

# Lead the way in social media

**Social media is a blend of technology and social interaction**



"WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE IF YOU LIVED EACH DAY, EACH BREATH, AS A WORK OF ART IN PROGRESS? IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE A MASTERPIECE UNFOLDING, EVERY SECOND OF EVERY DAY, A WORK OF ART TAKING FORM WITH EVERY BREATH."

THOMAS CRUM, AUTHOR AND PRESENTER

**S**ocial media has made the world one big global village dominated by the strength of relationships in a currency of caring, powered by word of mouth. Remember when one person would complain to one other? Those days are over, now you can tell the world.

What is social media? It is a blend of technology and social interaction, an online community. One in four users is actually over 65 years of age (to keep in contact with the grandchildren, the world at large or for online dating we wonder?). Social media is free, instant, re-active, allows conversation, is accessible and has powerful reach. There is no credibility factor, no barrier to entry, so anyone can say anything, anywhere. You as a leader need to anticipate that.

Social media cannot be called new media, it can be called now media. It is not going to go away, so leaders need to embrace and understand it—and then use it effectively as part of a strategic communication plan. It does not mean that you cancel out all traditional media (television, radio, magazines and newspapers) as these have a perceived elevated credibility factor. Because the coverage has had to be approved by an editor, the audience perceives the information to be more credible, unlike social media where there is no barrier to entry

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online. Tangible materials such as magazines and newspapers are subject to greater emotional processing (measured by brain activity in the visual and spatial areas). Greater emotional response and deeper impact is what you are wanting when you are building a brand, so don't move from traditional to social media in isolation; rather try to integrate the two. Duplicate your traditional media coverage into the online platforms for deeper impact.

Leaders make the mistake of trying to prevent their staff accessing social media in work time, banning it completely. Instead, they should explore ways in which it could benefit the business, for example restricting the times of access e.g. lunchtimes and one other hour. It can be used for collaboration and knowledge sharing, research using online focus groups, networking, community building and advertising. Like anything, it needs a level of commitment, responsibility, maturity and balance. Business is built and expanded through inter-personal relationships, and social media offers vast access for this. The best way of ensuring strategic use of social media in your business, is to have a strategy, to share it with your team, and ensure that each and every member knows their role and responsibility.

Some leaders dash into social media space just because they feel they have to. They appoint a digital manager to oversee the process, and then go back to doing things as they did before. I believe that it is like learning to drive. We book a learner's licence appointment and then study the manual. After passing our learner's test we then practise with a licenced driver and may even enlist the help of a professional

driving instructor for some lessons. When we feel we are confident and experienced we take the driver's test (In my case, a few times!). Once we have the licence we remove the red L from the back windscreen and proceed to drive, not always confidently at first, on our own. It takes a long time to build up what I term instinct—the ability to anticipate other driver's moves and to respond quickly and adequately.

All communication plans should identify objectives, define your target market and include key messages and content need to be designed.

With social media it is essential that you first understand social media, accept it and then draft a usage policy. You will also need to:

- Educate and train all staff. Drivers in the organisation have a driver's licence with experience ie are trained. Those operating in social media should have a licence and be trained.
- Decide on which avenues are best e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook, blog, Twitter.
- Get one medium perfected, and then move onto another.
- Co-ordinate all messaging for consistency and integrate where possible.
- Integrate social media with all other communication e.g. traditional media.

Social media is no different to learning how to drive. Approach it in the same manner, and only take the lead when you are proficient, with your plan in place. It offers you a platform in which to establish yourself as not only a leader of your organisation, but as a thought leader, a leader of your industry. Lead the way. ▲

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