

## CHAPTER

# 4

# Rules of Engagement for SMM

Marketers can find social media difficult to navigate because there are many unwritten practices and bits of etiquette that social media participants are expected to abide by. Slip up, and the unwary social media marketer could incur bloggers' wrath

or be labeled a spammer. Hence, the rules of engagement in social media are as important as those in everyday life, but not always as familiar. A social media marketer must have a firm grasp of these rules and the norms that govern interactions on the social web.



### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter students will be able to:

- Define the rules of engagement for SMM
- Explain the difference between permission vs. interruption marketing
- Describe the initial entry strategy of passive vs. active
- Detail the principles for success in social media engagement

(Continued)

Being a successful social media marketer requires more than marketing and technical skills. It requires a knowledge of the rules of the road in social media and understanding of the appropriate way to communicate on social platforms.

This chapter will provide the general rules of engagement for success in SMM as well as guidance on how to avoid costly mistakes by behaving properly on the social web. Something to keep in mind is that social media involves discussions between real people about issues or products that they care about. Typically, these conversations are not about the particular brand a social media marketer is hoping to promote. Therefore, one must *earn* people's attention, and that means playing by generally accepted standards.

Janna Parker

Treat a person's social media properties, whether a blog, Twitter stream, or Facebook page, as though they were the individual's online homes. Depending on the circumstances, the social media marketer may be an invited guest (the person requested to follow or receive updates) or may be dropping in unannounced (by following someone and hoping to gain that person's attention or interest). It is polite, both in real life and online, to build some rapport before making requests of someone's time and attention. A first interaction should never be requesting a favor, especially when dropping by without an invitation!

- Describe the rules of effective social media interaction
- Define SMM ethics
- Explain how to make ethical social media decisions
- Describe the global perspective of SMM

## Permission vs. Interruption Marketing: Developing the Social Contract

Seth Godin coined the distinction between permission marketing and interruption marketing.<sup>1</sup> Traditional marketing relies heavily on interruption marketing. When using interruption marketing, companies purchase the right to interrupt people and demand their attention. TV advertising, magazine ads, billboards, pop-ups, radio ads, and so on are all created to interrupt a viewer at what he or she is doing (trying to watch a show or listen to the radio, for instance) and make that person view or listen to a marketing message. Marketers in the interruption field don't have to worry about whether or not a consumer *wants* to see their ads, as firms paid for the right to display them regardless. Viewers or listeners realize that seeing ads is part of the cost they pay in order to consume some media content (TV shows, radio, magazines, etc.).

The content of interruption ads is focused around selling a product or service that provides value to the target market. The goal of the ad is to showcase the product, highlight its benefits, reduce information search costs, and create a persuasive case for someone to make a purchase. Effective placement of the advertising must occur in order for the advertisement to be effective. Media scheduling includes comparing the demographics of the audience to the target market of the product or service being advertised.

Thinking in this way helps explain why advertisements can create value for consumers. By reducing the time spent gathering information about a product, ads make the real cost of purchasing lower, increasing both company revenue and customer satisfaction. Ads also serve a signaling function, because it is most profitable to advertise a high-quality product. In *Exchange and Production: Competition, Coordination and Control*, noted economists Armen Alchian and William Allen explain that "A seller's long-term survival rests on continued consumer acceptance—at least for products that continue under the same brand name. We therefore expect a positive correlation between a seller's *continued* advertising and quality of product and profitability: Good products make advertising more profitable."<sup>2</sup>

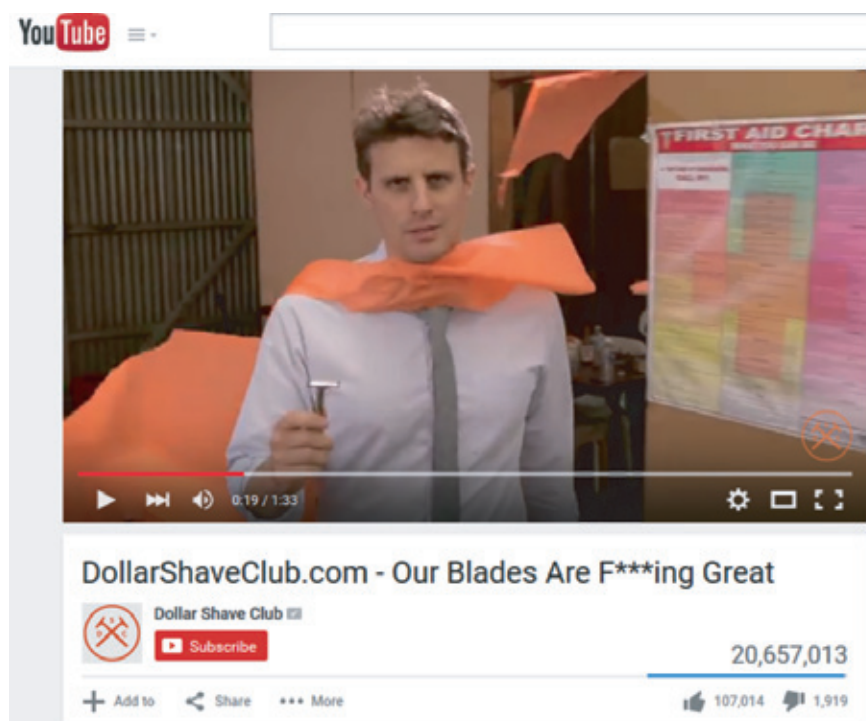
Reducing information cost to consumers and the reputation effect are two justifications for traditional advertising. In spite of its downsides, interruption marketing in the form of mass TV and radio broadcasts and print publications does have its uses today and it often helps consumers more than firms! More informed customers will drive a harder bargain, increasing competition between sellers and pushing down prices.

