

Quiet please! Social media can be for business

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Quocirca Comment

The global reach of the internet and access to billions of potential customers on their desks, laps and pockets through an abundance of communications methods from social media to email on a myriad of devices is a fine thing. The fundamental question remains, is the right person actually listening to the right message at the right time and in the right place to be able to make the right response?

The Martini-esque mantra coined by Sun Microsystems the 1990s – anyone, anytime, anywhere on anything – was great for touting the need for a universal infrastructure. But that is just the open network plumbing that connects everything together and without some intelligence layered above it, all the universal network can do is raise the level of cacophony and noise.

For first movers this is not necessarily a problem. Those quick-witted organizations who get in early to a new domain can often exploit it sufficiently before it gets too crowded and the dynamics change. Then when well-structured heavyweights get involved, consolidation kicks in, dominant players emerge making it harder and harder for new entrants to get a toehold. Witness the high street and Tesco, e-commerce and Amazon, social networking and Facebook, tablets and Apple.

Sometimes in the technology world it is slow moving incumbents that take over, but often it is the fleet of foot, who were not necessarily first to market, but are first to volume. Market momentum, like Newtonian momentum, is about velocity – speed and direction – as well as size or mass.

So what about the majority of 'wannabe' suppliers who then become followers, can they ever hope to get their message out?

Sure any supplier can make a marketing push to set up Facebook pages, tweet on Twitter, have downloadable mobile apps and pay for search

engine optimization on the web, but for all their digital SHOUTING, are they actually taking time to listen to their prospects and customers?

One way to get ahead in the game, even of those who currently dominate, is to use all the information available and listen carefully to user requirements, build relevant market intelligence and so out smart the incumbents.

Just as good salespeople pay more attention to listening and understanding rather than simply speaking, so good marketing, even in a highly connected digital age, depends on good listening. This is the key to businesses engaging in the current social networking boom – how much information can be collected, analysed and understood, rather than how much can be pumped out.

Unlike traditional channels that are more oriented to public one-way communications with perhaps only a 'call to action' response, today's highest profile digital channels – social media, video, mobile – are personal and bi-directional or virally shared. They are also highly treasured and far more sensitive to abuse.

The negative reactions seen with the explosion of SPAM in email, pales in comparison to the feelings stoked up by misuse of these highly personal contact points. Even a service provider's attempts at change can be viewed by the digital society as negative – e.g. Facebook's continual tinkering with privacy settings – and so much so that they can cause significant and rapid uprising among highly connected and vocal users.

Businesses need to tread carefully and keep within the evolving online etiquette and mores as they develop their social media strategies. Most importantly they should remember the 'two ears and one mouth' sales mantra to listen carefully, build understanding and then reflect that back into the marketplace.

Social networking brings many opportunities for businesses to build relationships with their customers and prospects, but these will need care and attention to avoid being seen as intrusive.

For a more detailed exploration of the business use of social media, download Quocirca's free report, "[Community, connection, conversation or channel](#)"

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Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

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