

1 Strategy

Learning Objective

In this chapter I will equip you with the arguments to allow you to have a discussion with senior leaders about why and how social media and measuring it, is a requirement and not an optional extra.

This is a chapter for those of you that have to work with non-believers. If you can't convince someone that your organization should be engaging with social media there is no point in starting the conversation about ROI. If your organization is all over social media you can skip ahead to the next chapter.

Is social media for us?

You can't secure buy-in before you know the timing is right. Before you embark on your social media journey, you must start by taking a good look in the mirror and asking yourself if social media really is one for your company?

There are authors of books such as this that argue that social media is a must for every business. "If you're not on the bandwagon now, you're too late for the party!" I agree that social media is a must for every business, but only when the time is right for that particular

business. The recruitment industry was early on the ball using social media for business gains, a few years later the property industry caught on but the automotive industry is still notoriously behind.

As a mentor at the tech start-up accelerator Oxygen, based at Google Campus in London, I had the privilege of getting to know the founders of a company called Carhoots.com. Today they have more followers on Pinterest than any car brand in the world, any car magazine, car show, car retailer, etc. How could a whole industry be leapfrogged by two guys working from a living room?

Which industry are you in and where on this scale is that? You will be facing different challenges depending on how mature social has become in your sector. As an early adopter, you can get away with replicating what others have done in other verticals already, as a late bloomer you have to be much more creative to make an impact.

In the same way that having a child won't save a failing marriage, embracing social media won't help a business faced with more pressing issues to address. The actual logistics of having a child is as straightforward as creating a Facebook page, but the real work begins when you have to start looking after it, this is when the problems begin. So don't do anything just for the sake of it.

Before you start spending any money on social, and therefore creating the need to monitor ROI, you should decide if this is the right time for your business. Does your business have the bandwidth to pull it off? Does it have within its DNA the willingness to try and fail and get back up again? This is very much an introspective assessment; do we know enough about social media? Why are we

doing this? Is it to please a certain person? Is it scalable? Is it sustainable? Is it really what our customers want?

If the answer is “no” to any of these questions, leave it. Park social media. Go and fix other problems in your business or switch employer to one that is moving more quickly with the times.

Senior buy-in is critical for the success of your social programme, so I don't envy people who work with senior leaders that don't “get” social or who think it's something their kids do on their smartphones while watching TV. In this case, it falls upon your shoulders to educate the business on how social can improve the way you do business and instil a social mindset.

Before we progress I thought I should share with you my top tips for selling social media to your boss and any other sceptics who you might come across. First, let's examine some of the most common objections cited by businesses for staying away from social media. Then, one by one, bust the myths and surface some killer arguments that will help you win this potential battle.

Five common objections to social media by business leaders

1. Fear of the unknown

This is an objection they won't spell out, you have to read it between the lines.

My 65-year-old mother joined Facebook a few years ago and one day someone she didn't know sent her a friend request. This puzzled

her, why would a stranger want to add her as a friend? She called everyone in the family asking if we knew who this person was, which we didn't. It scared her so much that she decided to permanently delete her Facebook account and would never consider another social media platform again. She will bluntly say that she fears the unknown.

Most businesspeople wouldn't be as vocal as my mother, but this is what they are basically trying to say most of the time. They don't want to lose face by admitting to not knowing something. Some even believe it will go away if they ignore it for long enough. This was certainly the case for many hotels when they realized people were reviewing them online and there wasn't anything they could do about it, or at least so they thought. Today TripAdvisor is one of the main sources of referrals for new business for many hotels and they love what social media means for them.

2. No headspace

No one wants more work, there is no free time to spend online getting more familiar with social media tools. This leads to a real lack of insight about how it actually works. Without taking the time to learn more, there will be no platform to build on. It makes sense that if you don't understand what goes in, you won't truly have a grasp of what comes out.

