriela pondered.

- *So, Gabi, the real question is how to bring the customer to the e-commerce site. If you think about it, whenever we want information or need to solve something, we go to Google, right? Exactly, that is the foundation of everything. We need to show up when someone searches for something related to us. We need to present the best answer, the best information, or the best solution to the search. Solve their problem.* – Jordan explained.

- *And how are we going to do this, Jordan?*

- *Well, it is a lot of work, but now we know what we need to do. Of course, we need to figure out how and what to say, meaning we will need to explore copyright effectively, and this also involves working with keywords.*

- *Yes, I have seen a lot about SEO.* – Gabi mentions.

- *Great, Gabi. If we identify the search queries and determine the right keywords, we will need to produce a lot of articles, white papers, and other content based on this combination of keywords. In other words, it is a lot of work! Understanding the parameters of these search engines and working with this content is not simple. This material needs to be good and timeless, with no "expiration date." The more it is accessed, the more it will show up in searches. The material needs to have strong titles that grab attention and concise text. Those keywords need to be in the body of the content.*

- *Yes, we need to generate organic traffic.* – Gabi agrees.

- *Well... One thing that works is anticipating these questions. We sell semi-jewels. They are not exactly jewelry, and they are not just costume jewelry either. What questions do consumers have about this? In the same sense, we sell accessories, and there must be several consumer doubts about how to use them, how to combine them, and the occasions for wearing them. So, we really need to think about this and create material content around it. How are we going to make this content reach people? There are several ways. I recently read that short videos are the most engaging, but for that, we need to know what and how to use these answers in these formats. And our big challenge is also attracting resellers. We will have to use two different languages, one for the end consumer, who buys for personal use, and another for the reseller, who will make a profit from selling our products. Got it?* Explained Jordan

- *I am impressed. I have been working in digital for a while and have not thought of that.*

- *Well, when we started, the tool that worked and concentrated our efforts was email marketing. Everything was solved through it, but now it is not just that. Content needs to inform, be useful, and reach the potential customer.*

- *It seemed so much easier a few years ago. Look at the numbers I gathered from our sector: An article from Valor Econômico, written by Bouças (2022), details that in 2021, the Brazilian jewelry and semi-jewelry market saw a 20% increase in revenue, totaling US$ 4.5 billion (Brazilian Institute of Gems and Precious Metals - IBGM). Meanwhile, the costume jewelry market (items made from fabrics, straw, stones, and glass) had an annual revenue of US$ 45 million. I searched on the ComexVis platform from the Ministry of Development, Industry, Commerce, and Services (MDIC, 2023) and found that jewelry exports, goldsmithing, and related items moved a total of US$ 146.38 million in 2021, with over 47% going to Germany. Imports totaled US$ 64.46 million.*

- *That is right, Gabi. We have to identify our audience, understand them, understand their needs, understand their desires, their limitations. It is a fact that here at Dona Diva, we serve more than one segment, so we need to define them well, create personas for the consumer, because that way it becomes easier to gather the information we talked about above. We also need to understand the resellers' interests and how to attract them. And that is why we brought you in, Gabi. We understand the importance of content for our field. We know we need to constantly produce content. Claudia has always done this, but she needs to focus on managing the company too. But today we recognize that good production is not just a luxury, and we know we need to manage it. We cannot just do it when we have time or when we wake up in a good mood. This needs to be well thought out, developed with strategies, and managed properly.*

- *I understand.* Said Gabi.

- *Our market is not commoditized, it is a market of luxury and style, so through content, we demonstrate expertise. We need to personify, generate conversations with consumers, and enchant potential resellers. And there is one more thing that useful content helps with, which is maintaining relationships with clients. This generates upselling and cross-sell, and also, a good relationship with the customer creates loyalty, turning them into true brand advocates.*

- *One more thing, Gabi, when we talk about wholesale, we are talking about independent resellers. These are usually people who seek our products to generate a new source of income or to supplement their earnings. Individuals who set up a small business (MEI) and start selling our products to friends, neighbors, and family. It is like the old concept of "sacoleira" who used to sell clothes. They sell well, grow, and build a solid customer portfolio. In this sense, we like this market and understand that we can expand it, but it requires specific communication, from us and through our channels, both to attract them to work with us, to convince those looking for extra income to do this, or even to find those who are already doing it to work with our products.* Explained Claudia

- *This would be very logical for us to target resale in semi-jewelry stores, but this market is already highly competitive. Every day, shopkeepers receive visits from several representatives of companies like ours. They already have their suppliers, and we would just be another one offering something. The independent reseller, however, has difficulty finding suppliers, so we need to attract them and convince them to sell our products.* Added Jordan

- *Wow, I am totally convinced and honored to take on this role.* – Said Gabi, feeling emotional.

