

The social media response

 By [Jaco Pienaar](#)

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Customer complaints are as old as business itself. A company makes a claim or sells something and inevitably someone will find something wrong with it or bemoan the lack of service.

Social networking has made these complaints all the more visible leaving companies with the decision on how best to engage on those platforms, if at all.

For many brands (and their agencies), integrating social networking into their marketing and communications strategies have become a matter of course. Some argue that it is a necessary evil while others believe that it provides them with a valuable tool to engage with customers and get insights on the success (or failure) of campaigns.



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Maintaining social media

Unfortunately, in some instances it is a case of starting with the best intentions but due to whatever reasons, unable to maintain a Twitter or Facebook or profile for the long-term. Some companies might never even post anything or follow anyone, but merely register their name to avoid it being taken by someone with malicious intent on damaging the brand of the organisation.

One of the biggest lessons to learn in any social campaign is that using these platforms as a customer channel require resource planning, insight into crisis communications, and the ability to respond in real-time.

FNB, through its RbJacobs persona, is well-known in South Africa for successfully bridging the gap between the perception that a bank is a cold, unfriendly institution, and an entity that values customer communications. Despite its recent issue when posting an insensitive joke, it is widely regarded as a great case study for any aspiring social media managers.

Online risks

Of course, one-time FHM model Jessica Leandra has proven too well the risks associated with social networking when she made a racist tweet a few years ago. This quickly led to her sponsors and FHM distancing themselves from her and her subsequent disappearance from all social networks.

More recently, there is the example of US Airways who accidentally (so they claim) tweeted an x-rated photograph. Sent to a customer by mistake, it took the airline nearly an hour to remove the post. The social networking world is littered by other #fails (couldn't resist). Another notable example is when the public relations company of MasterCard attempted to tell journalists who covered the Brit Awards what to tweet in exchange for accreditation.

But despite the clear challenges raised and risks associated to company social networking, the benefits need to be valued. Generally speaking, a social campaign is fairly easy to implement very quickly and at low cost when compared to above the line campaigns. Even in South Africa, social networking is growing in leaps and bounds thanks to the mobile generation.

Monitor the conversation

Having said that, it is imperative that if a company decides to go the social route, it is able to effectively monitor and measure the conversations taking place. A key ingredient to do this is a monitoring and analysis agency who understands the market and is able to track in real-time what is being said about the company.

Such an agency will act as a trusted partner in the process and will inform the company (or public relations agency) of any reputational issues taking place. As stated previously, social is all about real-time information, so the agency used should be able to mirror that in its monitoring and analysis.

ABOUT JACO PIENAAR

Jaco is an MA Information Science graduate who specialises in research, analytical framework development, and content analysis. His thesis was on Intellectual Capital measurement and he applies this to his framework developments as well as knowledge strategies. Professionally, Jaco has worked in the journalism field, academic environment, multi-national research environment, and media analysis environment. He is currently the Chief Knowledge Officer at Professional Evaluation and Research.

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