The problem for modern advertisers is that people are already bombarded by ads although the estimates of just how many vary widely. One often quoted study puts the number of ads and brand exposures per day to 5,000 or more and conventional ads at over 350.<sup>3</sup> Ads can be seen on urinal cakes, the backs of restroom stalls, napkins, airline peanuts, and even on sheep!<sup>4</sup> Consumers are becoming increasingly talented at tuning out much of this advertising. People will record shows in order to fast-forward the commercials or change the station when an ad comes on the radio. There is also a

growing trend toward “banner blindness”: consumers know where to expect ads on a web page, and their eyes do not focus on those areas.<sup>5</sup> Internet viewers mentally block out the ads because their peripheral vision allows ads to be briefly seen and then ignored.

How is it possible to gain attention and build a brand in this sea of marketing? Unless a company has millions of dollars to spend, traditional broadcast advertising is not an option since the cost of one ad placed in a prime time television show can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. In 2014, the average cost for a one spot in the popular show “The Big Bang Theory” was \$344,827 making it the most expensive program on broadcast channels.<sup>6</sup> Even less expensive traditional media is frequently too expensive for smaller companies. The more economical answer is social media and permission-based marketing. In a permission-based marketing model, the budget is less important than a solid strategy combined with passion and compelling personalities. Permission marketing evens the playing field and allows new talent to compete more effectively against large, entrenched brands.

Permission-based marketing, on the other hand, relies on attention being earned from the audience. Permission marketing is when consumers consent to being marketed. This form of marketing may add value to consumers’ lives, causing them to welcome and request certain marketing messages. Opting into an email newsletter, following an account on Twitter, or signing up for text message alerts are examples of permission marketing. Permission marketing is an important element of SMM. Another term for permission SMM is *organic social media*. Permission marketing has been used successfully in launching new brands. In a product category dominated by Gillette and Schick, a small company named Dollar Shave Club started selling razor blade cartridges online on March 1, 2012. As the name of the company suggests, people join and are sent a monthly supply of razor blades for as little as a dollar a month plus a minimal shipping charge. The blades are not available in stores and when Dollar Shave Club entered the market, their promotional mix consisted solely of permission marketing via social media. Founder and CEO, Michael Dubin explained the purpose of the club and its products in a wildly popular YouTube video (Figure 4.1).<sup>7</sup>

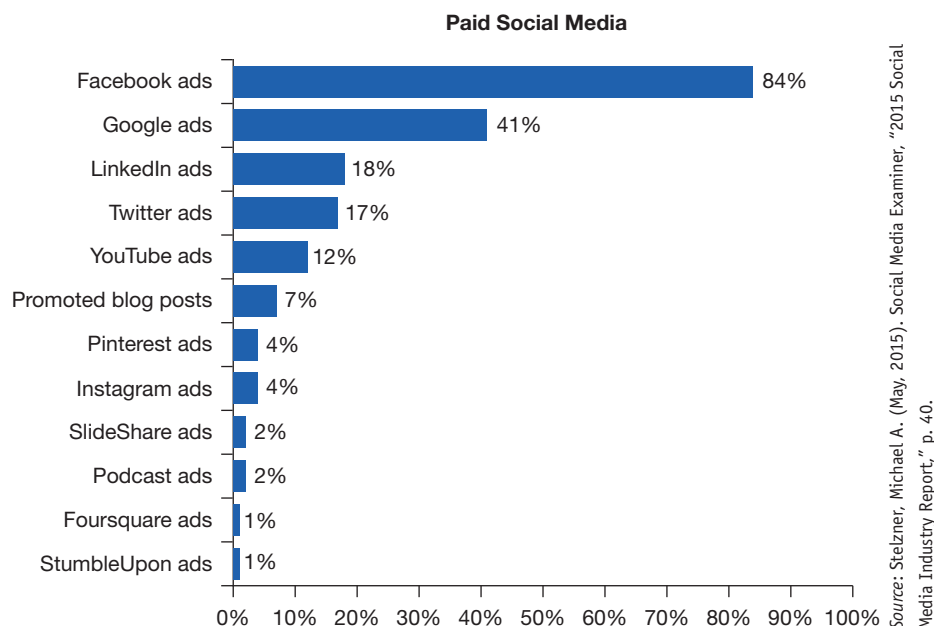


**Figure 4.1** Dollar Shave Club’s First YouTube Video

By September 2015, Dollar Shave Club had over 68,000 followers on Twitter<sup>8</sup> and a vibrant Facebook page that showcases a continuing series of entertaining videos. It had surpassed Schick as the Number 2 seller of razor blade cartridges.<sup>9</sup>