Keeping up with the developments in social media seems to be a full-time job in itself. The world never sleeps. The thought of keeping up with it all can be overwhelming and it's hard to know where to start. That's why you need to make it clear that you will own this space and stay on top of all the new developments for the

benefit of the business. You should also have in mind a programme to disseminate information so that the business is not totally dependent on you if, one day, you decide to leave.

3. No resources

It's a fact that no company has an abundance of resource. In the last five years, many companies have reduced headcount, introduced hiring freezes or reorganized teams. When things are in a constant flux it is difficult to make a business case to set resource aside to invest in social media. This includes time and money for recruitment or retraining, implementation and sustainability. It is difficult to understand exactly what makes a good social media resource if you don't really understand the area that you expect them to excel in.

4. Nothing to say

Many aspects about social media success relate to being able to tell stories and sharing relevant content. Any self-reflecting boss would ask him- or herself if their company has enough to say. This is an objection most commonly held by B2B companies, arguing that the combination of social only being used by private consumers means that business buyers are not interested in stories. But they are and every company has stories to tell. A great example of this is Hobart and ARM featured in the first two books. Both are B2B brands that are doing exceptionally well connecting with their audiences.

5. Can't measure it

Even if you do get the resources to invest in social, how do you justify that it was a worthwhile investment? You measure it.

However, there are many that argue that you can't measure social media – and they are correct to a certain extent. As this book will point out, there is a wave of techniques that you can apply to measure this in a very precise way. By becoming familiar with them and applying them, you can prove to your boss that you can measure social just like any other form of business activity.

Instil social mindset

Having just bought this book I clearly don't have to sell the benefits of using social media to you, but you might be surprised to hear that even today, in 2014, I regularly meet businesspeople who are sceptical about using social media platforms. They most often say that social media “leaves them open and vulnerable to attacks by those who don't like something we sell or do”. As if not engaging officially on social media platforms would stop that from happening anyway. (For more on this, read the case in *The Social Media MBA in Practice* about The Israeli Foreign Office).

Some sceptics are not quite as hard line as the worst offenders that write social off completely as in the example above, but they do talk about the pros and cons of social media, and I don't buy that line of reasoning either. It's like forcing yourself to list the pros and cons of having a company phone. On the one hand it's great when a customer wants to phone in an order, but on the other hand, phones cost a lot to buy and maintain. No matter how long you could make either of those lists, you wouldn't seriously consider unplugging your phones.

I worked for three years as Head of Product in Europe at one of the largest jobsites in North America called CareerBuilder.com. Owned

by a large conservative newspaper conglomerate, the online side of the business which I was in, was acting like a start-up and the unofficial motto was, “act first, ask for forgiveness later”; meaning that if we saw a business opportunity, we should just go after it without waiting for approval from further up the hierarchy. This meant we could experiment with social media in a way that the mother company didn’t. If you work in the latter type of slow-moving organization, then taking your own inspiration from reading this book to win them over by doing social media on the side and showing the ROI data you can extract, may not be a guarantee to make them forgive you for investing in social media efforts behind their backs. In this case, you have to take one step back and first sell social media via the official route.

Five best arguments to sell social media by business leaders

Today social has become a hygiene factor, something companies need to do in the same way they had to be in the local phone book. If you still need some killer arguments, here they are:

1. Our competitors are doing it

Just like little boys get jealous of their friends when they get a shiny new toy, businessmen in particular get just as jealous when their competitors get recognized for something they themselves are not doing, or something they have overlooked. I used to work as Head of Commercial Product development for one of the UK’s largest property portals. When I joined we didn’t have an iPad app, but our biggest competitor did. During my first year, the CEO finally agreed that we needed an app and at the launch he was man enough to admit that he had been too late in recognizing the opportunities

apps presented. Nothing spurred him on to catch up more than seeing the competitors racing ahead.

