

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](#).*

Does going for a run make you want to smile?

Yesterday, I took advantage of a gorgeous low-humidity, warm (not hot) day and went for a run along the C&O Canal in Potomac. There were several people along the trail, some walking, some biking and some running like me. Some people smiled, nodded or said hi as I passed. Some people ignored me completely (like the bikers who passed me without a warning or even a look back or the runner who pointedly looked straight ahead when passing in the other direction).



Smile! by Rob Kleine on Flickr

Some people are social, and some are not.

It's not just when you are out running on a gorgeous day. It's when you get in an elevator, walk along the street, go in a store, and so forth. Some people will always greet others, and some will pretend they are in their own little fiefdom. Some people are naturally social and some are not. Some people feel connection to those around them, and some do not.

Some of this has to do with factors other than sociability. Perhaps someone has just received bad news or is lost in thought about a pressing problem. Perhaps there is a language or culture barrier.

The same is true on social media. Some people are naturally good at social media and some are not. You can see it by how often they post, how often they like posts, how often they re-tweet, **how often they interact**. Of course, some people will defend their lack of engagement on social media by saying they are "too busy" and they "don't have time."

Then there are those like someone I know named Jon, who blocked off his Facebook wall to avoid unwanted communication and has even asked me to "untag" him from a conversation because he did not care to hear what other people had to say about something he had been involved in. Or the people like Jon, who avoid commenting on posts because they don't want to be dragged into a conversation. My question to Jon and others like him is: why are you on Facebook? Why are you on social media at all?

Here's the thing: If you don't want two-way communication (or even multi-lateral communication), DO NOT get on social media. It is not all about you. It is about the other people too.

People who like to control what others say or with whom they connect, are not naturally good at social media. We see the corporate CEOs who have been forced to open Twitter accounts by their communications advisers and who then do not tweet or respond to tweets.

Getting on social media is about being social. It is about being responsive. It is about interacting. It's about (the hated, overused term) engagement. You can't automate your social media interactions. You need to be present, social and say hi.

Smile! You are on social media.

How companies #fail at using Twitter

Twitter is second only to Facebook in brand marketing (85% to Facebook's 91%, according to Social Media Examiner's 2013 Social Media Marketing Report). It's safe to say that Twitter is part of most organizational social media strategies. Yet, many companies do not seem to understand how to use Twitter or how to use it to connect with their customers.



FAIL stamp by Hans Gewirtz on Flickr.
Read more here:
<http://hans.gerwitz.com/2011/03/07/fail-stamp.html>

How do companies #fail at Twitter?

1. They fail to update their profile

Have you ever gone to a Twitter profile and found a link to a blog that has not been updated since 2009? Or how about a company that does not list its current website? It takes minutes to update a Twitter profile. There is no excuse. And don't even get me started on those companies (and individuals) who are using the default Twitter egg as their profile pic...

2. They fail to seize opportunities

As on most Sundays, yesterday I watched CBS Sunday Morning (some of the best morning TV out there). There were lots of great stories, including one about a Brooklyn pickle manufacturer. It was a nice story, and gave the company great publicity. CBS tweeted out a link to the video and mentioned the company's Twitter handle. I went to check it. The company never promoted its appearance on CBS and the only mention of it was the re-tweet of CBS's video link after the fact. That is a missed opportunity.

3. They fail to use Twitter beyond self-promotion

Too many companies think that Twitter is a one-way megaphone where they can trumpet their awards and recognitions or think of it as an easy way to push out news releases and personnel announcements. While there is room for this type of promotion, if a company's stream is devoted solely to itself, it is not "engaging" with its audience.

4. They fail to understand how people expect companies to use Twitter

Related to the above, companies who use Twitter as a self-promotional news stream, don't understand people expect to be able to interact with them. Twitter is a social media network, and the word social is there first for a reason. Social has up-ended the way that companies must communicate with their audiences. Instead of one-way communication, social media has given companies a way of having two-way communications with their customers.