- *Yes, Gabi, this work is crucial. Right now, we have this need, and we know that through these tools, we can reach a considerable number of people, meet their demands, generate a significant list of leads, and use content to convert them. We need to increase our visibility by using social media, search engines, email marketing, and engaging with these followers and searchers. To do that, we need to curate content carefully and also post a lot of our own, original content.*

- *I understand all of this, Jordan, I just do not understand one thing. If you know all of this, why do you need me?*

- *Well, Gabi, everything I have told you here is theoretical and generic. We know what to do, but we have difficulty putting it into practice within our company. Also, we need to focus on managing the company overall, because there are other departments that need us.*

- *The truth, Gabi, is that we are producing content, not as we should, but we are. The problem is, even though we have decent visibility and some engagement, we are having conversion issues. And our central problem is producing content for both consumers and resellers. We need to be precise enough to increase sales for both audiences.* Explained Jordan.

- *Is this serious?!*

- *Yes, as I told you, we know quite a bit about the subject, we understand the concepts and the theory... We have the ideal vision of the world, but we are not managing to implement it in practice. We are not converting as we hoped and need to. Costs have gone up, competitors have emerged, margins have flattened, and that is why we need to increase sales. We need to convert more.* Affirmed Jordan.

- *I understand, Jordan, but engagement does not necessarily lead to sales, and that is what is happening to us. We need to understand where we're going wrong because despite all the effort, we need more sales, and that sale needs to come from both channels. Right now, we are working on our Instagram, even posting frequently, not repeating content, trying to bring new things. We even think our Instagram is where we want it to be, with our positioning, and we have invested in the photography part, hiring models, setting up scenes. But even so, we still feel like the content needs to be more precise. We need to attract more attention, and to operate everything we have talked about before in a unique way. We have the feeling that "we swim, swim, and die on the beach." And to be completely honest with you, I really do not know what to do anymore.* – Points out Claudia, feeling discouraged.

THE DILEMMA

Dona Diva faces a pressing challenge: how to create tailored content that effectively targets both B2C and B2B audiences through e-commerce? The company needs to improve its content in order to increase sales conversions for both the end consumer (B2C) and at the same time, create content that attracts the attention of resellers (B2B), while avoiding conflicts between these distinct sales channels.

It is clear to Jordan and Claudia that the company's business model is digital. Neither of them is considering working with physical stores or reintroducing sales representatives. So, how can they generate content for two distinct channels, with distinct characteristics and interests (B2B and B2C), to sell through e-commerce to both?

Case Study

This case study provides the teaching notes separately.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Authors' statement of individual contributions

Roles	Contributions			
	Silva I. M.	Lana J.	Partyka R. B.	Kreling B.
Conceptualization	■	■		
Methodology		■	■	
Software		N. A.		
Validation		■	■	
Formal analysis	■	■		■
Investigation	■	■		
Resources		N. A.		
Data Curation		■		
Writing - Original Draf	■	■		
Writing - Review & Editing		■	■	■
Visualization	■	■	■	■
Supervision		■	■	
Project administration		N. A.		
Funding acquisition		N. A.		

Note: Acc. CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy): https://credit.niso.org/

Open Science: Data availability

All the data that supports the results of this study is available as follows.

Badge	Description
OPEN DATA	The entire data set supporting the results of this study was published in the article itself.
OPEN CODE	Not applicable.
OPEN MATERIALS	Not applicable.
OPEN SUPPLEMENTS	https://doi.org/10.14211/regepe.esbj.e2351pr
PREREGISTERED	Not applicable.

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