The basic rule of permission marketing is both a blessing and a curse: money is not enough to buy the way in. Effective permission marketers *earn* the attention of their audience. This need is part of what makes SMM difficult to navigate; it requires earning attention from people who *have a choice* about whether or not to engage with the marketing campaign. There are many strategies available, but people tend to choose engagement with brands that are authentic, are transparent, show care and empathy, respect consumers' time and opinions, and have a human presence online. In the early days of SMM, strategies were developed using only a permission-based or earned approach to marketing. Relying on this approach alone no longer works because there is also an interruption component of SMM in the form of sponsored and paid posts. Facebook, Twitter, and most of the other social media sites and networks have started selling advertising. On November 11, 2014, Facebook made an announcement that a new policy would go into effect on January 1, 2015,<sup>10</sup> and that the policy was based on consumer research. In their newsfeeds, users will now see less of the organic promotional posts from the businesses that they have chosen to follow on Facebook and they will see more paid sponsored posts. This new policy of Facebook means that companies cannot rely solely on permission marketing when developing their social media strategies since many organic posts will not be shown on the newsfeeds of the Facebook fans. An effective social media strategy must include elements of both permission (organic social) and interruption (social advertising).

Social Media Examiner's 2015 Social Media Industry report asked marketers how many of them were using paid social advertising. As shown in Figure 4.2, over 80% of them use Facebook ads with Google ads rather far behind at 41%. LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube also have a significant amount of paid advertising. Marketers expected to increase their ad spending on all platforms except Twitter during the next year. Sponsored posts, Twitter cards, and all the other forms of social advertising are a form of interruption marketing.



**Figure 4.2** Number of Businesses Using Paid Social Advertising



Social media marketers need to determine which mix of interruption and permission marketing fits best within the overall marketing strategy. Even companies such as Dollar Shave Club have moved toward mixing the two types. Dollar Shave Club not only utilizes sponsored posts as interruption marketing, but in November 2014, they also began to use television advertising and spent \$64.5 million to Gillette's \$43.4 million.<sup>11</sup>

Although individuals generally feel that marketers don't have the *right* to be on their Twitter stream, Facebook page, or blog, most people have accepted that advertising is necessary for the platforms to exist. Advertising is the only way that these networks can generate revenues.

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## Initial Entry Strategy: Passive vs. Active

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When engaging in social media, there are two types of engagement: passive and active. For either big brands that may face risks from participation or businesses that are just getting started with social media, it can be helpful to begin with a passive strategy that then evolves into a more active one. In other words, test the water first and then jump in.

### THE PASSIVE STRATEGY: SEARCH, LISTEN, AND RESPOND

If one is new to social media, beginning with a more passive approach is a good way to get started. This approach links back to the first step of the SMM cycle: listening.

To implement a passive approach, start by searching out mentions of your business, its competitors, and the category or industry. Spend some time listening to what people are saying. After achieving familiarity with the conversations, responses can begin.

Responses can be relatively simple: "Thanks for including our product in your blog post. We really appreciate it. Please give me a call if you have any feedback or additional comments." Simply saying thank you and answering questions is a great first step. Again, resist the urge to directly sell or market; rather, begin by responding to people who mention your company or who provide a clear opening to start a conversation.

### THE ACTIVE STRATEGY: CREATE AND ENGAGE

The second stage of SMM is an active strategy in which the marketer creates content and engages in conversations through different social media channels. This stage involves actively creating and building social media profiles, connecting with key influencers, and starting or participating in conversations. Many brands jump to step two right away, and start creating content without really understanding their audience or without gaining some experience on how their audience wants to interact. Consider starting slow with a passive strategy before jumping into content creation.

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## Principles for Success

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To be successful in SMM requires giving the community (the audience) something of value. In his book *The Next Evolution of Marketing: Connect with Your Customers by Marketing with Meaning*, Bob Gilbreath discusses the importance of value-contributing marketing content as a way of earning attention from the target audience.<sup>12</sup> People spend time online for three basic reasons: to connect with people, to get information, or to be entertained. A successful social media strategy has to associate itself with at least one of these three reasons.

Successful social media strategies typically meet one (or more) of the PARC principles for success. PARC stands for the initial letters of *participatory*, *authentic*, *resourceful*, and *credible*.

## PARTICIPATORY

Brands that are successful on social media are participatory. They interact with the community, answer questions, and thank those who respond. Participating in the community and existing groups or events is important. Big brands often want to run their own show and create their own community, groups, and events. If there is a genuine need, starting fresh is always an option. However, in most cases, there are existing communities whose trust can be earned by showing interest and by participating in those communities. It is faster, simpler, and almost certainly cheaper to work with an existing social media community rather than trying to start a new one. Play on the terms of the community and support its events through positive posts or comments. Participating in dialog will eventually bring results.