5. They fail to understand that Twitter is real-time

Perhaps waiting 24 hours to return a phone call or an email is standard business practice, but it won't fly on Twitter. When somebody is asking something on Twitter (or other social media networks), they are expecting a real-time answer, much the same as if they were having an in-person conversation. Answering a Twitter @ query hours or days later is ineffective and completely inappropriate to the medium.

6. They fail to understand "social shame"

Companies who disregard/ignore/fail to check @ messages on Twitter are unaware of the concept of social shame. Like it or not, individuals turn to Twitter when they have a problem, figuring companies want to preserve their reputations and will respond or try to fix the problem. Many companies don't seem to understand the amplification involved in social media. If I complain about a company, my followers may see it but people who use Twitter's search function will also see it.

What other company failures on Twitter have you seen? Please add your thoughts in the comments.

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Failure can include auto-tweeting replies. Seems that Bank of America has been doing that, quite inappropriately, according to this story on Consumerist.

It's only new once

You can't call yesterday's news new. In fact, you probably can't call it news either. And yet, it has become a habit for some marketers, most notably those on Twitter, to use the word "new" or even worse, the word "breaking" to set apart their content. Now, if something is truly new or breaking, then that's fine, but keep in mind that calling something new or breaking is a one-time-only proposition.



News shop by Cyberslayer via Flickr

Once you have called something new or breaking, you can't do it again. Why? Here are three reasons:

1. It is **false advertising**: it is no longer new.
2. It **undermines your credibility**: you are trying to get me to believe something that is not so.
3. It's a **cheap tactic**: is this the only way you can get attention for your product, service or idea?

If I see a Twitter stream replete with the words new or breaking, it better be from a wire service, newspaper or news broadcast. A post that you wrote two weeks ago is not new. An idea that you tweeted out last week certainly is not breaking.

Remember it's only new once, everything else can be classified as gently used or old or even outdated!

Social media amplifies everything

Social media takes a magnifying lens to everything. It makes everything appear bigger and closer (kind of like your side view mirrors).



Fun with magnifying glasses by matlock on Flickr

You've probably heard that social media serves to amplify your message. You tell your friends on Facebook, and they then share it with their friends, and so on. I have come to realize that social media amplifies more than your message. It amplifies mistakes, personality traits and business smarts (or lack thereof).

Mistakes

You used to be able to slip up and it would be forgotten. Not any more. Now, someone will catch your mistake, and put it on Twitter or YouTube. And then people will share that. And before you know it, everyone knows of your mistake. Perhaps forgiven, but not forgotten.

Personality traits

Are you an angry person? You will appear even angrier when trying to contain your ire to 140 characters. Your nastiness will be contained and then disseminated. Are you rude? Not only will the person appalled at your belching at the dinner table know about it, but everyone else will too. Self-centered? It will be evident in endless self-promotional posts. On the other hand, if you are a connector or naturally gregarious, it will be evident because you will have 1000s of followers.

Business know-how

Do you answer your customer queries? If you don't do it regularly and quickly, it will be even more apparent on social media channels. People will complain. And since you aren't used to replying quickly, the problem will grow.

Not sure what social media is for and ignoring it? You can be sure others will not be. You will either look like a fool or lose customers.

For example, today I was looking at service providers "website." All it was a poorly formed WordPress site. There was no contact information. None. No listing of services. No reason why I should hire. In short, it was a disaster. I found a Twitter handle, and tweeted. No response. Better to not be on the web at all!

Remember that social media gives people the ability to share

the good and the bad about you. Small can become big. And that can be a good thing, or it can be a disaster. Your choice!

Don't miss out! Sign up for the next How to blog workshop, taking place on May 17. Details and registration here.

How to tweet like a marketer

Yesterday, about 1.1 million tweets were posted regarding President Barack Obama's Inauguration ceremony. That's a lot of tweets! People commented on everything from Michelle Obama's coat to Richard Blanco's poem to Beyonce's rendition of the National Anthem.

