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By LISA WELCHMAN published DECEMBER 17, 2015 EST READ TIME: 7 MIN

RESEARCH

Governing Brand Identity in the Age of Social Media

This post was co-written by Kristina Podnar, VP of consulting services at ActiveStandards.

With each new wave of social software and tools, marketers

have more prominent and sophisticated ways to adopt an online identity and interact with audiences – for better and for worse. The good thing is that organizations now engage with prospects, customers, and the world at large in ways inconceivable a decade ago. The

Governing Brand Identity in the Age of Social Media By Lisa Welchman & Kristina Podnar

not-so-good is that organizations no longer control their brand identity as they once did. Most organizations have adopted some sort of approach to social media – even if it's not very strategic. Most organizations have acquired appropriate Twitter handles and claimed

Facebook identities, and the human resources team regularly uses LinkedIn for recruiting.

Global organizations are localizing social media, focusing on Weibo, Tianji, and QZone in China and Mixi in Japan. Yet staking claims is the simplest part of social media marketing. We've all heard about infamous social media missteps. In honor of the July 4 holiday, American Apparel posted to its Tumblr page a stylized picture of the space shuttle Challenger disaster, mistaking it for an image of fireworks.

Pls tell <u>@americanapparel</u> that this isn't a "cool tumblr photo" of clouds. h/t @slarkpope http://t.co/uwoSR9MwwK pic.twitter.com/SzIsisnz8y

- kenyatta cheese (@kenyatta) <u>July 3, 2014</u>

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crisis management.

McDonald's gave its brand mascot a new look and an associated Twitter handle (@RonaldMcDonald), underestimating the virulence of brand detractors – who promptly

came up with a new hashtag, #notlovingit. Smucker's deleted users' Facebook comments

regarding the company's use of GMOs in its products rather than engaging in a conversation.

Missteps like these lead organizations to become reactive, either shutting down certain social media channels or hesitating to launch new ones. While some of these actions may be warranted, non-participation is not the best approach in the long run. That's where having a clear approach to social media governance comes to the forefront.

When Followers Attack: A Monty Python Guide to Maintaining Social Media Harmony Just as with any marketing channel, social media channels need to be governed. Social media governance focuses on understanding who represents your organization through social

channels and making sure they work in concert with business objectives. It's all about roles

and responsibilities. It's about a focus on issues such as risk mitigation, brand oversight, and

expresses basic principles and measurable outcomes. Organizations need to be intentional about defining a social media strategy. That means handpicking individuals on the strategy team and ensuring that the team represents a broad

lines of business. Getting started: Understand which social channels you are using, why you are using them, and what outcomes you expect to achieve through the use of the channels. 3. Develop policy This people-oriented document governs how employees should behave online; it must offer clear parameters about employees' behavior as representatives of your organization, as well

policies. Most changes will be made by adding to posts and we will mark any additions

Gap Inc. famously writes its social media policy in an informal, no-nonsense style: "If you

Social media policy boils down to creating a competitive advantage while minimizing loss.

clearly."

risks your organization takes are wholly necessary and appropriate. Getting started: Identify an individual who understands the business and its objectives, and ask this person to facilitate conversations with subject-matter experts about the risks and opportunities of using social. This context becomes the foundation of your social media policy.

Think of your social media standards as an extension of your brand standards. They should

spell out the look and feel of your social media channels, the ideal tone of voice for each, and

the values of your organization that you want to spread via social channels. It's the way you

Examples: MailChimp gives practical guidance to writing for Twitter and Facebook with direct

requirements such as "Be appropriate. During major news events, turn off scheduled and

Ben & Jerry's uses standards that specify which colors, illustrations, and sans serif fonts should be used to impart the company's fun, friendly, and relaxed attitude.

