



SOCIAL SENSE

MICHELLE CARVILL EXPLAINS WHY SOCIAL MEDIA IS AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT DISCIPLINE TO ENGAGE WITH AND MASTER

I'm going to start by putting it out there that my belief is that being active on social media makes you a better leader.

Over the years, I've met with scepticism, cynicism and downright disbelief in response to that statement. You may have already rolled your eyes yourself and mentally crossed your arms. If so, I implore you to hear me out.

Leading in a digitally connected world, where technology continues to evolve at a blistering rate, has created

a new set of challenges for today's leaders. And a number of research findings evidence that leaders and organisations are struggling to keep up.

In the leadership space, there have been a number of studies around the positive impact social media literacy creates, both on bottom-line performance of a business – and with developing the all-important trust factor.

At a time when the Edelman TRUST BAROMETER is reporting that trust is at an all-time low, and BRANDfog's

research finds that 82% of consumers are more likely to trust a company whose leadership team engages with social media, there has never been a better time for leaders to be stepping up, cutting through the 'fake news' – and sharing their authentic voice.

Even if you're sceptical about the studies and research findings and don't believe the stats and reports about the impact social media literacy and engagement has on brand and performance, then you can't deny the fact that, despite

privacy fears, social media adoption continues to grow quarter on quarter.

Today, more than 50% of people – that includes you, your family, your friends, your colleagues and your employees (and, of course, your future employees) – spend at least two hours a day on social media channels. In some demographics, that's going to be closer to three hours. And the time we spend keeps increasing.

For millions of people around the world, these technologies are their trusted source to

connect and communicate. Yet even though these technologies are no longer ‘new’, there are still hundreds of thousands of people that struggle with this new way of communicating.

They struggle to keep up, they know they need to be doing more to get their message to their audiences, but they feel out of touch and more than a little overwhelmed. You may be one of them.

The role of any leader comes with responsibility, whether you’re leading a team, a department or an organisation. Your activity needs to make sense, both for you and the business. And, of course, as a leader putting yourself out there in the social media landscape, as well as being inspirational and ‘leading by doing’, there are other potential ‘What if?’ factors to consider:

- What if I say something wrong/controversial/stupid?
- What if my message gets taken out of context?
- What if I upset key partners?
- What if our share price dives?
- What if no one engages?
- What if no one’s interested in what I’ve got to say?
- What if someone attacks me?
- What if I mess it up?

I have put together a 90-day plan (see panel, right) for those who are feeling a bit left behind, yet are keen to learn and curious to explore, but don’t really know where to start. It helps them understand what it’s all about, why to do it, how to get involved and, importantly, where and how to implement activity so it fits in with the bigger picture. It will arm them with strategy and tactics so that they can personally ‘get social’. ❤️

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A 90-DAY PLAN FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

To understand where you want to go and how to get there, it helps to understand where you are right now. To this end, I ask you to do a very quick exercise.

Take to your trusty smartphone – and simply, Google yourself...

Then ask yourself the following questions:

- What do people find when they currently search for you?
- Are you happy with what’s out there?
- How recent are any articles? Are they from years ago – or right up to date?
- Are there any elements that you feel are missing?
- Are you seen to be a thought leader – championing the big *idea*, leading the conversation?
- Is your digital footprint how you want it to be?

This short and simple exercise is often quite illuminating. Do the same exercise for a leader who is embracing social technologies, and what you’ll find is that their online presence is often dominated by current, up-to-date news, which they’ve shared across social platforms.

As well as considering whether you yourself are embracing social technologies, it’s also interesting to gauge your awareness of where your organisation sits.

Does your business have:

- A defined business strategy with key performance indicators? **Y/N**
- Focused goals for social media? **Y/N**
- A blog or news channel on your website? **Y/N**
- A growth mindset, open to new ideas and trends? **Y/N**
- A basic understanding of the benefits of social media and digital tech? **Y/N**
- A content strategy and plan in place? **Y/N**
- A plan to actively listen and measure what customers say? **Y/N**
- A customer-engagement programme? **Y/N**

And now over to you. Do you have:

- A basic understanding of the benefits of social media? **Y/N**
- A social media engagement strategy with KPIs? **Y/N**
- Focused goals for your social media activity? **Y/N**
- A blog or news channel where you share your experience and views? **Y/N**
- A growth mindset – open to new ideas and trends? **Y/N**
- A content plan in place to create relevant and compelling content? **Y/N**
- The means to tune in ‘real time’ and listen to what customers say about your business? **Y/N**

I love the statement by author Zig Ziglar, “Those that aim for nothing hit it with remarkable accuracy”. The key isn’t to dive in and simply ‘engage’, but rather to plan, listen and analyse before you engage, then measure and keep iterating.

Far too often, people simply dive in and start without doing all the necessary steps to ensure that their message and activity is objectively driven. But like anything, the clearer you are on what you are looking to achieve, the better you can prepare and the more successful the outcome. If you haven’t been doing anything with the social channels until now, then don’t rush into it.

Key aspects of your 90-day plan

- Understand where you are now and where you want to be.
- Get clear on your objectives, get clear on your ‘why’, your purpose and your message.
- Understand where your audiences are – spend some time ‘listening in’ and understanding what’s being said, by whom and where.
- Select which social technologies are right for you – these may include internal intranets or social networks, your organisation’s blog or newsletter, LinkedIn’s Pulse, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Learn about the channels and how to optimise your activity accordingly.
- Develop a content strategy. Consistency is key, so you’re going to need content. Find your rhythm. The aim is to make content creation a habit. And if you don’t plan for content to happen, it generally doesn’t happen. Set goals and targets, and block time out in your diary to commit to content – one blog or vlog a month, week or quarter – whatever fits with your overarching plan.
- Work with your team, your agency and get training and support where you need it. You’re not alone – while it has to be your authentic voice and your views, you can get help with content creation, writing, video, and so on.
- Measure and understand what’s working and what’s not. Ramp up and refresh as necessary.

At the end of the day, it’s all about doing what works for you. But be sure to spend some time planning and listening; don’t simply ‘dive in’ and get started. That’s not smart or focused. And remember, Rome wasn’t built in a day. Be patient and consistent – make social something you *are* rather than something you *do*.