As I watched the Inauguration ceremonies and followed my Twitter stream (using the second screen), I noticed a social media "expert" tweeting out content management tips. Then I noticed another marketing/social media person promoting a blog post, which had absolutely nothing to do with politics, Martin Luther King or inauguration. It struck me as dissonant.

I tweeted out that I was ignoring anything not Inaugural-related, and I thought anything regarding other topics would most likely get lost. This led to an exchange with Kathy Dodd, a Washington, DC-based marketer. It went like this:



So it wasn't just me. What was happening was that those tweets were not following a main tenet of marketing communications: molding your message to the audience's needs. As Kathy said, **the people putting out these messages were not being aware of outside events or of the timing involved.**

In those tweets, there was nothing wrong with the message, but the message failed to have an impact. They came off as extraneous and irrelevant.

Twitter has often been described as one big cocktail party. Can you imagine if you were at a party where everyone was talking about the how much fun they were having at this event, and somebody crashed the party and announced that bananas were on sale across town. Everyone would shake their heads and continue talking about the party, *no matter how much they*

liked bananas because it was a message that wasn't suited to the occasion.

Perhaps the non-Inaugural tweets from yesterday were previously scheduled, we can't really know. But what we do know is that they failed to achieve their goal (selling bananas if they were the party-crashers above) for one simple reason: the people tweeting were not thinking like marketers. **Marketers want to make sure their messages get to the right people at the right time.**

Here are some tips to tweet like a marketer:

- Be aware of major events (some are scheduled and some are not) that will hold a majority of your target audience's attention.
- Time your tweets for when they are most likely to be well received. For example, if you are promoting your lunch specials, don't do it at dinner time.
- Be human, not an automaton. Remember it is *social* media.
- Don't talk at people; have a conversation with them.

What are your thoughts? Agree or disagree?

Dealing with the haters (on social media)

Perhaps its a sign that our social fabric is stretched too thin. Perhaps people don't know how to behave when they have the cover of social media. What is happening more and more is that people are expressing hate and hateful things to strangers on social media channels.

On Twitter, haters will search for ideas that they disagree

with and then attack whoever tweeted those thoughts. On blogs, people will leave nasty comments. On news sites, people will disparage others they disagree with. Social media seems rife with haters and trolls.

How do you deal with all these haters?

First, do NOT take these comments personally.

Second, ignore the hater/troll. Most of these people are attention-seekers or enjoy getting an angry reaction from others. On Twitter, go to the hater's profile and block him or her. On your blog, discard the comment (you are under no obligation to provide a platform for others' ideas, especially if they are contrary to your own and expressed in a disrespectful manner). If feasible, delete the comments on Facebook.

I am not saying to get rid of all comments that show a different viewpoint or even that question you, just get rid of comments that are obviously motivated by hate or the desire to incite argument.

Third, move on. Social media is a constantly changing landscape, and what was interesting and hot five minutes ago may not be now.

How do you deal with haters or trolls? Would you add anything?

How to use Twitter and not be

obnoxious

It seems that there are lots of people out there who either don't know how to use Twitter or don't really care. Their behavior –from ignoring people to being excessively self-promotional– is just plain obnoxious. “In real life” if you engage in obnoxious behavior, people start avoiding you, right?

These are a few obnoxious behaviors that you should avoid:

Behavior: Not responding to @ mentions

Why this is obnoxious: Someone is trying to talk to you. In person, would you ignore someone who is speaking to you?

Behavior: Retweeting every comment that includes a mention of you

Why this is obnoxious: It is clear that you are trying to make sure your followers know that others have mentioned you. In person, what would you think of someone who is constantly saying, things like “Joe really likes me, and told me so.”

Behavior: Bragging or posting completely self-serving tweets

Why this is obnoxious: When you are going on (and on and on) about yourself, you are acting as if the world is your echo chamber. The only person that benefits from your behavior is you.

Behavior: Following people but never interacting with them

Why this is obnoxious: If you are interested in following someone, perhaps it is because you enjoy what they share or have to say. When you don't COMMUNICATE with that person, you are giving absolutely no reason why that person should follow you or value your follow.