Because many organizations don't provide the tactical infrastructure for social media, little or

no attention is given to how the accounts should look and feel, the nuances of properly

Getting started: Identify which aspects of social media are most important to your organization (e.g., brand consistency, tone or voice of communication, responsiveness and

engagement levels to customers) so that you can prioritize the development of associated

localization for targeted social media channels – all of which help the organization execute

opportunity for positive dialogue, audience conversion, and brand loyalty. After all, social media is just another way to express who you are and what your organization stands for. The only difference is that you have over 2 billion eyes and ears potentially looking at your brand.

This article originally appeared in the December issue of Chief Content Officer. Sign up to

receive your free subscription to our bimonthly, print magazine. Find more best practices and

rules of engagement for working with today's top social media platforms. Read our Content

Cover image by Joseph Kalinowski/Content Marketing Institute **Author: Lisa Welchman**

A leading authority on digital governance, Lisa Welchman is president, digital governance solutions at ActiveStandards. Lisa's core strength is helping to resolve differences of opinion among digital stakeholders and maturing digital

← 5 MUST-HAVE TOOLS FOR THE BRAINY SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER THE LOWDOWN ON CREATING PERSONALIZED QUIZZES TO BOOST YOUR MARKETING \Rightarrow

We find it's useful to break the governance task into four major parts: Assemble the social media team Who is moderating and managing your social channels? Signing up for a social media account is a 30-second process that requires little skill. Unfortunately, ease of adoption means some organizations have no idea who owns certain social accounts; even worse, they find relevant and desirable handles aren't owned by their organization. Getting started: Understand and document who in your organization (and outside) is operating in the name of your business. 2. Define strategy The social media strategy is the organization's overall approach to leveraging social channels to meet business goals. The strategy is informed by social media and business expertise, and

spectrum of interests inside your organization. That team should be responsible for establishing an organization-wide approach to social media and expressing what outcomes (qualitative and quantitative) it expects once that strategy is implemented. With a global strategy in place, different parts of the business can localize the strategy to suit their needs.

This "think globally, act locally" view is effective in organizations with multiple products and

as guidance for out-of-work behavior. The policy should include clear rules for dealing with crisis and controversy. Think of it as a risk-minimization tool for your social media presence. Examples: HP's policy spells out how to deal with inaccuracies: "We will correct inaccurate or misleading postings in a timely manner. We will not delete posts unless they violate our

#!%#@# up? Correct it immediately and be clear about what you've done to fix it. Contact the social media team if it's a real doozy."

Organizations take on significant risks by operating in the social world. Much like with public

determine when employees are "on" versus "off the record"; special consideration must be

behavior online, but also aims to protect confidential or proprietary corporate information,

that must take place should a misstep occur (including expectations about deleting online

drive compliance with regulatory and legal requirements, and clarify crisis management steps

posts or related actions). A social media policy that is clearly thought out will ensure that the

relations specialists who speak on behalf of the organization, it can be challenging to

given to what social media specialists do as part of their job and what expectations the

organization has for their performance. Social media policy not only guides employee

promoted tweets."

4. Define standards

want your brand to be personified in social channels.

communication in a consistent and effective manner.

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Future Watch: Expert Talks Social Media Ideas for 2016

Marketer's Guide to Social Media Survival: 50+ Tips.

communicating in short bursts, how online statements might be scrutinized, or how social should be monitored from an analytics and engagement perspective. This can lead to disconnected messaging at best, or brand degradation and PR disasters at worst. Organizations should help themselves by defining social media standards, focusing on the look and feel of social media accounts, the tone and voice used, as well as language

standards. Conclusion If an organization takes a strong approach to social media governance, it can ensure that the investment in social media maps to the right organizational priorities, and that channels are leveraged in a way that limits brand and marketplace risk. For those who are deliberate and embrace social media through a properly governed framework, the payoffs can be significant - from effectively listening and engaging online audiences to leveraging a misstep into an

operations so it works in concert with organizational objectives. Lisa is a soughtafter keynote speaker who presents at conferences around the globe. Follow her on Twitter @lwelchman. Other posts by Lisa Welchman

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