

Is social media your new digital ID?

In this demanding digital age, social media can make or break any business. Dealing with social media customer relations can be a nightmare. A small mistake can turn into a major headache when customers turn to social media. We speak to communications specialist and communications company owner, John French to find out what you should and shouldn't do and what the best communication strategy is...

It's a known fact that most businesses don't know how to properly deal with comments published on their social media platforms and French agrees.

"Any company's greatest asset is feedback. There is nothing more important than feedback, because it helps you understand where the market is at and what the market has an appetite for," says French.

"Social media is immediate and has allowed businesses to get feedback like never before."

French adds: "Is the feedback negative or is it just honest feedback? We need to take into account that feedback is feedback. I think it's dangerous to mark it negative or positive. Feedback is something any business should consider and work with and address."

Proactive rather than reactive

French suggests that if a consumer, for example, wrote some sort of negative comment on a business' Facebook page, the entity should be proactive rather than reactive in dealing with crisis communication or negative feedback.

"Any business in this day and age should have a pro-active social media strategy in place."

"Companies should invest in hiring professionals and experts that can deal with all kinds of feedback and to manage their communications and strategies for them."

"Social media has given the common man on the street a very-very public voice out there in cyberspace."



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The true impact of social media for your business...

One tweet can spread like a wildfire and 140 characters can easily cost any business R140,000 in damage control or loss of revenue.

"You're going to get people projecting all kinds of hope, fears, anger, insecurities and all their emotional baggage into cyberspace."

"These wildfires can be extinguished by businesses keeping emotionally mature in dealing with any type of feedback or potential abuse".

"The moment you react emotionally, you are playing up to it and you're setting up a dynamic for conflict to escalate", says French.

His advice to businesses out there is simple:

"Be considerably responsive, rather than giving an emotionally, ego-driven reaction".

Social media strategy

"Best practice communication for any organisation is simply to have a social media strategy. "

"This is a broad plan of action that must be developed and implemented by experts within any business."

"Social media communication training is very essential for employees or the people representing your brand," says French.

We all know that social media never sleeps.

Social media never sleeps

However some businesses want to get away with dealing with social media updates and reply only during office hours rather than their business hours.

According to French: "social media comes with rules and demands and if you going to engage in that arena, you need to take full responsibility realising that it never sleeps".

"The basic rule of social media is that it's a 24 hours around-the-clock job and most people fail to see this."

Many businesses would do well to realise that a social media account is not about you and about your ego or to express what you want, when you want to, but about being fully accountable 24 hours of the day, says French.

Social media skills- and awareness-training

In his expert opinion, he says the only solution to the problem is skills- and awareness-training around social media.

Social media staff need to undergo training, so they learn how to communicate effectively on this fairly new medium.

"With the right skills, organisations can understand the dynamics, responsibilities and demands of social media much better."

More skills required than ever before

"The consequences and impact of writing and communication is so far and widespread today, it calls for more skills than what people ever had in the past," says French.

We asked his opinion on whether social media has improved customer service for consumers and is it helping businesses improve their service and product in the process.

"In the long term it'll help consumers get better customer service, but better customer service only happens when businesses train up their customer service staff".

Pressure to deliver better customer service

"They can get all the negative feedback in the world, but until those employees are up-skilled and learn how to deliver better customer service, social media isn't going to form part of that equation."

French says that it has in fact put pressure on a lot of businesses to up-skill their staff to deliver better customer service and that he can see is a very positive spin off moving forward."

What is French's prediction for businesses with all the social media platforms they already have and more to come?

"The future is quite easy to predict because we already in the next phase of human development."

Digital communication is the only way

"We are in the digital age and it is all about communicating digitally using social media platforms and this is growing all the time".

"What will be exciting is that in 10-20 years, humanity will catch up to all this new technology and hopefully learn how to use it better."

"As a result writing skills is becoming increasingly important and especially in South Africa where there is a national crisis in education."

"School leavers walk away with very poor writing skills and this is going to be a major problem for South Africa going forward," says French.

Social media is here to stay. It is a digital identity document for the future.

John French, owner of John French Communication Guru, is a leading communication strategist and trainer. For more

information see www.johnfrench.co.za or follow him on [Twitter](#).

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