Behavior: Never interacting with anyone at all

Why this is obnoxious: Would you go to a party, stand up and start talking and ignore everyone else in the room? Would you show up to a networking event and not speak to anyone? Why are you there? Presumably, you are there because you want to speak with other people—not to or at them.

Behavior: Scheduling Tweets

Why this obnoxious:: When you schedule Tweets you are using Twitter as a place to dump information rather than a place to interact with people. It takes the social out of social media.

Behavior: Automatically Tweeting your check-ins

Why this is obnoxious: Do you walk around announcing yourself everywhere you go? “Hi, I am at the corner of Main and Elm. Hi, now I am dropping my clothes at the dry cleaners. Hi, now I am stopping at the drugstore for my seizure medication. Hi, now I am picking lint off my jacket while standing on line at Starbucks.”

If you don't want to be obnoxious on Twitter, think whether you would do those things if you were to see your “Tweeps” in person. It really is that simple.

What obnoxious behavior have you encountered on Twitter?

The medium and the message

You may remember the famous line by Marshall McLuhan:

The medium is the message.

What does that mean? According to Wikipedia:

meaning that the form of a medium embeds itself in the message, creating a symbiotic relationship by which the medium influences how the message is perceived.

All that is somewhat esoteric...and when McLuhan was writing his observations in 1964, the new frontier was television.

Television may or may not be on the decline, but we are definitely in a world where the Internet and social media are our mass communication media.

I came across an article by Jeremy Porter, on his blog Journalistics, entitled "Are Blog Posts Better Than Press Releases?" Now, I am a huge fan of blogging and blogs, but I don't think blogs are "better" than any other form of communication. However, blogs may be *better suited* to some types of communication.

In my opinion, there is no hierarchy among the media (this one is better than that one) but rather there is a "right-er" medium for the message. For instance:

- If your message is short and ephemeral (an observation, a quick update, etc.) use **Twitter**.
- If your message is long and requires complicated explanations, use a **white paper**.
- If your message is newsworthy, and you want to get out to journalists, use a **press release**.

Choosing which media to use is your job as a communicator. If you don't understand the differences between media, then you are going to have a hard time communicating your message to its target audience.

What are your thoughts? Is there a medium that can be used for all messages? Is there a better medium? Let me know in the comments.

Who should handle your Twitter feed?

Twitter (and any other social network) is a form of public communication. Even individuals who are representing themselves are using it as a platform to reach a broader audience. Throw in a few hashtags and re-Tweets and suddenly you may be talking to millions of people.

At an organizational level, who should handle your Twitter feed? For many organizations, it falls to the communications/marketing folks (fine) and for some it is interns (not so fine). Some organizations have their top executive tweet (really good, I think).

And then there is Sweden, yes the country of Sweden (or rather its tourism board). You see, Sweden has embarked on an experiment to allow citizens to handle the @sweden Twitter feed. There are some rules on the ground—apparently, citizens should not discuss political views.

Someone forgot to tell the latest citizen to handle @sweden, a 27-year old “holy mother of two” Sonja Abrahamsson, that racism should also not be displayed. Sonja apparently is a huge fan of Adolf Hitler, and seems to be just a tad anti-Semitic. You can read all about it in this story on The Atlantic Wire and this story on AdWeek.

How is having Sonja do some stupid (racist) jokes helping to communicate anything positive about Sweden to any readers of the Twitter feed?

The person in charge of your Twitter feed is representing you (your organization, business or country) to the world. He or

she is in effect, your public spokesperson. As such, this person should have the following characteristics:

- Be very knowledgeable about your organization (or country)
- Understand how Twitter works and that it can be quoted and used as a news source
- Be familiar with all key messages, press releases and other public information
- Be prepared to answer questions and comments professionally and not emotionally
- Be enthusiastic about your organization (or country)
- Keep personal opinions to him/herself

What do you think? Who handles your Twitter feed? Would you ever let someone like Sonja take over your feed? Thoughts and comments welcome!