Be ready to respond and be conversational. In social media, there is an expectation of two-way communication. Many users will assume that businesses who are active on social media will respond to blog comments, tweets, or Facebook posts that mention the brand. Be open to conversations and participate actively in the community. Taco Bell has been recognized within the advertising industry as a leader in the use of social media. Taco Bell is known for engaging in conversations with both followers and other brands on Facebook and Twitter. One high school swim team member received a custom made Speedo from Taco Bell after posting on Facebook that he would like a “customized Speedo that says think outside the buns on the back.” Taco Bell’s response was to ask for his size and address so that one could be made and mailed to him.<sup>13</sup> The result is shown in Figure 4.3. The lively discussion on Facebook garnered 2,705 likes and caused Mashable to declare it another “epic social media win.”<sup>14</sup>

## AUTHENTIC

Being authentic is vital to the success of any SMM campaign. The Internet spreads information faster than any other means of human communication. A signal can travel around the globe in seconds and reach billions of potential receivers. This rapid spread of information makes deception functionally impossible as a long-term strategy for any company. Sources can come from inside or outside a business, from employees, neighbors, friends, or just from a passerby who hears something. Any single person can quickly broadcast an incriminating secret and reach a larger audience than ever before.



**Figure 4.3** The Taco Bell Speedo

Information is spreading more quickly, so strategies that are deceptive or lack authenticity run a serious risk of being outed (i.e., discovered and broadcast). In the age of information, a lack of authenticity is a surefire way to lose credibility and public respect for a brand.

But authenticity is more than telling the truth; it also implies conversing without forced attitudes or a false demeanor. Being authentic is hard to pin down, but it is easy to tell when someone is trying too hard to sound either serious or cheerful. Social media interactions should be professional, but they should also be personable at the same time. Sharing some harmless personal information or anecdotes can do a lot to make an online interaction more interesting and memorable. Putting a human face to the brand helps build connections. Providing honest and sincere responses will earn goodwill, trust, and ultimately business.

Keep in mind that people do business with others they know, like, and trust. By being authentic, a business can build a positive brand reputation that pays future dividends in sales and customer loyalty.

One of the reasons for the success of Dollar Shave Club is their use of videos that feature the CEO, Mike Dubin and his employee, Alejandra in the shipping department of the company. Mike's rumpled appearance and engaging conversation with both the camera and Alejandra who calls the boss by his first name, Mike, contribute to this authenticity.

## RESOURCEFUL

When doing permission marketing, businesses have to present useful and relevant content. One of the best ways to do this is to be resourceful: that is, provide the audience with helpful information. Giving the audience a genuinely useful resource is a powerful method for earning trust and gaining attention through social media. There are many potential ways that a company can become a resource online. Social media can be used to solve customer service questions or deal with complaints. For example, in Chapter 1, we discussed the success JetBlue has experienced with customer service on Twitter. Simply tweet the message @jetblue and a customer service rep will answer the question or resolve the problem. Some social media tools make this even easier for firms. For example, a service called Get Satisfaction allows visitors to a site to share feedback and ask questions, and users can vote up or down others' suggestions.<sup>15</sup> The company can also share responses to suggestions or questions posed by users.

Being a resource for customers is so important in B2B marketing that you find frequent lists of the "top thought leaders" in various aspects of marketing and SMM. One who almost always makes the SMM lists is Jeff Bullas. Here's what Webbiquity blogger Tom Pick says about him:

Jeff Bullas — does *anyone* know more about blogging than Jeff? He's one of those guys who seems to defy the laws of time and space by being able to consistently churn out bookmark-worthy blog posts, speak at events all over the planet, write ebooks, and still engage actively and prolifically on social media.

And here's what he has to say about the team of Cheryl and Mark Burgess:

Cheryl Burgess would unquestionably be on the list. In addition to being an expert on enterprise b2b marketing, she's the co-author (with Mark Burgess) of *The Social Employee*, and *the* authority on how to inspire employee social media advocacy inside large organizations.<sup>16</sup>

These marketers work hard and consistently to maintain their thought leader status. The discussions through the book on building a personal brand provide the basics on how to establish yourself as a resource. The rest is about intelligent application of the rules of engagement and plain old hard work.

# CREDIBLE Not For Sale

Social media is a powerful way for an organization to earn its audience's trust by being credible. There are two sides to credibility. The first is building a reputation for knowledge and expertise in the field, and the second is building a brand's trustworthiness. Knowledge-based credibility is often referred to as demonstrating thought leadership; by showcasing original thoughts and ideas related to the product or the industry in general, "[t]his form of content brands a company, a consultant, or a nonprofit as an expert and as a trusted resource."<sup>17</sup> Having strong credibility in the form of knowledge or thought leadership is especially useful in B2B markets or for those trying to build a personal brand.

