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The Tens—Ten Dos of Social Media Marketing

1 Align with the brand Social media needs to reflect the brand promise and the brand values. Social media should not be a separate effort that reinvents the company for social media engagement. Social media is another channel for communications and relationship building, consider ways it enhances and augments other forms for engagement.

2 Anticipate the process Don't post something to a Facebook page and then scramble to figure out how your team will respond. Sit down and think through how people will respond, what kinds of questions they may be asked, and be prepared to respond in "web-time."

3 Go where your customers are Many companies think that if social is cool, then they should create their own social platform. Don't. Do go where your customers already are. Don't try to get them to migrate from one place to another just because you want to limit your investment. If you aren't willing to go where the customer goes, then you aren't ready to get in at all.

4 Use automation sparingly People want to connect to other people in social media, not to automatons. Although some automation is inevitable given the scale of successful social media campaigns, use it sparingly, and never to generate the message. Messages should come from real people who can respond to other people after they read the message.

5 Integrate it with other marketing investments As with brand, social media is just one tool in the arsenal. If you have a social media team working in isolation, your social media marketing will look like that to customers. Coordinate across channels to reinforce messages and build brand synergy.

6 Experiment If your VP of Marketing is casting doubt on a social media investments because they aren't proven, then you will never learn. When experimenting, really experiment. Create a hypothesis, test the hypothesis through a process that provides data and feedback on the experiment. Experiments only waste money when they can't be learned from, not when they fail.

7 Vet your support If you plan to outsource or out-task some or all of your social media work, hire a team that has a track record of delivering results in the areas where you plan to invest. Experimentation is one thing, but social media has proven value, so don't experiment with partners, hire firms that can deliver.

8 Learn Social media offers several levels of learning. Learning from engagement experiments is one. Learning from what customers are saying is another. Don't let any good idea go unmined. This is part of process anticipation. If you haven't figured out how you are doing to learn from the social media investment, then you aren't ready to make a social media investment. These are not one-way pushes of information from the company into the community. Deep individual and community engagement results in sharing and dialog. The community will expect acknowledgement and recognition of their participation.

9 Engage the right people The marketing team is the marketing team. If you are holding a conversation about marketing practice, that is who you want to engage. If your customers are talking about quality issues on Facebook or Twitter, then get an engineer to talk with them. As part of process anticipation, engage organizations outside of marketing to garner support for social media customer engagement. Unlike letters sent to companies, a lack of meaningful response in a social media environment is visible to all—and the response, or lack of response, reflects back on the brand and will be a key indicator of seriousness to the community.

10 Provide Value From the content posted to the responses rendered, value is the key. Putting out messages for messages sake that don't create a perceived sense of value among the audience is not useful. A strong social media engagement model creates permission and builds trust. Technology companies, for instance, should be willing to not only discuss their technology, but to provide practical guidance on how best to use it. Every engagement is an opportunity to reinforce the value-proposition of the brand, its partners and its people.