Before you speak to your boss about getting involved in social media, spend some time creating an overview of what your three biggest competitors are doing and list things like size of fan base (even if we know that doesn't account for much, but we want to keep it simple to start with).

As a bonus to this point, it's worth noting that everyone in the office is probably doing it. If this is the case in your office, it will look the same at your prospective clients' offices too. Business is social, social is business.

2. Cheap

While there may be a recruitment or training cost, setting up social media accounts come, in the main, with no cost attached. All you need is one person and one computer, phone or tablet. How many other forms of advertising are this cost effective? Once the posts, tweets, images or videos are out in the world, they stay there. They don't become tomorrow's fish and chip paper. They are always present and they are always searchable.

This can impact on two elements of your organization's spend. Careful and well-thought-out posts can really improve organic searches and can assist your website's SEO performance. Campaigns can be run through social media and there is a real opportunity to use social media cleverly, which can lead to reducing advertising spend. Social media now becomes a little easier to sell to the board.

3. Influence opinion

Social media reaches the customer earlier in the decision-making process, making it the most valuable and true mass medium. Social media is the channel to the clients and allows you to nurture a relationship over time.

There is always something to say. When considering social media output, don't just consider what your company or organization has to say. Think about it in terms of the world. Keep an eye on the news. A pencil company can congratulate pupils on exam results day. A religious organization can consider the implications of a breakthrough at the CERN physics facility in Switzerland.

4. Become the non-corporate face of the company

Social media is a great way to connect one-on-one with your customers. Trusted social media colleagues can be relied to post as @themselves. There are many benefits to engaging with your customers in this way.

Allowing customers to forge a relationship with the people behind the company allows the customers to build a stronger connection with, and sense of belonging to, one another. Most social media interaction takes place on mobile devices. These are more likely to be owned personally, which strengthens the feeling that you are hand-in-hand with the people you are speaking to.

It allows you to develop a deeper emotional relationship with the customers and to develop an empathetic understanding of their situation. This is critical for customer loyalty and creating an enduring relationship with them.

5. Improved customer relations

Although similar to the point above, it is different in the detail. Being “live” on social media will allow you to “harness the negative” and turn it to your advantage. So many times, customers post and tweet about poor service or products and will continue to, regardless of your organization’s stance on social media.

Seize the opportunity to turn a perceived failure into a success. Stephen Fry took to Twitter to complain about his Blackberry. Blackberry approached him publicly through social media and dealt with the problem out in the open. Who won that one? Everyone. Stephen got his problem sorted and Blackberry was able to swoop in like a knight on a white horse.

Word of mouth is very powerful on social media. Not only do you get to engage with your customers but it will unlock the door for you to discover their friends and contacts – social networking at its optimum.

So, in conclusion, when selling this to your leaders, don’t make it sound like you’re forcing it down their throats, but do make them think it was their idea. You want them to give you the mandate to get on with it!

What is ROI?

It’s time to talk about the elephant in the room. Before we get into the details of measuring ROI (Return on Investment), I want to make sure we are all on the same page with regards to what we are talking about.

ROI is traditionally a financial equation to show the sales delivered from the cost of making that sale; production cost, marketing spend etc. It is a cut and dried equation that has a simple linear nature. This is unlike social media, where a “tipping point” can be much harder to identify.

When I give talks about social media I try to avoid using the words Facebook and Twitter, and over 4,000 words into this book, I’ve only mentioned these once or twice. For me social media is something much bigger than individual platforms, even though we are zeroing in on some platform-specific matrices in this book, ROI can be applied to any business processes that are driven by a social media mythology and not limited to a set of consumer websites. A good example of this is Electrolux who use social media tools to capture ideas for business improvement from staff. The methodologies you will learn here can be adjusted to work around your company-specific social media activity and goals.

The R and the I

In order to deliver on your ROI targets you need to be clear what success looks like, what is R for your business? For example:

- Acquire customers more cheaply?
- Reduce costs linked to your operation?
- Explore a new route to market?
- Improve the way you service your customer?

