

Executive Summary

BARK launched in 2011 with its flagship and best-known product, BarkBox. BarkBox is a direct-to-consumer subscription box containing toys and treats for dogs. The company was founded by Carly Strife, Matt Meeker, and Henrik Werdelin.

BARK's products include BarkBox, Super Chewer, BarkShop, Bright, and BarkEats. BarkBox is its flagship product which is a monthly themed box full of treats and toys. Super Chewer is largely the same, although the toys are significantly tougher and meant to stand up to stronger, more tenacious canines.

Bright and BarkEats are relatively newer offerings. Bright is a subscription focused on canine oral health and can be added to an existing BarkBox or SuperChewer subscription or purchased separately. BarkEats is focused on food but is currently only available in the Columbus area.

BarkBox is designed to be somewhat personalized. During signup, customers can select the size of their dog and mention any allergies. The toys and treats in the box are tailored to these parameters.

BARK designs its toys in-house, and initially, they weren't available through any other channels. However, after discovering that people wanted access to the toys outside of the subscription box's confines, BARK launched Barkshop.com, where dog owners can purchase individual toys. Additionally, BARK formed a partnership with Target, which carries a selection of BARK products both in-store and online.

BARK's brand personality is funny, often irreverent, and steeped in internet culture. The company's stated mission is to "make dogs happy," and BARK does this not only through its products but by donating both funds and supplies to shelters.

Context Analysis

While the pet supply space is a crowded one, BARK differentiates itself through its use of a subscription model. While there are other dog subscription boxes, few offer BARK's products' variety and customization options. Most competitors appeal to a specific subset of pet owners. For example, Good Dog in a Box is geared towards involving children in dog training, while Wag Well Box is focused on wellness and provides organic and all-natural products.

When compared to its competitors, BARK's prices are the same or lower. BARK also offers significant discounts for more extended subscription periods. However, there isn't a considerable price difference between buying BARK products a la carte and subscribing to the box.

Communication Objectives

BARK's communication objectives are primarily focused on acquiring new customers. BARK uses Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Youtube, and Instagram. In addition, some of the individual products have discrete social media presences as well. However, what is shared doesn't vary much between them.

BARK frequently shares UGC and sees enthusiastic engagement from its followers in response. This comes in the forms of likes, shares, and comments, as well as followers sharing photos and stories about their own dogs.

Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning

There is fierce competition in the pet supply space, especially as attitudes shift toward treating dogs more and more like members of the family. Interestingly, while other pet subscription boxes have really niched down, BARK casts a much wider net. This is not only in the audience it targets but also in its positioning as it adds more products.

According to a study on Statista, Millennials make up the largest segment of pet owners in the United States at 31%. According to Mintel, these pet owners feel strongly that they are responsible for making their pets happy and spoiling them. According to 2018 data from MRI, the number of people who have bought toys for their pets in the past year has increased among those ages 25 to 29, while it's decreased among those 55 and older.

The pandemic has impacted the pet owner segment as well, with many families adopting a new dog during the extended time at home. In addition, stay-at-home orders have caused many to bond even more closely with their animals, likely increasing the desire to make their pets happy.

Message Strategy

BARK focuses on the experience it provides more than on the actual products in the box. Communications frequently make use of party imagery and verbiage. Much of its content

consists of photos and videos of product unboxings as well as cute or funny moments of everyday life with dogs. These posts frequently inspire social media followers to respond with their own dogs' contents, very often alongside BARK products.

BARK also emphasizes the idea of being a "pack" in much of its communications. This is especially evident in its email marketing campaigns. For those who receive BARK's emails but have yet to make a purchase, these emails are full of images of BARK toys and happy dogs inviting the recipient to join the "pup party". BARK's emails do a lot to strengthen the idea that they're selling a shared experience with one's dog rather than merely a box of toys.

Another way BARK emphasizes shared experiences with one's dog is by live Tweeting television events. An employee's dog live Tweeted this year's Superbowl, and The Bachelor is frequently live Tweeted as well. Again, this furthers the concept of being a part of the pack and sharing loved activities together.

Storytelling Strengths/Weaknesses

BARK has absolutely nailed a crucial insight, which is that people want to share experiences with their dogs. More than ever, people see dogs as part of their family, and shared experiences are a huge part of what makes a family. This insight enables BARK to capitalize on the emotional connection between humans and dogs. Given the pandemic, consumers are likely to place an even higher value on these relationship-nurturing experiences. Based on BARK's recent expansion into dental products and food, it seems the intent is to become a more complete dog

supply solution for people who want the best for their animals. BARK will need to continue to strengthen this emotional connection to be successful in this.

BARK excels at speaking to its target segment, frequently referencing current events in its communication. A recent example would be the Bernie Sanders mitten meme, which features Sanders wearing a pair of distinctive knit mittens. BARK responded with a mockup of a toy based on the mittens, which its audience received with a great deal of enthusiasm. Not only did BARK put the toy into production, but all of the proceeds will also be donated to a Vermont-based pet food pantry. While the mitten toy hasn't shipped yet, it's a pretty safe bet that it will result in a flood of entertaining UGC.

