

Why is there so much bad language on social media?



By Jo Duxbury

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I don't mean four-letter words and the awful vitriol in News24.com's comment section. I mean the multitude of typos, spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and disregard for punctuation that pepper Facebook and Twitter.

In a recent [two-part article](#), [Caryn Gootkin](#) explores how damaging bad copy can be to brands. She's taken the bold step of naming and shaming companies which are slapdash with their online copy, and we're not talking small businesses here.

While errors can be found on print ads, billboards, printed materials and websites, it's social media that seems to suffer the worst of it.

Why is this?

- **Social media is still not being taken seriously**

Although brands are becoming more switched on to the value of the social media mix, many are still not allocating proper attention and resources to it.

You don't have to pay anything to set up a basic Facebook page or Twitter account - but it is not free. There are strategy, [copywriting](#), design and development costs involved. It takes budget, people and expertise to run these properly.

All too often, a company's social media presence seems to say 'we think we need to be on here, so we're here, but we're not really going to spend much time on this'. It's really obvious when this is the case.

And palming the daily management off onto a junior (or, worse, an intern) does neither your intern nor your brand much good. Hire someone who knows what they're doing. Which brings me to...

- **Non-writers are writing social media copy**

Spotted a brand whose social media presence is riddled with language errors? I'd guess that the person assigned to the social media manager role would likely never call him- or herself a writer, and probably wouldn't know one end of a split infinitive from the other.

What company does not want all public-facing copy to be error-free? If, as Gootkin says, you'd hire a copywriter for

a billboard or print ad, and a PR to write your press releases, why are so many brands letting non-writer staff loose on their Facebook pages and Twitter accounts?

Companies which use specialists to generate (read: write) their social media content don't get off scot-free here, unless they're also paying them to moderate, too.

We at Peppermint Source have several clients that we prepare well-written Facebook wall posts for, but which manage responses and comments themselves, and that's where errors creep in. Most of the time, the social media managers are blissfully unaware of the mistakes they are making (often their bosses are, too), because they're not writers. The fact is that your brand is being [judged](#) constantly, and if you're not going to hire a writer, please invest in some basic copywriting training.

- **Social media management is being done via smartphone**

A frightening number of social media managers I've worked with use their phones to write tweets, update Facebook statuses and moderate comments. THEIR PHONES. On which there's no spellcheck or grammar corrector - and where inserting an apostrophe is a mission [*certain smartphones do have both, but then you end up with the dreaded autocorrect/predictive text and may end up starring on [damnyouautocorrect.com](#) or [Fail Blog](#) - managing ed*].

And touch screens don't make it any easier. They're not reading and checking what they've written before they post it because it's really hard to do this on a tiny screen.

Also, when many of us are on our phones, we are in 'casual' mode, not 'work' mode. We're used to SMSing our friends or posting a quick status update for our buddies. It's easy to forget that - in a professional, brand context - although it's *social* media, it's not OK to be casual.

Should copy errors be overlooked on social media? Should non-writers be assigned customer-facing copy tasks? And are smartphones a writer's worst enemy? Weigh in with your opinions in the comments section below.

ABOUT JO DUXBURY

Jo Duxbury has been providing a platform for marketers to find thousands of industry freelancers since she launched www.freelancentral.co.za in early 2006. January 2010 saw her launch Peppermint Source, which offers a full outsourced marketing strategy and management service to companies that don't have the time, skills or staff to handle their marketing themselves. Jo is also a fine art, travel and portrait photographer - view her work at www.joduxbury.com or follow @JoDuxbury on Twitter.

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