To build trust-based credibility, businesses have to be ready to share information and explain the rationale behind decisions to customers or potential customers. When problems emerge, businesses can gain credibility by admitting their mistakes, by asking the community for understanding or support, and by taking action to remedy the situation. Communicating openly can build credibility and make relationships with the audience stronger. This was illustrated by JetBlue's SMM success. The trials and tribulations endured by Walmart over the course of developing a viable SMM strategy provide another example,

The saga begins with the *Wal-Marting across America* blog, started in September 2006. The subject was a couple traveling in their RV, using Walmart parking lots as rest areas. They would blog about how much all of the employees they encountered liked their jobs and other PR-friendly messages for Walmart. However, when the significant financial relationship between Walmart and the bloggers was revealed, many people were displeased and felt the company had been dishonest. Even though the bloggers involved were real fans, Walmart's secretive approach drew negative media coverage and hurt the company's credibility.<sup>18</sup> Still, the company knew that social media was important and persevered.

To break into more platforms, Walmart set up a promoted Facebook account in 2007. Its page gained fans at a very slow rate; even after several months, membership in various anti-Walmart groups was still larger than Walmart's promoted account!<sup>19</sup> The page had a feature tailored to college students, where roommates could input information and get fashion advice for their dorm room. Other forms of participation on the page were severely restricted. Users felt their comments were ignored and discussion was being quashed, and these feelings spawned even more negative remarks. Walmart's initial Facebook campaign was largely regarded as a failure for the company.<sup>20</sup> In spite of all these issues, Walmart now has a robust Facebook presence that generates a considerable amount of user feedback. Given the occasional controversies that beset the firm, not all of the feedback is positive but the Facebook page shows Walmart responding to both customer problems and compliments.

Over the years, Walmart has experimented with many other platforms and types of social engagement. Sometimes the results have been controversial as with their ElevenMoms blog, founded in 2008. About a year later, this community-building effort was embroiled in a broader controversy in which bloggers were found to be accepting money and gifts from businesses in return for positive blog posts. The ElevenMoms pleaded "not guilty" at the time.<sup>21</sup> Walmart once again persevered. There is now a Walmart Moms page on the website in which a group of moms "like you" provide "an everyday guide to living well."<sup>22</sup>

By 2014, Walmart had established a significant social media presence with a clear social media strategy. Their targeted presence includes Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest. Walmart also uses market segmentation strategies. Each Walmart store now has its own Facebook page that contains information specific to the store's geographic location. On Twitter, the company uses @WalmartToday (Figure 4.4) as a hub for several accounts, @WalmartNewsroom, @WalmartAction, and @WalmartGiving. It is also linked to the Walmart Today blog.





**Figure 4.4** The Walmart Today Twitter Hub

This sizeable number of social media accounts paints a picture of a complex business, but even more of a business that has used social media effectively to establish and sometimes to reestablish credibility. On all the social platforms, there is emphasis on the stories of real people—employees, customers, and suppliers—going about their daily lives with the support of Walmart. For the social media marketer, Walmart’s journey of discovery provides a useful model of learning and tenacity in the challenging world of SMM.

## SMM Ethics

What does it mean to be ethical while using SMM professionally? Generally speaking, the same code of ethics that applies to traditional marketing can be applied. However, due to its highly interactive as well as long-distance nature, social media brings its own set of challenges and complications to marketing ethics. Here are some principles to keep in mind when making those difficult decisions.

### HONESTY

SMM is based largely on personal interactions. Unlike traditional advertising, where it is often expected that some spin will be applied to the message, people use social media channels to communicate with friends so that honesty is highly valued. Social media messages are exposed to public view, so expect a high degree of scrutiny: facts will be checked, and promises will be expected to be kept. Building a reputation for honesty is a valuable asset in SMM. Honest and transparent communications should be a priority for both ethical and practical reasons.

### PRIVACY

Do not collect or distribute personal information without consent. When implementing a social media campaign, it is helpful to have as much information about your target audience as possible, but obtaining that data should be balanced against protecting user privacy. More aggressive information-gathering software can be interpreted as malware, a computer virus, or just an annoyance to users. Violations of user privacy can quickly destroy a site’s reputation and severely damage a company. When collecting user data, it is best to employ passive approaches that allow people to input information voluntarily. Do not collect any more information than is necessary about users, and be very careful that it does not leak to outside parties.

## RESPECT

# Not For Sale

Showing respect for people means treating them as equals, as reasonable individuals with goals and lives of their own. While online interactions can be highly impersonal, there is always another person somewhere in front of a screen. Do not present manipulative messages, create false identities for testimonials, or hijack user profiles for promotional purposes. Using these questionable tactics hurts the quality of information online and inconveniences everyone. Show respect for online participants rather than attempting to herd them with deceptive claims.

## RESPONSIBILITY

Mistakes or errors will inevitably occur during a SMM campaign. When a customer has a valid complaint, a technical problem arises, or some other crisis looms, there are three steps to take:

- **Acknowledge:** Find out what the problem is, and take responsibility for the situation.
- **Apologize:** If someone is angry, first attempt to calm her or him down. Apologize, and determine what would give the individual resolution.
- **Act:** Implement promised changes or make other restitution. Inform the complainant(s) that the problem is being addressed.

To responsibly handle a situation, all three of these steps must be undertaken. Still, it is important to avoid promising *too much* while apologizing because then it may be impossible to act! If the problem is beyond the realm of social media (i.e., a technical problem or corporate policy), then a SMM specialist can only do so much. Taking responsibility must be done in realistic ways; an empty gesture is worse than a modest promise.

