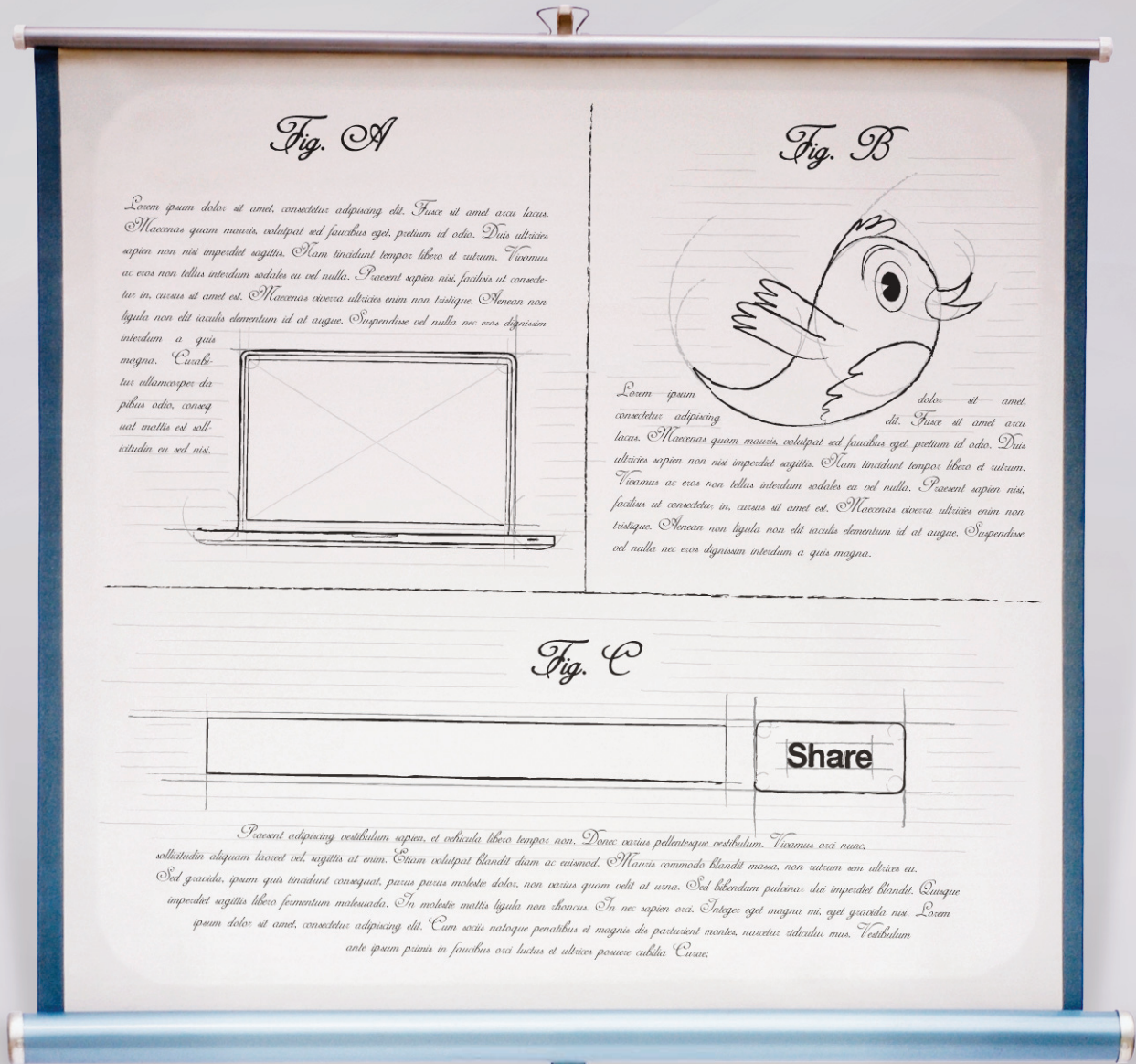


Social Media Lessons Learned in 2009

Early adopters share tips as more brands prepare to dive in



Looking to compile a list of 2009's top tips for social media engagement? Who better to ask than the experts! The best practices and guidelines below are highlights of the responses we received directly from members of the public relations community who are early adopters of social media.

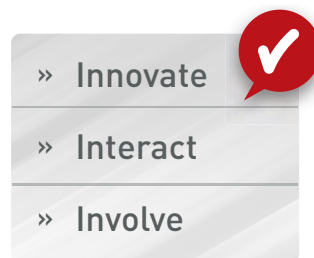
Contributions came from the United States, Canada and Europe, from solo practitioners and consultants to community ambassadors in Fortune 100 companies, from branches of the military and NGO's, to creative advertising, PR, marketing and social media agencies.

With fast-growing **Facebook** accounting for more than 6% of U.S. Internet visits in October, and **Bing** and **Google** just starting to include **Twitter** postings in their search results, 2010 will be the year that brands will stop studying and start executing on their social media plans. Thanks to expert navigational advice from social media pioneers, those organizations just now beginning their journey will enjoy a much smoother ride.

1 Formulating a plan of attack: Rules of engagement

Incorporating social media across a company is not an easy feat. Developing "rules of engagement" for your employees and your company means understanding what the goals of your engagement will be. The rest will fall into place from there.

