

Summer challenge #8 (final!): Take a (social media) break

Here we are, in the last week of August, and Labor Day is upon us. This means that summer is “officially” over, and so is the summer challenge series.

There’s been a lot of chatter over the past couple of months about social media being addictive. Huffington Post UK has an article that states that quitting Facebook and Twitter is harder to do than quitting smoking!

CBS News, in the article “How real a risk is social media addiction,” shares that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has defined a “Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD).” The article states:

Symptoms for Internet addiction can be similar to addiction to anything else, and fall into two types of behaviors: an ever increasing need to engage with the object of the addiction, and a bad feeling when not getting enough of it.

I feel that I check Facebook and Twitter way too often. Is it bad? Here are 10 Signs It’s Time to Take a Break from your Social Media Self. Do any of those ring true to you? In my case, I think Twitter definitely impacts my productivity.

My final summer challenge to you is to take a break from social media. I don’t mean quit it completely, but just take a few days off and see how you fare. With a three-day weekend ahead, now is the perfect time to do it. Why take time to be on social media when you can be social in real life?

Forbes has a helpful article (Need a Break from Social Media?) that concludes that taking a break from social media can help your productivity and impact in the long run, and even

provides three steps for how to do it.

I am pledging right now to be off Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn for all of the Labor Day Weekend. If you see me post, get on my case! Will you join me?

Have a fantastic Labor Day Weekend, and make the most of the last few days of “official” summer!

Summer challenge # 7: Be direct and get it fixed

A few years ago, I had a client who thought I had a special skill: mind reading. Unfortunately for both of us, I am not actually able to read minds. I can sense moods (anger, disapproval) but I can't actually know what a person is thinking unless that person decides to tell me. In the case of this client, I did not do what she was thinking I should do, and therefore, the relationship went south.

Years later, reflecting on this client relations episode, I concluded that that particular client was passive-aggressive. She had high expectations, which she did not clearly articulate, and then was extremely disappointed when her staff and contracted personnel failed to meet those standards.

Unfortunately, passive-aggressive behavior has become standard for many. Instead of confronting a problem, they hope the other party will sense their disapproval. If you've dealt with passive-aggressive people you know they will often pretend everything is OK but do things like procrastinate or give the

wrong information in an effort to subvert your efforts. Or they will give you the silent treatment. (You may want to read: [How to Spot and Deal with Passive-Aggressive People](#) .)

In social media, we see a lot of passive-aggressive behavior. On Twitter, we see it in “sub-tweeting,” in which a tweet refers to a specific individual without identifying him/her. We see it in random complaints, designed solely to shame the company but not actually get the problem fixed. You know the type: “My phone service sucks thanks to @companyIhate ... I should switch.” Or there is the re-tweeting and hashtagging of someone’s tweet, in order to embarrass or mock that person (I recently had this done to me and it resulted in getting a couple very ugly tweets from random strangers).

Recently, I saw some truly remarkable passive-aggressive behavior on Twitter from someone busy live-tweeting her condo board’s meeting. She tweeted her displeasure at everything discussed. Never mind the condo board is not on Twitter and that nobody would even know to look for the hashtag this Twitter user made up. I read her litany of tweets with complete astonishment. She was present in the room—why not speak up and address these issues with the people she was so angry with instead of showing (and recording for posterity) her mocking displeasure?

My summer challenge to you is to drop the passive-aggressive behavior and be direct. If there is an actual issue, get it fixed. Yes, it may mean confronting someone directly. In some cases, it may mean going offline and using the telephone to call the dreaded customer service to deal with a problem. In the end, the problem will be aired out if not resolved completely.

Before you go to Twitter to air your problems, why not follow excellent advice from Paula Kiger on [Spin Sucks: Four Questions to Ask Before You Complain on Twitter](#) .

If you are upset or angry at someone's actions, why not discuss it directly? Here are 5 Tips for Communicating Assertively Without Being Passive-Aggressive.

What do you think? Have you been victimized by passive-aggressive behavior? Or do you engage in passive-aggressive behavior yourself? The truth is we have all been on the giving *and* the receiving end of passive-aggressive behavior. Let's try to stop the cycle.

Summer challenge #3: Clean up your social media act

Are you happy with your social media presence? If so, then please feel free to ignore this post. If you want to improve your social media presence, this post is for you.

Now, let's take a look at your social media presence and then decide if you need to clean up your act. It's my summer challenge to you!

