

LET'S TALK SOCIAL MEDIA

A FEW months ago, I noticed an advertisement in one of the mail-outs I receive regularly. It was promoting something like a “minimal impact social media solution”. I’m sure the guy promoting it was billing himself as a “social media guru”. The concept was that he could sell me an “add on” to my business, that would do all the social media marketing that I needed, without me having to change a thing. My business could just tick along nicely, and he would do everything. Or so it seemed.

There is a problem with this. You may think that Twitter is all about people sharing what they have had for breakfast – or you may already be using a business Facebook page, a blog, or recruiting on LinkedIn, but the story is the same. You cannot get the best out of these tools without a fundamental change in your business.

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To quote Euan Semple: “Social computing requires a mind-shift from previous ways of doing business and requires high levels of trust and confidence from those engaging in it. How you communicate your intentions and encourage take up is crucial.”

Social media is not only something you can no longer ignore, it’s part of a bigger shift that is changing everything. Boundaries are falling, and they are leaving big gaps in the way we used to do things.

The big movement is to trust, openness and transparency. This is showing up in many facets of the 21st century world, but for business, it is all about opening the shop or factory walls, and letting our customers in. This may seem a little scary, but we do get to choose how we respond.

Just as social media is impacting on the newspaper business, it is affecting all industries. We are moving from an economy of scarcity – where you could lock things away, and charge high prices to drip feed them out – to an economy of abundance. It’s no longer a zero-sum game; it’s now more about sharing and win-win.

So how does this affect business? Rather than losing control, we can open the way for our customers – and also our staff – to tell us what they want to see in our products and services. They know what they want, and they are happy to tell us. Social media tools can give us the ears to hear what they are saying.

Social Media tools use computers – even those little ones we carry around in our pockets – but don’t let this trick you into thinking that it’s all up to those IT guys. These new tools affect all facets of business, so they should not be left up to just one part of the business to run. There’s something in this for Marketing and even HR.

Social Media outside the business is for letting your customers, suppliers and other stakeholders join the team and build the business potential that they can see. Inside the business, it is for truly empowering staff to

be part of the business. Recent research has shown that the top two reasons for using collaborative tools inside businesses are team productivity and decision making (cost reduction rated a distant ninth).

Other research has shown that Australians are at the top of the world not only in Social Media take-up, but also in hours spent per month using Social Media. More and more of this population are also saying that they want to use these tools to interact with businesses.

Another way to look at this is – what is the risk of not engaging with your audience this way – when your competitors are?



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He is a regular presenter and speaker at conferences in Australia and overseas, and a part-time staff member at three universities in Melbourne. He has researched and written about communication, conversation, celebrities, cognition, communities – and cats. He has contributed to a range of books and publications, and his work has also been translated into Portuguese. Keith is a member of the International Association of Business Communicators, and of Mensa, and has appeared on radio and in quiz programs on TV. He blogs at delarue.net, is married with three children, and lives in Pascoe Vale.