

A brand born from a big idea is something we can identify with. It becomes an extension of our personality, a part of who we are, and a personal badge that we wear with pride.



WESTJET



theBIG



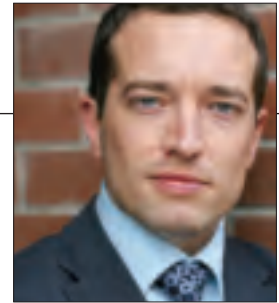
V  
E  
D  
I

Ym100!

1-800-GOT-JUNK?

# The Sociable! Enterprise: Successfully implementing social media use in your company

By Shane Gibson



Today the receptionist who operates your customer service account on Twitter can have a larger positive impact on your brand than the transit ads you buy or the direct-mail campaigns you execute. A junior executive who lands on a competitor's blog and posts the wrong comments can undo your positive branding and marketing efforts in one click.

Social media marketing is an industry that has evolved out of this circumstance. This approach to consumer engagement is highly personal and is flattening the marketing landscape.

With this highly effective but hard to control media, many senior executives are avoiding the use of social media. They are suffering from an affliction that could be referred to as "Social Media Phobia." Many, in the opinion of the author, are avoiding the inevitable.

*"Within a few years, a company that doesn't engage in this sort of activity will look dated."*

*– Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff authors of "groundswell"*

Social media tools and networks are a significant force that is growing which we can't ignore any longer. Here are some numbers on the networks:

Facebook: 190 million people  
LinkedIn: 35 million professionals representing every Fortune 500  
Twitter: 6.5 million people, 1.3 billion messages per year  
YouTube: 1 billion views per day

The reality is that the consumer is already talking about your brand online, and if you're not online listening and engaging, you have lost control of your brand. By getting proactive you can begin to positively direct and amplify these online conversations.

Once an organization has made the decision to begin using social media tools they need to have a solid implementation plan. Here are some steps and tips on executing an effective plan:

- 1 Social media messaging is not produced solely by a marketing team. Zappos, a one billion dollar online shoe company, makes it mandatory for all staff to use Twitter. Expand marketing roles to everyone, taking the number of marketing messages and multiplying them significantly online.
- 2 Provide social media training to all staff. More importantly than training on the tools is training on the principles of using the tools. There is a specific etiquette to engaging people in each of the major networks.
- 3 Have a social media policy and process that outlines how to engage customers online. This should include guidance on how to deal with negativity, social events and clients. Important note: If your guidelines are too stringent and you take the fun out of Twitter or blogging, don't be surprised if your efforts fall flat.
- 4 Social media is about listening, community, adding value and entertaining people. It's about a dialogue. It is a multilateral communications medium.

"Talking at" people or "blasting updates" is not true engagement, and it's not good for the brand either.

## 5 Don't outsource your personal brand.

If you're the CEO, operate your own

Twitter account. The CEO of Zappos,

ING Direct (Canada) and the Managing Director of the Vancouver Board of Trade are all on Twitter and blogging. This transparency and direct communication enhances their brand. Sending your assistant to a cocktail party on your behalf isn't nearly as effective as going yourself, people want to meet the personality of the brand. The same goes for online networking.

Many people ask, "How does an individual become engaging online?" or simply put, "How do you get people to follow you on Twitter?"

Great conversations in the offline world are about listening, providing insight, empathy, and at times, the right measure of humour. The same goes for online tools. In using a tool like Twitter, here are some tips on being engaging:

- Fill out your profile completely with a current photo, link to your personal blog or site, and use the entire 140 characters provided for your bio. Hiding who you are or not providing your company information can create a barrier to trust or engagement.
- Update regularly. For most active Twitter users that's 8 to 15 times per day. Key principle: don't update unless it adds value, solves a problem, inspires or entertains your target market.
- Share useful links to sites other than yours. Also pass on and share (known as retweeting on Twitter) useful information from other Twitter users. This will strengthen your relationship with them and increase the chances of them sharing your messages.
- Use social search to monitor what people are saying about your company or your industry. <http://search.twitter.com> can give you by-the-minute opportunities to engage people who are talking about your brand. You can instantly solve a problem or correct a situation as it happens.
- Vary your message and the frequency so that you appear human and not robotic. Your updates should be a combination of personal messages, corporate updates, answering questions, commenting on other people's great tweets, and links to valuable information.
- If you sound like everyone else, you're not a brand or a leader. Create engaging content and unique conversations. This is vital to building a brand and solidifying client relationships.

The strategy behind using these social mediums and networks such as Twitter is 90 per cent listening and contribution and 10 per cent marketing and messaging. While that seems like a bad marketing ratio we can go back to what John C. Maxwell said about leadership: "It's 90 per cent connection and 10 per cent content."

Shane Gibson is an author, international professional speaker, blogger and podcaster. His new book "Sociable!" will be available in June 2009. Follow Shane on Twitter: @ShaneGibson or connect with him on his blog [Closingbigger.net](http://Closingbigger.net).