First, you may want to conduct a **social media audit** on yourself. A simple one would be to create a chart listing where you have social media presence, how many followers you have and how many posts you have in each channel. For more advanced audits, you may want to check out these articles:

The 15-Minute Social Media Audit Everyone Can Do

Auditing Your Social Media Content: 5 Issues to Tackle

Good. Now we know where you are.

Now, here are some suggestions for where to start "cleaning

up" your social media:

Clean up your bio. Do you describe yourself consistently across social media? Is it time to update your bio? Has anything changed, perhaps you have a new website/business/focus?

Clean up your image (I mean your profile pic). Do you use the same image across social media channels? Is it a current picture? Is it flattering?

Clean out your Twitter lists. Are you following the people you want to follow? Are there people that just clutter your stream with information you are not interested in? Perhaps it's time to unfollow.

Clean out your RSS reader. Do you enjoy reading all the feeds in your RSS reader? No? Well then get rid of those that you don't enjoy.

Clean out your LinkedIn connections. Are the people in your network people you know? Could you reach out and ask for an opinion, referral or coffee date? No? Maybe you need to cull down your contacts. Your network should be more about depth than about breadth.

Again, these are a few suggestions. You may find that you want to concentrate on just one social network, or think about your overall strategy. What would you clean up? Please tell me in the comments.

Happy cleaning!

Take some Twitter advice from Biz Stone

Biz Stone is one of the co-founders of Twitter. He's now CEO of a new company called Jelly. The *Washington Post* ran an interview with him in yesterday's edition, for its On Leadership series. You should read the entire interview but here is Biz's best Twitter tip:

Just be authentic. That's the only way to go. Over and over and over it comes back to that. People try all kinds of different things, and when they just present themselves as human, that's when people connect with them.

Exactly. This is why robo-tweeting, as I discussed a few weeks back, doesn't work. This is why humble-bragging and endless self-promotion turn potential followers off. It's rude and it's not how you would interact in person.

When you act as you do "in real life" you develop real relationships and therefore get the "engagement" that you should be aiming for. You talk with people not at people. You help others out. You act graciously. It's called being human, and if you are a likeable human, you may actually get people wanting to follow you on Twitter.

Do you understand why people follow you on Twitter?

Last Friday, as I was checking my @mentions on Twitter, I found the following tweet:

@DBMC I've been following you for a while but you don't follow me back. (Found out with Tweepdash.com)

6:09 PM · 16 May 14



This tweet came from a mobile app developer and it seems to be trying to shame me into a follow. (BTW, according to its website: *"Tweepdash helps you to distinguish mutual followers and people who are not sharing the love. It's very tedious and mind-numbingly boring to sort out your Twitter list. Tweepdash gives a quick overview of your total Twitter community."*)

Why haven't I followed this particular Twitter user, or as Tweepdash claims, why am I not "sharing the love?"

Well, for one, I have zero interest in or love for the user's product and even less in the user's Twitter stream. Also, this user has never, ever interacted with me on Twitter other than to follow me (meaning that he/she/it? has not ever retweeted anything, or asked me a question, or anything). So, in Tweepdash language, this user has not shown any love for me. Lastly, I don't automatically follow anybody back.

My "following rules" are these:

- Follow people and organizations with whom/which I have a personal connection.
- Follow those with good content in areas that I am

interested in (read my profile on Twitter if you want to see what some of those are).

- Follow journalists who cover subjects I am interested in.
- Follow those who have interacted with me on Twitter (other than simply following me) and with whom I have built a “relationship.”

Why do people follow specific Twitter users? Because they are getting something out of it; whether it be information, furthering a connection or sharing an interest.

Following people just to get them to follow you is not a good Twitter strategy. It shows that you don't understand why people use Twitter. It shows that you think all you have to do is show up to the party. But hey, if you've ever been to a large party, you know just showing up and not talking to other people or being uninterested and/or uninteresting will lead to you being all alone.

The bottom line is if you are trying to build a Twitter following, start by understanding why people would follow you on Twitter.

What are your thoughts? Do you automatically follow back? Would you block users you don't care for? And finally, what would you do with the tweet I got?

Is social media savvy a

learned skill?

Today, on one the many social media blogs I follow, I saw yet another post on how to use LinkedIn effectively (“5 tips to improve your LinkedIn experience” or some such).

Also today, coincidentally, I received a generic “let’s connect on LinkedIn” invitation (the third in the past week and a half) from someone I have never met, and with whom I have no connections in common.

One of the five tips to use LinkedIn effectively was not to send generic invitations, but rather to take the time to personalize the invitation and explain why you want to connect.