With so many products, all with separate websites and some with individual social media accounts, there is a feeling of disorganization. I believe the overall messaging would be more potent if it weren't coming from so many directions at once. It's not likely that consumers will be interested in following social media accounts on multiple platforms from multiple products from the same brand. Considering how similar the shared content is, this seems like a considerable amount of wasted effort.

Opportunities for Improvement & Recommendations

While BARK does have a blog, BARK Post, it lives on a completely different URL and isn't easily accessible via BARK's main website. I would recommend including links to this blog throughout BARK's website and sharing articles from it more frequently on social media and in email campaigns. The blog is an ideal platform for uniting all of BARK's offerings as well as

highlighting the benefits of each product line. Content from the blog could also be used to flesh out BARK's email communications. This could be especially useful in relation to those who receive BARK's emails but haven't yet made a purchase. Blog content that provides value to pet parents while showcasing BARK subscribers' experience could serve to move this segment further in the funnel.



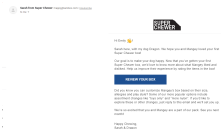

My second recommendation would be for BARK to use its email marketing for more than just advertising. Over the month, I was subscribed to BARK's email lists (one for subscribers, one for nonsubscribers) I didn't receive anything particularly engaging after the initial Welcome and the first box follow-up emails. One notable exception was an email I received in response to the weather-related disasters in the area of Texas I live in. However, I think BARK could do more with this channel in terms of sharing content, especially items of interest from the blog.

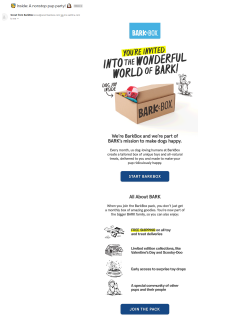
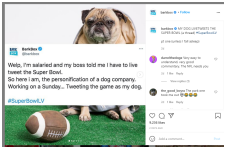
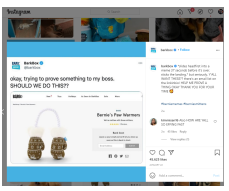

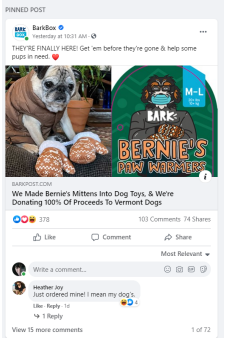
A third recommendation would be to consolidate the many social media accounts into one per platform. While BARK's products do serve different needs, they still appeal to the same segment and benefit from sharing the same types of content. This would also increase the chances of existing subscribers becoming aware of and signing up for additional products.



My final recommendation is, admittedly, a hybrid of the above opportunities. With BARK repositioning itself as a provider of more than just toys, it's important that it tells a cohesive story to capitalize on existing brand loyalty. By consolidating social media and making an effort to disseminate blog content via email, BARK can continue to build trust and authority while still maintaining the fun-loving personality it's cultivated. While it's important to welcome new

members to the BARK pack, the brand should realize significant value by enticing existing customers to purchase additional products.

Appendix

Date	Channel	Subject	Image	Notes
	BARK website			BARK partners with dog-related charities across the country
January 31	Email (subscriber)	Welcome to the Pack, Super Chewer		Upon subscribing to a BARK product (SuperChewer in this case, my dogs are absolute monsters) a welcome email is sent.
February 7	Email (subscriber)	How was Mangey's first Super Chewer box?		An email checking in on the experience with the first box. The email is personalized with mine and my dog's name and offers customization options for the box.
February 12	Facebook			BARK often shares UGC, inspiring followers to share photos of their own dogs, often with BARK products.

February 10	Email (nonsubscriber)	Inside: A nonstop pup party!		BARK uses a lot of party and pack imagery in its marketing communications.
February 7	Instagram			Superbowl live Tweet announcement
January 22	Instagram			BARK is quick to join in on memes. In this case it went so far as to create a product based on the Bernie Sanders mittens meme.
February 21	Blog			BARK announces the production of its Bernie Sanders mittens as well as its partnership with PAWsitive Pantry
March 1	Facebook			BARK announces the availability of the mitten toy

February 17	email	Warm Regards from BARK	<div><div></div><div><p>Hi Emily,</p><p>This is Melissa and Thor from the Happy Team at BARK. We wanted to reach out about the water issue that is currently impacting your community. We've been following the news and wanted to send our love to your family.</p><p>All of us at BARK have been thinking of you, your pack, and your family and hope you are staying safe and warm. We know the health and safety of you and your loved ones is your top priority right now. If you need any help with your pet's water/energy experience, please let us know. The Happy Team is here for you.</p><p>We will keep you and your loved ones in our thoughts. Please feel free to reach out if there is anything we can do to help.</p><p>Warm Regards, Melissa and Thor</p><div></div></div></div>	This email came in response to the winter storms in my area. Again, the word “pack” is used.
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Works Cited

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MRI-Simmons. (2018). *Spring 2018 NHCS adult study 12 month* [Data file]. Retrieved from Simmons Insights database.

Statista. *Generational share of pet ownership in the United States 2019/20*. Retrieved February 10, 2021, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1130651/pet-ownership-by-generation-us/>.