Depending on what your R is you can choose the most relevant I, for example:

- What sort of people resource do we need to put in place to support this?

- How much money are we investing?
- What's the time frame we are working towards?

Once you have established the R and the I you can concentrate on execution.

That is to say:

$(\text{Money gained from activity} - \text{cost of activity}) / \text{cost of activity} = \text{ROI}$

You will receive a number. If you want to understand your ROI as a percentage, multiply your ROI figure by 100.

KPIs

In addition to ROI you can also choose to use Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor specific areas of your overall social activity. Again, depending on the nature of your business and your goals, different KPIs should be used. Below are some examples suitable for different activities.

$\text{Active Audience} = \frac{\text{Active advocates (last 30 days)}}{\text{Total advocates}}$
$\text{Audience Engagement} = \frac{\text{Unique advocacy influencers}}{\text{Total advocacy influence}}$
$\text{Conversation Reach} = \frac{\text{Number of advocacy driven conversations}}{\text{Total volume advocacy traffic}}$

Figure 1.1: Advocacy KPIs

$$\text{Share of voice} = \frac{\text{Brand Mentions}}{\text{Total Mentioned (Brand + Competitors)}}$$

$$\text{Audience Engagement} = \frac{\text{Comments + Shares + Trackbacks}}{\text{Total Views}}$$

$$\text{Conversation Reach} = \frac{\text{Total People Participants}}{\text{Total Audience Exposure}}$$

Figure 1.2: Dialog KPIs

$$\text{Issue Resolution Rate} = \frac{\text{Total issues resolved satisfactorily}}{\text{Total service issues}}$$

$$\text{Resolution Time} = \frac{\text{Total inquire response time}}{\text{Total number service inquiries}}$$

$$\text{Satisfaction Source} = \frac{\text{Customer feedback input}}{\text{All customer feedback}}$$

Figure 1.3: Support KPIs

Can you measure?

Even if you or your superiors or predecessors have managed to successfully sell-in the absolute necessity of doing something in the social sphere, the next step in proposing to measure social media can be controversial for various reasons. There are a lot of people who say you can't measure social media, so here are some of the arguments you might come across and should be prepared to address.

1. There are too many entry points for us to determine the key interaction

We can take an overview of what is happening on social media channels. This will provide analytics that we can make assumptions from, but the element of guesswork is too high to deem it scientific or mathematic. When was the last time you bought something on the back of reading a tweet?

We can take measurements from the key social media channels and even extend that to lesser-used and emerging channels. However, we are unable to access all sharing hotspots, and sharing is a key element to social media. Email and Instant Messaging are also key sharing formats, but they are private and impenetrable. This means we are unable to pinpoint the exact point of brand or product buy-in.

2. Social media is not a transaction, it's a relationship

Social media is not where the action happens. Social media is a space where conversations begin. It is a useful tool to take measurements of brand awareness from, but it will never deliver the bottom line number we seek.

We can measure certain elements of the customer interaction through social media.

Awareness

The key awareness metric can be ascertained by assessing if more people know about your brand than they did previously. This figure can be reached by taking brand mentions, brand proposition mentions, positive mentions and share of voice. Share of voice is the

number of brand mentions divided by the total number of your industry mentions. Industry mentions is the total number of your brand mentions plus your competitors. Once you reach this number, you compare it against the previous period. This figure cannot specify if any financial transaction has taken place at this point and so cannot be considered an ROI metric.

Reach

Reach can be considered as knowing how many people can hear what your brand is saying. This figure can be generated by calculating the rise in followers or fans in a given time period. This will also require some social media analytics tools to demonstrate the geographical information of the users. These tools include Facebook Insights and LinkedIn analytics.

Traffic

Are your posts bringing people to your website? When you broadcast or publish through your social media channels, are you driving traffic to your website or are your posts missing the mark? Google Analytics will produce reports to show you where your website customers are coming from, but not necessarily why. This means that you cannot identify a sales lead that was generated as a direct result of your post.

