

Dos and Don'ts of Social Media

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Because social media is designed primarily for networking with friends and peers, it is a delicate space to convey marketing messages. Like any social event, marketers should learn a certain kind of etiquette when entering this realm. Collin Douma, VP of social media, Proximity Canada; Paul Dunay, global managing director of services marketing for Avaya; Jeff Hilimire, managing director at Engauge Digital; and Aaron Shapiro, Partner at interactive agency HUGE, offer their Do's and Don'ts when it comes to social media marketing.



Collin Douma, VP of social media, Proximity Canada

Do: Let go of brand control and focus on building influence

If you want to change the way consumers view your brand, you first have to change the way your organization views consumers. Consumers don't think of themselves as consumers of products and services – to them, they are simply people trying to fulfill their needs. In social media, consumers decide what topics related to your products they find most useful. If you want to play in their space, you better be ready to share the stage with them – or face brand alienation.

Don't: Try to buy your way in

If you have a well-established brand, awareness is probably not your problem, credibility is. Credibility is earned by character, not wealth. Money invested in media often solves awareness, but does not build trust or credibility. Put your mouth where your money is and join the conversation to earn that credibility.



Paul Dunay, global managing director of services marketing at Avaya

Do: Create content to attract the right audience

You need to give customers and prospects the opportunity to start a dialogue with your brand. Don't do it with banner ads. Create content that doesn't interrupt users as they explore their interests so they can interact with your brand. The content should be a pull rather than a push. That's the goal of new media: create the nexus for your brand and the media it takes to make that brand experiential.

Don't: Think about it in terms of a campaign

When marketers use the word “campaign,” it tends to suggest an initiative to get a message out to a targeted group of constituents. It also implies there will be a beginning and an end. This kind of thinking creates a danger zone for marketers when it comes to social media. The idea that social media can be incorporated into every campaign you are doing is wrong. It's not like “slap a podcast onto that campaign, and we're going social.” That is the wrong approach. You need a strategy.



Jeff Hilimire, managing director of Engauge Digital

Do: Recognize your brand is in social media, whether you like it or not

When talking to brands about digital strategies, I often hear that they are just not ready to be in social media. I tell them, “too late, you’re already there.” Many companies don’t realize that social media is just word-of-mouth on steroids. You can’t say, “We’re going to hold off on people talking about our brand.” Start by listening and monitoring the chatter that is already there.

Don't: Try to keep up with the Joneses

You sit down in a marketing meeting and your CMO says, “Our top competitor is all over Facebook and Twitter. Get us there ASAP!” Rather than trying to keep up, take a step back, study the way your customers are using the Web, plan out your strategy and take baby steps. It’s a marathon, not a sprint.



Aaron Shapiro, Partner at interactive agency HUGE

DO: Be human

People find it more natural to connect with other people, as opposed to brands or positioning statements. If you want to connect to the community, it’s often best to find the individual personalities within your organization. Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh maintains his own Twitter feed, discussing everything from recent work on his pool to an e-mail he sent employees announcing the Amazon acquisition. Each picture, post, comment and cross-link is an opportunity to further the conversation.

DON'T: Make social a one-off project

Don't make this about a single project or campaign. Once you create a community and people start “following” you, it's there for keeps. Nearly nine months after winning the election, President Obama is still a solid presence on Facebook. McCain's page is a disorganized jumble of Twitter rehashes and press releases. Marketing processes are often still built around the big push of a single campaign launch, but social is different. Although the rules may feel more relaxed on social networks, people are watching very closely.