## Observing Social Media Etiquette Helps Achieve Your Personal Branding Goals

This chapter prepares you with the rules of engagement needed to be an effective social media marketer. All these rules apply to your personal branding effort. In addition, there are rules of etiquette that apply to individuals that everyone would be advised to follow in both their personal and their professional social media activities.

**Lesson #1. Use different accounts or profiles for your professional and personal communications.** This is another place where business and pleasure don't mix. In the early days of social media, many of us made the mistake of posting both personal and professional content on a single account, likely to be a Facebook page at that time. We found that the page became such a mishmash that it appealed to no identifiable group of our followers and the result was often abandonment of the page. So keep the business separate from the personal. And be careful how you define *personal*. It should mean personal updates and communications that you are happy for most of the people you know to see. It does not mean your most intimate secrets that will embarrass you if seen by your favorite aunt—or by a potential employer!

**Lesson #2. Don't post pictures and videos of people without their permission.** If it's all happening in real time, just be sure they know you are doing it. If they are not

present, ask their permission before you post. By the same token, don't tag a picture of someone caught at an unflattering moment.

**Lesson #3. Don't play the game of the Internet trolls.** In case you haven't met a troll yet, they are the commenters on various platforms who invariably have something nasty to say. In most cases they should simply be ignored. If given attention, their level of misbehavior is likely to increase in ferocity or frequency or both. Moderating blog posts is a good idea. On many platforms, you may be able to delete the comments or block the commenters altogether. There are two exceptions to this rule. In a personal situation, if the behavior becomes threatening, you need to carefully consider bringing it to the attention of the relevant authority. In a business situation, if you see a flood of comments, civil or not, about a particular issue, it needs to be investigated.<sup>1</sup>

**Lesson #4. Don't react too quickly.** This is virtually a corollary of #3. Take time to think and to respond in a kind manner, supporting your answer with any relevant facts. Do your research and consider your response; don't let yourself get caught up in the moment.

**Lesson #5. At all costs, avoid the drunken post.** Actually, also make a habit of not posting when you are really tired, jet lagged, or angry. Once sent, a message can never really be recalled. You may delete it from your page, but it will still reside on many other pages.

Perhaps this final lesson sums it up all in one simple rule.

**Lesson #6. Don't post anything anywhere on the Internet that you would not want a potential employer, your boss, a current customer, or a potential client to read.** A post may be seen at once or it may be discovered months or even years later, by design or by accident. Either way a careless statement can come back to do significant damage. Remember that you cannot take it back. You must observe etiquette and the rules of engagement in such a way that you do not create content that does permanent damage to your personal brand.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

Hootsuite University has a video that provides good recommendations and a nice summary at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ootxiibcOWc>

<sup>1</sup> Brandon, John (June 15, 2015), "5 Ways to Handle Comment Trolls on Social Media," *CIO*. Retrieved October 1, 2015, from <http://www.cio.com/article/2935933/online-reputation-management/5-ways-to-handle-comment-trolls-on-social-media.html>

<sup>2</sup> Kievman, Nate (n.d.), "Social Media Etiquette: 10 Commonly Overlooked Best Practices in Social Media," *Linked Strategies*. Retrieved October 2, 2015, from <http://www.linkedstrategies.com/social-media-etiquette-10-commonly-overlooked-best-practices-in-social-media/>

<sup>3</sup> Ramsay, Lydia (2010), "Top 12 Rules of Social Media Etiquette," *Business Know-How*. Retrieved October 2, 2015, from <http://www.businessknowhow.com/internet/socialmediaetiquette.htm>

<sup>4</sup> (n.d.). "20 Social Media Etiquette Tips," *Alltop*. Retrieved October 2, 2015, from <http://holykaw.alltop.com/20-social-media-etiquette-tips>

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## Making Ethical Decisions

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This set of ethical principles for SMM should be read as a starting point rather than the final word. As technology and involvement in social media continue to evolve, new ethical situations will arise. Software tools to mine for user data are becoming ever more

sophisticated but so are antiviral, ad-blocking, and anti-cookie programs to combat them. Deciding which practices to employ will be complex and will be based on both the tools available and the ethical limits and norms of the online community.

In a situation in which ethical standards could possibly be breached, it is best to err on the side of caution and avoid a potentially unethical action. The Internet has a long memory, and past actions can linger indefinitely. Gaining a reputation for unscrupulous tactics can seriously tarnish a SMM career and make finding employment more difficult. Even if questionable decisions seem like the only option, it is better to spend time doing more research and use creativity to solve the problem instead. It is better to learn through trial and experience rather than cut a career short by using unethical practices.

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## Global Perspective

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Social media is an international phenomenon. As Internet access becomes more widely available, the number of people in online networks is certain to grow. As a result, communicating across national boundaries is an essential skill for any social media marketer.

### CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Adapting the message to fit the expected audience was discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, but this lesson is especially important when part of the community has an international background. Do some research beforehand to determine which regions or nationalities are active on each social media network. Then tailor communications on each platform to reference likely areas of interest or commonality.

