



Don't FREAK!

Social media just one part of the marketing mix

By Andrea Obston

If you're feeling guilty, outdated or downright dowdy because your business is not using social media, consider this column your safe island in the storm. "Just do it" may work for Nike, but it has no place in your marketing efforts.

The mere size and speed of social networking has made everyone sit up and take notice. The mantra, "If Facebook were a country it would be the world's third largest" is enough to make any businessperson's heart go pit-pat. Or consider this: a recent Consumer Reports' "State of the Net" survey said that "...two out

of three online U.S. households use social networks such as Facebook and MySpace, nearly twice as many as a year ago."

Guilt about missing the boat creeping into your brain? Stop it! I promise this will be a guilt-free read. So continue on without fear.

If you get nothing else from this column, take this one thought: Just because a marketing tactic exists, doesn't mean it's right for your business. Social media is one of many ways to reach your customers.

Some were there when my grandmother ran her salon in the 1920s, such as newspaper advertising, samples and making sure that every aspect of the business pampers the senses. (I still keep my business cards on the exotic Japanese brass plate that held her appointment cards.) And some were invented within the last few

years, such as blogs, Facebook fan pages and YouTube channels. They all work in some form or another. But they won't necessarily drive the right customers into your chair or onto your massage table if they don't suit your marketing objectives and client needs.

The bottom line here is that any marketing effort starts with the answers to a few key questions:

- Who are my most profitable customers?
- What do they want from their salon or spa experience?
- How does my business deliver it?
- Why would they come to me?
- Where do they go for information before they buy?
- How can I make them into loyal customers who come back and send in their friends?

Essentially I am asking you

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to decide who you are, who you want to be in the eyes of your clients and how you can deliver what they want. Once you know that, you can be a more intelligent marketer on all fronts.

Enough of Marketing 101. What about this crazy idea of social media? Let's start with a definition: Social media is web-based communications, which seek to set up a conversation, a relationship. It's interactive, personal and something that people invite into their lives. Contrast that with advertising, which essentially intrudes into your customers' lives. Think about it – people turn to their Facebook page as an activity. Ads interrupt an activity (say reading the newspaper or watching TV) to deliver their message.

So, if you're interested in really maintaining or creating a dialogue with customers and prospective customers, then social media – be it a Facebook fan page, a YouTube channel, or a blog – may be for you. Use them to offer practical advice that your customers will want to read and pass along, such as tips on summer hair care. Those who use social media to talk about themselves (the iconic teenage “I'm going to the mall” tweet) offer nothing. As with any marketing effort, it's not about what you want to say; it's about what your customers want to hear.

Think of the social media world as one giant cocktail party.

When you go to such functions, with whom do you end up spending your time? The person who offers you an interesting conversation or the one who assaults you with diatribes about themselves?

So, here are a few tips on whether or not social media is for you:

- Do you or someone on your staff have the time to devote at least five hours a week (throughout the week) to updating and monitoring social media?
- If not, do you have access to a 20-year-old (or other tech-savvy person) who can do this for you, has existing experience on the Web and can be trained on what you offer well enough to essentially hold social media conversations about your business?
- Do you currently participate in social media and enjoy it?
- Do you cater to the kind of customer who can answer yes to the question above?
- Do you understand that your picture of the average social media user may be way off?

So what do you do next? Before subscribing to the “Just Do It” principle, I suggest you do two things: 1) Look long and hard at the customers you want and how

they use social media; and 2) Get a lot more literate about creative uses of social media.

Start by reading two wonderful blogs: Mashable.com and FreshNetworks.com. Get smarter; get more comfortable with your choices and get going in the way that best suits your business.

No guilt; no worries; just bottom-line communications. However that looks. 💰

A few facts about social media:

- The average user of social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn or MySpace is more affluent and more urban than the average American, according to Nielsenwire.
- A profile of users of social media from a site called Royal Pingdom tells us:
 - » Those 35 to 44 dominate users of social media.
 - » The average social network user is 37 years old.
 - » LinkedIn, with its business focus, has a predictably high average user age: 44.
 - » The average Twitter user is 39 years old.
 - » The average Facebook user is 38 years old.
 - » The average MySpace user is 31 years old.



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