

# Amplifying social media for brands

By  Louise Marsland

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Social media amplifies the conversation and feelings around any subject, be it personal or a brand. Think of the collective sadness felt the world over when Robin Williams died this week. Or the hatred that spews forth when those with opposing beliefs clash.

Social media is the intersection between advertising and mainstream media and real life. It is becoming for many of us, a daily extension of all our communications from face-to-face to virtual. Brands have obviously taken longer, because brands have never before been this close to their actual consumers. Call centres and brand strategy did a good job of keeping 'real people' at arm's length in the past. But now your customers are in your face in all their sweaty, hairy glory, with an opinion. Millions of them. Right or wrong.



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The question is no longer if you should be there - it is how to maximise brand engagement in a positive way when you are there.

'Idiocracy' isn't only a mildly funny movie about a possible brand-driven future where consumers no longer think for themselves but accept 'almighty brand' as the oracle of truth, it is also what sometimes happens when people engage on social media in emotive debates which go too far, often involving brands in the process.

A great online resource for anyone trying to navigate the stropky waters of the social media airwaves is [CIOWhitePapers.com](http://CIOWhitePapers.com) which puts out useful content from various companies and think tanks on social media strategy. There's something for everyone

at every level of the social journey.

In a recent paper ['11 strategies to increase social media engagement'](#) the point is made that it is about a real conversation: being relevant, interesting, thought provoking, honest, engaged, two-way. It really isn't rocket science, but I still meet so many brand and marketing communications folk who either don't see the value of social media, or are too afraid to use it properly.

These tips from Awareness software company on the CIO site are simple and they give great examples of how you can get people talking about your services or products; get to know your customers better; and increase sales:

1. Ask questions.
2. Offer a deal or promotion.
3. Hold a contest.
4. Create a game.
5. Host a live chat.
6. Use photos and videos.
7. Have an opinion (even if it is not popular!).
8. Engage your most passionate fans.
9. Create stars.
10. Host a guest post.
11. Ask for engagement.

## Building influence

Building relationships and influencing their customers is of course why brands and communicators know they need to be

active on social media, despite the risks, as the Cision executive white paper on ['Building social media relationships and gauging influence'](#) reports. This one is aimed at PR communicators and social media community managers specifically. It's a few years old, but the points are still very valid and it is a great starting point.

A very important point discussed is how to find community in your communities of customers online. There's a step-by-step guide to find out where on the web your customers are hanging out; how to engage and join in the conversation; and how to track and measure success.

Of course, engagement doesn't begin and end with a sound social media strategy. The right [social media technology](#) needs to be harnessed, writes Sterling Commerce in its paper for etailers and retailers immersing themselves in ecommerce, in order to have a [multiplatform social media strategy that includes sales leads](#) (some nice case studies here for brands too).

For retailers it should be about delivering "a more intuitive, interactive shopping experience that delivers the collaborative and communication characteristics online shoppers' desire, much like those experienced in the store". Unfortunately, most bricks-and-mortar retailers do not even deliver on an "intuitive" shopping experience, as I've written about previously in this column, so that still needs some work too!

I'm going to end off with a great quote from a marketing manager quoted in the Awareness report on CIOWhitePapers.com: "I don't have a social media strategy. I have a business strategy and social media plays into it... Social media has changed how we go to market." Social media should indeed be integrated into everything now - from internal communications to CRM to external brand strategy. There is no 'why' anymore, there is only the 'how'.

## ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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