By the way, the invitation today was from another writer. I know she could’ve come up with a sentence or two on her own. But she didn’t. Was she being lazy? Does she understand how to use LinkedIn effectively? Has she never read an article about how to use LinkedIn effectively or is that I am the only one that has seen the same five tips regurgitated in article after article after article?

This got me to thinking: can you learn how to be savvy on social media or do you have to be born that way? Or put another way, are the people who could benefit the most from the “5 tips” articles precisely the ones that don’t read those articles BECAUSE they don’t follow social media (read blogs, interact on Twitter, etc.)?

It’s not just LinkedIn (as an aside, how many of your network still don’t have pictures on their profiles?). It’s Twitter. It’s Facebook. We see people doing stupid things all the time, the same things which get endlessly pointed out in how-to and tips articles everywhere...on social media.

There’s an older communicator whom I know tangentially. She

didn't understand how to use Twitter, in spite of being on it, in spite of the many resources out there. When I pointed something out to her, something so obvious, she actually thanked me. She needed to learn. She needed to be taught. But the thing is that she didn't know she needed to learn because she was (is) not social media savvy.

It's like people who use caps lock in their email. They don't know they are "shouting."

What do you think? Can people become more social media savvy? How will they learn if they never seem to see the many resources out there? Do you share my frustration?

How to choose the best social networks for marketing

Being effective in social media marketing requires choosing the right social networks on which to spend time and effort (and money). And you do have to choose because a) there are too many networks and b) some will work better than others.

To choose the "right" social networks you should consider:

Your offering. Are you a retailer or a service provider? How much explanation does your offering require?

Your target audience. Who is buying your product or service? Where does the target prefer to receive information? Where is the target likely to make a decision?

Your strengths. Are you visual or do you like words? Are you more likely to take and post pictures or write a 1000-word blog post?

Where have you had the most traction? If you haven't yet been measuring response, then start right away. Google Analytics will tell you where people are coming from, and this is very valuable information. If most of your customers are coming from a particular social network, it makes sense to focus your energy and effort there.

I met a blogger who writes about event planning, and she gets the most visits to her blog from Pinterest. So she focuses exclusively on building her Pinterest presence. Then there's the women's clothing and accessories retailer who gets most of her online orders through Facebook. She has decided to budget for Facebook ads and sponsored posts and it is really paying off.

In both cases, these people understand their product/service and where to best market it. And they have decided to really focus on the social network that provides the most bang for the buck.

How many social networks do you focus on? Are you finding some work better than others?

You aren't on social media???

Those of use who work in a communications-related field have been quick to embrace and promote social media. We use social networks actively, we counsel clients to get on social media, and here's the kicker, some of us frown on those who don't do social media.

But how important is it to business to be on social media?

Just this morning, I read how Gini Dietrich of Spin Sucks is now a Hertz customer because her former favorite car rental company, Avis, failed her on social media. It would seem that businesses are at peril if they ignore customer complaints expressed on social media.

The book Groundswell by Charlene Li also counsels that businesses must adapt to the reality that customers are on social media, and will talk about you whether you participate or not in the conversation.

And yet, there are many many successful businesses that don't have a Facebook page, that are not on Twitter, have never heard of Pinterest—and **don't care**. For example, there's an accounting firm in McLean, VA that created a website seven years ago and has barely updated it since and that has absolutely no social media presence. Or the marketing firm that has a blog last updated more than a year ago. Or the many solo practitioners I have met that don't even have a website.

The truth is you can be in business, and even be successful, without doing social media. Social media is just a platform, like television or radio. If you don't use it, you may not reach a certain segment of the population, but that does not mean that you aren't reaching your target audience.

The big issue is that consumers take to social media to voice their complaints (not so much their compliments) about businesses. Those consumers figure that the amplification power of social media will shame businesses into fixing their problem. And in many cases, this is exactly what happens. Unlike the mass media of yore, social media allows for far more connection and interaction between businesses and consumers.

But what if your business is not a huge national brand? Does it matter? I don't think it does.

That said, I believe that being on social media is an asset to any business. Social media networks can help grow connections and create new relationships. Social media helps to market and grow a business, and expose it to new audiences.

Businesses do not need social media to thrive, but they should consider using social media to grow.

What do you think? Do you judge businesses if they aren't on social media?

Is robotic social media worth it?

