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The 10 Commandments of Social Media

The 10 rules every in-house social media marketing novice should obey. |

A quick scan of job openings for marketing positions on Monster.com yields a telling and very recent phenomenon: a large number of companies are demanding that candidates possess extensive experience with social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and video sites. Recently, Best Buy experimented with tapping into these social networks to find candidates and even help define the role of a new senior marketer position responsible for driving company's social media outreach efforts.

Let's face it, most companies don't have the resources to dedicate an entire staff position to managing its social media activities like Best Buy. If you are among the many businesses that must navigate the world of social media using your existing staff of social media novices, here are some basic rules to guide your effort:

1) THOU SHALT NOT LIE NOR CONCEAL ONE'S IDENTITY.

Be completely transparent about who you are and your role in your organization when you establish a presence within social networks or reach out to bloggers. Hiding behind a fake persona is only asking for trouble. Bloggers can be ruthless in exposing online tricksters and frauds, and aren't beholden to the same profession standards as traditional journalists.

2) HONOR THY EARS AND EYES BEFORE THY LIPS.

When approaching a social network group on Facebook or a blogger for the first time, get to know their unique focus or interest before entering the conversation. Go into the archives and read pasts posts, take note of the type of content and language used. Understand that this is an opportunity to stop pushing out a message and start to gain valuable insights.

3) THOU SHALT NOT COVET CONTROL OF THE MESSAGE.

Understand from the outset that social media involves a two-way dialogue that cannot be controlled, spun or manipulated. If your company is bashed in a blog or within a social network, your only recourse is to balance it with an earnest attempt to understand the problem and offer a solution.

4) THOU SHALT NOT BE OVERLY COMMERCIAL.

No one enjoys a sales pitch, whether it's at a party or among friends online. Only offer commercial messages or links if it truly fits the context of the conversation.

5) REMEMBER THE VIRTUES OF INTEGRATION.

Though it seems all the rage now, don't rely on social media technology alone to

move your message. A well-coordinated plan that includes advertising, promotions and traditional media relations is still the best way to build your company's visibility.

6) THOU SHALT HAVE ONLY ONE SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT.

Too many similar Twitter accounts or Facebook pages can be confusing. Make sure your organization is coordinated in its social media efforts and refrain from opening more than one account per platform. It may be helpful to funnel your company's social media activities through one staffer. Just be sure that your efforts are plugged in to your company's overall marketing strategy.

7) THOU SHALT NOT USE CANNED BUSINESS JARGON.

Never communicate with bloggers in impersonal business-speak using boilerplate language and never send them a press release. Instead, communicate in a human-to-human tone and let them know you appreciate their content.

8) THOU SHALT NOT LET YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS DIE.

Why start a Facebook fan page or Twitter account if you have no intention of looking at it again? Setting up pages and accounts is only the beginning. You must commit to feeding fresh, relevant unique content to these sites on a weekly basis.

9) THOU SHALT PROVIDE VALUE.

You must give the people a reason to engage with you. Offers of free products are one way, but plugging into the causes and communities members care about is powerful too.

10) THOU SHALT NOT OVERESTIMATE HOW INTERESTING YOU ARE.

Twitter gets a bad rap because many users send out random, stream-of-consciousness messages that mean nothing to anyone. Remember, each 140-character message is a representation of your company. Make sure it is planned, thoughtful and provides value to your followers. No one cares you're eating a ham sandwich. **MB**

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