Engagement

If you join traffic with click-through rates, you will understand what impact your output is having on your customers. You will be able to look at “likes”, shares, retweets and positive buzz created by your activity. This is like laying one layer on top of another. You will see a picture, but not a complete end-to-end customer journey relating to one user.

Intelligence

What are they saying and how are your followers reacting to you? This type of information is useful and interesting, but it can act like a massive disparate focus group to capture the general mood of your audience. It would not be common practice to generate an ROI figure on the basis of market research.

To calculate ROI, you need to understand the relationship between the money that you have spent against the money you have gained as a consequence of your activity (investment).

3. What are you measuring with ROI?

When considering ROI, what will you do with the eventual figure? Is it to determine the impact of your investment for your brand or product? Or is it to understand how well your social media is performing against the other channels in your marketing strategy e.g. advertising, email, pay per click. Is it to understand how you will build your next marketing plan and how to allocate your budget?

This is not as scientific as it may seem, despite the fact that a mathematical equation is involved. Social media is a communications tool which is in a constant state of flux and growth. The social media space is rich with newcomers on an annual basis. It is also full of the almost-rans; those who have not scaled the heights of Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, but are by no means defunct. The third group concerns those who do a similar job (sharing, favourites etc.) and who have loyal followers but who will never have a tipping point of followers because they operate in a saturated marketplace.

It also does not follow that you can throw more investment at social media to see a greater return. There comes a point where

too many posts or interactivity can cause customers to become overwhelmed.

4. Calculating your investment

What costs should you include when assessing your investment, which costs would you have had anyway? What price are you placing on your social media activity? Are you calculating the cost of the staff paid to do it, or the social media agency who is acting on your behalf? Also, when thinking about your return, what are you measuring?

Are you measuring the impact through increased brand awareness or are you looking at directly generated sales? You will need to take a firm viewpoint and stick to it in order for your figures to mean anything period on period.

5. Calculating worth

You cannot attach a meaningful value to a social media fan or follower. Liking a page on Facebook is not the same as having the means to buy that brand. For example: you could be placing a meaningless monetary value on the Facebooker who “likes” your page yet spending zero money, while attaching no monetary value to the physical customer who actually buys your product without prompt from advertising or marketing.

This means that you can place an importance on a Facebook “like” when it has an actual monetary value of nil. For more on this read how Bulmers calculate the value of a fan on page 36.

Want to measure?

Having got this far, we can establish that your organization is open for business regarding social media and they understand you can measure social, but the question remains, do you want to measure?

1. What if my ROI is negative, I will look like a fool

Some people think measuring things is a punishment, as if they are not trusted to do what is always the most sensible thing. What if the answer that comes out the other side isn't what you expected? Maybe you are only getting a marginal positive return, if any at all. In this case it might be tempting to pursue the "can't measure" line of discussion, but don't give up. If you find out that something isn't working instead appreciate the opportunity to figure out why it's not working and improve it. Finding out you're doing the wrong thing is better than continuing doing that thing; it gives you a chance to focus on the strengths and address the weaknesses.

2. It's going to be too expensive to measure

As we will discuss further into the book there are some very good free tools on the market that can be used as a first step to cutting measuring costs. If the cost of measuring exceeds the cost of the return you have to ask yourself two things: a) are we making enough of a return to justify this activity? Or, b) are our costs for measuring the return too high? If the answer is yes to either of these two you should arguably not carry on with the activity without making changes, as you can't prove it's worth your investment.

3. Make decisions based on data

Over the years I've found myself in numerous discussions with people defending their gut instinct to pursue one business option over another and I've let myself be pulled into that kind of reasoning too many times. If you're up against a more senior team member you will always lose those debates. I've learned to reference data more, it's objective nature puts an end to the gut instinct line of reasoning. "Let's do a trial and let the data inform this discussion." It's the ultimate punch line.