On Wednesday, I wrote about how some Twitter accounts seem to be run by Rosie, the robot maid on The Jetsons. But robotic social media happens on other social networks and even on blogs. Since so many people seem to be doing it, what is the value of robotic social media?

Robotic social media? That's a thing?

First, what do I mean by robotic social media? I mean social media that is cursory, unengaged, formulaic, uninspired, and there because someone thought it was a good idea to be present (but not active) on social networks. It's the one tweet a day that announces a new blog post. Or the automated "thank you for following me" tweet. It's the blog post that has no salient point and seems written just to have some new content on your site. It's the LinkedIn profile that has not seen an update in three years, since it was set up.

Robotic social media nearly always depends on some sort of “social media management tool” that usually cross posts for you, and basically handles social media by algorithm.

Why would you do that?

I have been thinking about why people would use social media in such a non-social way. There are probably several reasons, for example:

- For SEO purposes
- Too busy to manage social media on your own
- To check off social media on the communications plan tactics

Only one of these could has some sort of value: SEO. Certainly, due to changes in search engine algorithms, social media has impact on search results. The theory is that being present on social media *helps* your search results. However, I believe that search engines reward influence, and being robotic (unengaged) does not lead to influence.

Perhaps, it is even counteractive

I wrote about the woman who admitted she uses a Twitter management tool and that she really hadn't known she “knew” me from Twitter. Now, I know that there's no there there. So no more interaction. Davina Brewer in the comments on that post mentions something that happens every day, with big brands and regular people: no response to direct tweets/messages. In fact, just this morning, I tweeted LinkedIn to ask a question, and still no response.

When I don't get a response, I assume that person/brand/organization doesn't care or doesn't even monitor their messages. I then stop interacting. I bet many people stop interacting or even following brands/organizations when their comments are not even acknowledged.

In my opinion, robotic social media is not worth it. To do something just because you think you have to, and then do it by proxy, is not going to accomplish any goals other than checking something off your to-do list.

As many have said before, social media is a platform not a strategy. If you don't use the platform, it doesn't mean you don't have a communications strategy. Use the platform well, on the other hand, and you will further your communications strategy rather than stymie it.

*Don't be robotic! Come learn how to blog with me in the **How to Write Your Blog** workshop on April 1 in Washington, D.C. You will learn what makes for an effective blog, how to come up with blog post ideas and how to connect with your audience. Details and registration here.*

Is it real or is it...a robot?

Imagine you're having a party. You invite some friends and acquaintances. You crank up some music, put out some snacks and drinks, and your guests are milling around, having a good time. There's a knock on the door and Rosie, the robotic maid from the Jetsons is there. She's been sent in place of your friend Jane Jones. Jane is sorry she can't attend but she is too busy. Rosie comes in and tells you that she has been instructed to follow people she might find interesting. She then starts walking behind a couple of your friends.



Rosie Love by Doran
on Flickr

At some point, a group of you are sitting and discussing your upcoming vacation plans when suddenly Rosie chimes in and says: My latest blog post is about how to maximize user engagement. One of your friends asks Rosie to share her top tip on maximizing user engagement. Rosie is silent. Everybody goes back to discussing vacation planning.

This scenario happens every single day on Twitter, as busy people try to participate in the Twitter conversation via robot (also known as Twitter management).

Are you using a Twitter Management tool?

Last night, I was at an event (in real life) and saw someone I follow (and who follows me) on Twitter. I went over and said hi. She looked at me blankly. I explained we follow each other on Twitter. She kind of laughed and explained that she uses Commun.it, something that automatically follows people for her, and even tweets for her. So in essence, I have been interacting with a robot.

If your goal for Twitter is engagement, then having a robotic presence is a killer. I am not saying you shouldn't schedule some tweets or use something to let you find people to follow. But if you are not participating in it personally, and you are

basically “tweeting by proxy,” you are nothing more than Rosie Jetson—a robot bringing nothing to the conversation.

Perhaps you are too busy for Twitter

My thought is that if you are too busy for Twitter, perhaps it is not the best platform for you. Twitter is time intensive, no doubt. And if you use it well, you can develop real relationships with people all over the world. If you use it robotically, on the other hand, you get very little if anything from it. You may have a long list of followers and people you are following, but if there is no meaningful interaction, what is the point?

Do you use a Twitter management tool? Why or why not? If you do, what do you get from it? Please share in the comments.

*Looking to jump start your blogging? Join me for the next **How to Write Your Blog** workshop, taking place on April 1 in Washington, D.C. For more details and to register, check out the [Eventbrite](#) page.*