- » **Walk before you run.** The biggest mistake most organizations make (including public relations firms) is getting way ahead of themselves. These are dynamic and exciting times. It would be easy to jump on every single trend and just see what sticks. The most important thing was instituting internal strategies and methods that streamlined how social networking was employed by our staff.
- » **Don't sacrifice the message for the medium.** Panic-stricken PR people are so consumed with understanding different social media sites and tools that they run the risk of forgetting that what matters most is what has always mattered most: the story.
- » **Do something innovative, creative and interactive to really involve others, employees too.** The point of a social network is to create a community of like-minded individuals to express how they feel about a certain topic and who better to start this than your own people? The more people involved, the more ideas float around - some eye-opening. Who knows...you could get your next best idea (or product) from received feedback!
- » This really comes down to **accountability**. While certainly we believe everybody on our staff are experts at social media, it is too much to ask all staff to be responsible for watching emerging trends, drafting strategies and reevaluating the trajectory of our social media endeavors. Having somebody on staff who



is held accountable, who can unify all of our efforts – both for our clients and internally – really makes a huge difference in the overall success of social networking efforts.

- » More and more we are encouraging our staff and clients to **have the tools** with them **all of the time** to share a story, whether that means carrying an audio recorder to every event they attend or having a digital video camera wherever they go. With the right knowhow and tools, it is not difficult to keep your audience engaged and satisfy their desire for more information, transparency and access.
- » **Engage your international team** – If you live in the United States, you may think one Twitter or social media account is enough. If you think that, you need to go back to school. USA is great, but don't ignore emerging markets like Brazil, Russia, India, China, and other countries — and their unique languages and culture. Work with your sales/PR/marketing teams in those countries and make sure you have the right social media presence in those and other countries.

2 Engagement: How to build a community

Having a profile on various social media sites is not the same thing as developing relationships, and building a community to engage with.

But what's the best way to do this?

- » **Let the crowd do the talking.** A brand isn't defined by the marketing department or CEO, but by customers. As social media is integrated into the marketing mix, successful community builders will understand at the outset that **it's about people**. Talk less about products and more about the desires of customers. In nine cases out of 10, they will do the selling for you. Again, it's about them, not about you.
- » **Listen, observe and identify relevant conversations** and how they relate to your brand, long before you participate. You cannot just jump into conversations without knowing the people, their interests and the culture of the community. Listening enables us to customize stories and to offer meaningful information — to become a trusted, valuable resource and to build a strong relationship.
- » One of the biggest lessons businesses can learn from social media is to use it as a **listening and sharing** device instead of trying to use it for traditional "push" marketing. Some companies, like jetBlue, Zappos and Ford, have caught on and use the medium to enhance their customer service and keep tabs on their "brand," — whereas other companies, like United Airlines and Domino's Pizza, struggled in 2009 with the consequences of not having a proactive listening program in place early enough.
- » **Pull the media in instead of pushing the message to the public.** Best practice to obtain the "pull," 90/10 rule, 90% communication with the public, 10% self promotion.



Remember:
A brand is
defined by its
customers, not
its marketing
department.

- » **Don't auto-respond with Direct Messages** when someone follows you. "AutoDM", as it's known, is the scourge of Twitter, and nice folks don't like it. It's robotic and inhuman. It might seem nice to reply to every new follower to say "Hi!" but it soon becomes boring, annoys people and when someone follows 100 people in a day, they won't read a single one of those DMs. It is good to ask new followers to introduce themselves and say why they're following you; it's market information in its most raw and micro form.
- » **Be genuine.** Authenticity cannot be overstated. People can spot a phony from a mile away.
- » Linking my Twitter feed to showcase my blog has been successful, resulting in **larger audiences** for the blog and Twitter. Of course, the most important is having things to say that are worth hearing.
- » **Try to follow some of the best known social media experts** via Twitter and on their blog. You'll always get good ideas, advice and tips from them with case studies on how they successfully used social media.
- » If you want social networking sites to work for you, you will need to establish yourself as an expert. Do this by writing helpful articles, offering sound advice, responding to comments and messages, building relationships, and posting articles you have found that are relevant to the community. Do this and the traffic will come, but it takes time. **Give twice as much as you ever expect in return.**
- » **Identify what your customers' pain points are.** They might not be having conversations about your specific product or brand, but they sure are talking about problems that your product or brand solves.
- » **Use Twitter posts to link to timely or relevant content on your Web site.** This is not a passport to spam your followers but a recommendation to highlight helpful information – white papers, blog posts, news releases, videos – in the context of conversations taking place within the community.




Build relationships and establish yourself as an expert.

3 A delicate balance: Managing your message

One of social media's best attributes is its ability to build real relationships, allowing you to engage and interact with your communities. With that in mind, social media relationships are different from those with sales or marketing. How do you strike a proper balance when social media relationships could involve customer service, sales and even the competition?

- » **Use it (social media) to actually interact, not sell.** I see it as a method of two-way communications with current and potential customers. I think it is also important to use it as a call to action for events, brand development research, PR/marketing campaign research and recognition of your consumer base and target audience.
- » You've probably not started a Twitter account just for the purposes of **customer service**; the thing is you need to understand that that's precisely what you're



Use social media to interact, not to hard sell your company.

doing. We've all become bogged down in the idea that good customer service is unique to each individual, somehow a bespoke service. It needn't be. Customer service is about serving your customers and big part of that is keeping them informed. So even if you aren't in the customer service biz, you'll need to respond to customers' questions and where you can put them through your regular service routes. It's okay to make exceptions, but do it too often and you'll be swamped, too little and you won't seem human. Balance is the word, but never ignore.

- » **Build a community by sharing insightful information about the industry**, not necessarily over-the-top marketing about your company. Don't abuse Twitter like it's a marketing billboard.
- » **Listening to what others are saying is key**. If you're on Twitter, search for tweets that are relevant to your company and reply to them. Do not hard sell your company or people will get turned off.

About dna13

dna13 is the leading SaaS solution for reputation management and media monitoring. Providing complete visibility into global reputation, dna13 enables communicators to listen in real-time to what is being said about their company in television, print, online and social media, securely align team members to ensure accuracy in corporate messaging, and engage with stakeholders and influencers to develop and nurture valuable relationships.



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