In the end, you look pretty stupid when asked to defend a business decision that went wrong when it was driven by someone's gut instinct. Defending the same business decision based on data is a lot more comfortable, "the data suggested that . . .". You can't argue with data. You only need to make sure you have the right kind of data and the right amount.

4. Get the organization focused on what matters

Unless you're a fan of micromanagement, clear goals are essential to empower your peers to think for themselves and decide what would make the most sense in any situation they are faced with to take immediate action. When you provide them with updates on progress make sure the report focuses on actionable insight, this also includes findings about your competitors activities in the same space.

5. Benchmark

By going through the motions of setting up a scorecard to measure your activities, you get a benchmark to springboard from and the

following year you can show how much you have improved the results. This would not be possible without the first assessment. This means that deciding and testing the variables you're benchmarking your activities against, will be more time consuming than the on-going reporting of results. Creating a base line gives you the opportunity to realistically develop targets that can let you under-promise but over-deliver.

Create your benchmark

To create a benchmark for your coming activities you want to start with an audit. If you are unable to do all the work yourself, or want to anchor this with more stakeholders in your organization, this is an excellent opportunity to organize a social media team, or a centre of excellence, with whom you can share the work. I've discussed audits and centres of excellence in the previous books so I will not go into any details here, but as a brief reminder:

The first activity is to define your **audience**:

- Who are you trying to reach?
- What does their journey look like?
- Where do you want to add touch points?
- What do they want to hear?
- What motivates them to buy your products?

The second activity is to **listen**:

- Where and how do you listen?
- Who influences your audience?

- What search terms do you want, and not want to monitor?
- How are your competitors stacking up?

Define goals

Once you have completed your audit you're in a position to start to define your goals. Depending on your business these will vary greatly but here are some common goals you might want to consider starting with.

1. Brand exposure

Eighty-nine per cent of respondents asked, stated that social media and marketing through social media had generated more business exposure. The addition of social media to multi-channel marketing campaigns brings with it increased opportunities to broadcast brand messaging and elevate brand awareness. This metric is not tied into direct sales or lead generation, but rather a holistic overview of brand and the heightened recognition that social media can generate.

Brand awareness may not be responsible for directly generating sales leads, but it is the gateway that customers pass through as part of a sales funnel. With increased exposure, it can be measured in terms of reach or how far your message is being broadcast across your audience. Increased reach will also raise the opportunities for you to engage with new followers and fans.

Through using social media analytics, companies are in a position to track brand awareness and begin to add a value to the activity.

By quantifying how campaigns are working, by measuring “likes”, comments, retweets, pins etc., it then becomes possible to allocate future KPIs and so chart the rise of brand awareness through social media channels.

2. Improved customer relationships

In addition to the messages that you are broadcasting, social media allows you to converse with your customers and develop deeper relationships than those through more traditional channels.

This area is deep within the territory of intangible benefits as it looks at the value, interacting with your customers brings. To engage with your customers on a deeper level means that you can engage with them in a way which can stir or move them. This type of interaction will stay with the customer long after the conversation has ended.

By employing social media tools, which measure the online community for mentions of your brand, you are able to pick up on conversations which are already taking place. This offers the opportunity for your brand to jump in. This can be as important for the impact it can have on a positive conversation, as it can be for the difference your intervention can make on a negative conversation.

When thinking about how your message is viewed by users, a recent Nielsen survey found that, on average, 92 per cent of individuals trusted the communications that they received from friends – and this is measured on a global basis.

3. Drive traffic to your website

It would follow that more digital activity would lead to more visitors to your website, but social media cannot be left to generate these without human input. There are key areas which will ensure that social media activity delivers the visitors companies need.

Using hashtags can bring more users to your site. Employed by both Twitter and Google+, you can leverage “trending” hashtags to increase traffic to your site. This is, in principle, like using a powerful advertising tagline as your own.