Depending on their culture as well as personal preferences, different people have varying standards of contact and familiarity with others met through social media. Some will be more eager to participate in social media efforts than others. To avoid misunderstandings, be friendly but not invasive when seeking contacts.

### HOW TO AVOID CONFUSING YOUR GLOBAL AUDIENCE

Expressions, proverbs, or folksy sayings that are clichés to a domestic audience may be unfamiliar to an international one. Some may be translated strangely or sound very odd to a foreign audience. Similarly, remarks intended as sarcasm or metaphor may not be interpreted as such if there is a language barrier. Avoid making jokes or references overly dependent on popular culture, puns, domestic sporting events, etc. A nonnative speaker is less likely to find these remarks interesting and may even find the reference irrelevant or confusing. This does *not* mean to dumb down material for international audiences but rather adapt to different cultural contexts. Making jokes that are only funny to native speakers or are easily lost in translation may leave international users feeling excluded.

To avoid confusion, it is best to make messages polite, concise, and direct. Before posting, mentally ask whether there is any part of a message that could easily be misinterpreted or cause your overall idea to be misunderstood. This is good practice when crafting messages to any audience, but especially when different languages and cultural backgrounds are involved.

### GOOGLE TRANSLATE

Often, people who communicate globally through social media turn toward online translation services in order to bridge languages. Google offers one of several popular translation engines. Becoming familiar with Google Translate (or an equivalent website)





Source: <https://www.facebook.com/walmart>

**Figure 4.5** Walmart Facebook Page

is a valuable skill for SMM. Translation services can help gather what international audiences are saying about different brands.

Be careful when using online translations to create new content because sometimes the results can be rough or can lack important context. One good way to determine whether a message is likely to be misinterpreted is to translate that message into several other languages and then back into English. Is the content still recognizable? If not, revisions might be necessary. On Walmart's Facebook page shown in Figure 4.5, the company recognizes the importance of its Hispanic customers with a post in Spanish. A translate button is available for non-Spanish-speaking visitors.

Achieving familiarity with online translation will broaden the audience with whom a social media marketer can interact. These expanded contacts can be essential to the success of a marketing campaign. Learning to communicate and interact persuasively with an international audience requires skill and finesse, but the growing availability of online translations makes that task somewhat easier.

## Best Practices: Following the Rules of Engagement for SMM

Social media involves *earning permission* to join in *personal conversations* with *real people* who don't usually want to be the target of advertising. Most people use social media to build personal relationships, and they are generally not looking for new products. Being aware of the following nine rules of engagement will help a new marketer avoid common mistakes entering the field of social media.

## **RULE #1: USE SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS AS INTENDED**

Use all social media channels and their different communication methods as intended. Be aware of how the community is using channels and stay within the existing norms of communication. Look to how the general community is using each social media channel, then use some common sense about the channel's intended use, and keep usage within these standards.

For example, on Twitter, users can either send a *tweet*, which is a general public message to all followers, or a *direct message*, which is private and sent to a specific individual. Some people unfamiliar with this channel send direct messages promoting their blog/business/product to all of their Twitter followers. An untargted message for all followers should be sent as a tweet, not as a direct message. On LinkedIn, you should not send out generic invitations to people that you do not know. If you want to make a new connection, first look to see if you have a common connection and ask for an introduction. Failing to follow site-specific conventions is one of the quickest ways to get unfollowed or called out on social media sites. Misusing social media channels in this way is a mistake made by people new to Twitter and self-styled social media experts alike.

## **RULE #2: DON'T BE A DIRTY SPAMMER**

Don't send people in a network unwanted messages without their permission. Just because someone follows a page or group does not mean that they want promotional or sales messages.

For example, one LinkedIn member downloaded his entire list of LinkedIn contacts and sent an email promoting new products. There are two problems with his marketing approach. First, some people will feel that it is a form of unwanted spam. Connecting on LinkedIn does not constitute permission to be included on mass emails. Second, he violated rule #1 by using a channel (email) in a way not intended. Only a person requesting to be included or one who has opted in would expect emails. Taking email addresses from LinkedIn to do direct marketing is a violation of trust.

Many new marketers assume that average people *want* to receive their marketing pitches, but that is rarely the case. Give the audience the chance to opt out and don't mass-message people without their permission. People's general aversion to spam means sending unsolicited mass messages is a quick way to lose trust and annoy the audience. Don't send mass communications unless it is an urgently important issue or a person has opted in to receive group messages.

## **RULE #3: ASSUME PEOPLE DON'T CARE ABOUT THE PRODUCT**

Related to the previous rule on spamming, it is helpful to assume that most people on social media sites do not care at all about the product being marketed. Sure, a few might, but most people are not interested. They care about saving money or solving a specific problem.

Just because someone follows or friends a company page does not mean they want to endlessly hear about that business. Consider: what is in it for them? Why would they care?

Some business owners think that they are doing a service by directing marketing at people. One small business owner thought he was doing people a favor by messaging them about his product. He would search on Twitter for people in his city with a keyword related to his product, follow them, and if they followed him back, he would send them a direct message with a sales offer. The reality is that this approach is still seen as marketing aggressively in a social space. Be aware of this attitude. If the approach is too forward, others will perceive it as a sales pitch, and it may taint their perception of the information provided. Be cautious of directly marketing to people, especially when it might not be expected or invited.