Blogging can be a very powerful way of directing people to your site by including links or longtails to improve your SEO. This can be reinforced by guest bloggers on other sites, linking back to you. You can also comment on someone else’s blog and this can be used to drive traffic to your site.

Creating engaging content on a social media site can help drive traffic to your site by its quality and targeted nature. A good example of this is Pinterest. Pinning and Re-Pinning as many target images as possible and creating boards where you keep your own pins and then pins from others, means that you are able to increase the bandwidth of your influence and, as a consequence, develop your Pinterest authority. This means that your website links will become more visible and important on the Pinterest site, which means that there is an increased chance of user click-through.

4. Increasing market intelligence

Traditionally, market intelligence is the territory of the market researchers and the business analysts. When considering your

digital market, you are now able to generate detailed analytic reports very quickly.

There are companies like HootSuite, Webtrends and Radian6, who will work with you to understand who and where your users are. They will also be able to assess the attitude and behaviour of your webusers, which will enable you as a brand, to understand how your customers are thinking about your brand.

Other methods of understanding what is happening as a result of your social media activity can come at no cost. These include LinkedIn Analytics, Facebook Insights and Google Analytics.

Google Analytics can be especially useful to track a customer journey through the webpage. You are able to understand where your users come from, i.e., the site they accessed yours from, how long they spend on the site and where they drop off. This can be important information when it comes to assessing the success of your business goals – for example, booking an appointment, requesting a quote or making a purchase.

5. Generate leads

This is the business end of social media and at the opposite end of the spectrum from increased brand awareness. While linking through posts, by using URL tools such as tinyURLs and bitly links, there are lead-generating opportunities which will generate leads.

Twitter chats are organized discussions that are hosted by a Twitter account. Specific hashtags are used to ensure that Twitter users will know when a new conversation is happening on the account, even

though the subject of the chat can change. Twitter chat audiences are more focused as they have opted to be part of the conversation and, therefore, more engaged. When the chat is happening, you can position yourself as a source of knowledge and build friendly relationships with other users. You will also be able to follow them and track their future activities. This is like a warm sales lead that you can pick up in the future through direct messaging. This works most effectively if approached with a light touch.

LinkedIn allows you to access groups who operate in your areas of expertise. This is a lot like the networking which takes place in the physical world. Simply form a relationship by publically answering questions from those who need help. Give them a good idea of how you can help them, and follow-up with a more detailed response, using the Reply Privately feature.

What you think will work well in a given medium and what your consumers think, are two very different things. Like the CEO who only wants to use social media channels to push good news and thinks this will suffice, the assumption that consumers will consume any old data just because it's coming from your brand is false.

Before launching onto any social media platform, it's important that the first thing you properly evaluate is what information consumers want to receive, not what information you want to share.

Often, this information is not what you think. When newspapers first launched onto Twitter, the assumption was that consumers would follow newspapers to get a feed of shortened headlines and that would drive traffic through to newspaper websites. As it transpired users did not want feeds full of endless links. It was a lazy

use of Twitter and an example of where businesses put their own objectives – driving traffic – above the needs of the consumer getting real time information. Things changed dramatically when journalists started using Twitter as a medium for breaking the news itself, rather than merely delivering out-of-date headlines. The message was changed to suit the medium and everyone benefited.

When evaluating your communications strategy put yourself in the consumer’s shoes. Understand what they want to hear about. Hell – ask them! Then ensure you deliver it. In a world where the cost of set-up and delivery is the same no matter what size of business you have, if you don’t give your consumers what they want, the chances are someone else will. This will not only affect your ROI – it will have a long-term impact on the survival of your business.

PS. Are you a member yet?

Don’t forget the alumni network of fellow readers, people around the world that work professionally with social media. Join by searching for “The Social Media MBA Alumni” on LinkedIn. It’s free of course.