## **RULE #4: HAVE A PERSONALITY**

Some people are hesitant to be personal on public social media sites. They want to keep their content strictly professional and business related. The reality is that people connect with other people on a deeper level than they can connect with a brand.



**Figure 4.6** The Mars Curiosity Rover Celebrates Its Finding of Possible Water on Mars

Sharing some personality helps build common ground and trust. A bureaucratic or forced tone is not a very appealing call to interact. Instead, building a feeling of trust and common interest makes it more likely that people will find the social media campaign to be engaging and worth participating in.

There is a professional line to be drawn, of course; it is a bad idea to get excessively personal or share intimate details. However, talking about music tastes, coffee brands, or other harmless character traits builds common ground and human connections. Always try to inject some personality into SMM and keep a sense of humor about the process.

The NASA SMM team has done a great job of creating a personality for the Mars Curiosity Rover, which has been exploring Mars since 2011.<sup>23</sup> In Figure 4.6 from the rover's Twitter stream, the reader can see that the robot is very excited about having located possible signs of water on Mars.

## RULE #5: PROVIDE CONTEXT WHEN SEEKING CONNECTIONS

Many social networks are intended for connecting with people already known. Facebook and LinkedIn are both sites where the network should ideally be centered on people one has met face to face. However, for SMM, it is necessary to expand that circle to people who may help provide business now or down the road. Therefore, having a tactful way to add new connections that may rarely or never be seen in person is extremely important.

When sending a request to connect with someone—whether it is on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, or even via email—it is helpful to provide context for the connection. What is the reason for connecting with that person? Providing context is simple and just requires a quick note: “Hi, John, I saw that we are both members of group X, and you have posted some really smart discussion topics. I would like to add you to my network,” or “Hi, Sally, we met last week at a networking event, and I wanted to follow up and say hi. You mentioned you were interested in social media marketing, so I went ahead and added you to my newsletter distribution. If you are not interested, you can opt out at any time.” Adding a brief note for context will lead to higher acceptance rates on connection requests.

## RULE #6: BE TRANSPARENT

Social media has changed the way information flows. Information is now available quickly, and it travels across the world in an instant. This means that businesses have to be more transparent in their interactions. Consumers can talk to each other and read about each other's experiences. They can research a company and its employees fairly easily.

This access to information means that companies have to be upfront with their information. Consumer reviews will inevitably highlight issues or problems. Be prepared

to address them in an open and honest manner. Keeping secrets from customers is no longer a viable business strategy.

## **RULE #7: TALK ABOUT THE TOPIC**

Businesses will often find discussion threads, Twitter conversations, groups, or blog posts that are related to their business line. Often their first instinct is to jump into the conversation with a marketing message. This is a mistake.

It is a good idea for the company to join the discussion, but it needs to make sure to focus on what the conversation is about, not just do self-promotion. A business that interrupts conversation threads to talk about its product is perceived like a loud braggart at a cocktail party. Pretty soon, no one wants to converse with the firm. Being overly self-centered is a quick way to be ignored at social gatherings, both in real life and online.

To avoid being shunned, talk about the conversation topic that is being addressed, not about the product or service being marketed. Don't hijack conversations and try to shift them to other purposes. People see through this easily, causing a loss of trust and in extreme cases getting the marketer kicked out of the group or off that social media site.

## **RULE #8: SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES ARE NOT BILLBOARDS**

Keep in mind that people do *not* create social media profiles for marketers to use.

Marketers may think they are doing favors by leaving product messages on relevant blogs or discussions. However, most people are not excited to see posts from random businesses on their personal sites. What is intended as a useful product suggestion may be perceived as unwanted graffiti on someone's beloved blog and may generate a strong negative response.

Don't use other people's social media profiles or websites as a way to promote a message. It is best to engage in discussions without doing overt marketing unless it is directly on-topic. Generate original content and use that to get the message out instead of posting unwanted messages on others' sites.

## **RULE #9: BE NICE**

Being pleasant and nice is very simple, but some businesses have a hard time grasping this principle. Politeness costs nothing, but it can make a huge difference in the responses that a SMM campaign receives.

An easy "please" and "thank you" can go a long way. Look for opportunities to publicly or privately thank people who help out or make positive comments about the product. On the other hand, when asking someone for a favor, be sure to ask nicely and not demand too much.

Look for opportunities to give back to other people in the same social community. Promote their events, blog posts, or products. Providing a link, positive recommendation, or other traffic-building measure for someone else can help a lot in earning his or her gratitude. In the long run, the return from these small favors adds up.

In the face of a social media landscape that seems to change on an almost-daily basis it is pleasant to realize that there are some principles that resist change. They make up the rules of engagement of SMM. The principles include honesty, responsibility, and respect for other social media users and for their privacy. Social media marketers who participate with authenticity and who keep these principles in mind have a much better change of creating the trusted brand that is their goal.

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## **Notes**

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