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Studies on Internet usage report that two out of three people actively use social media. Average usage varies between 30 minutes to four hours a day depending on the demographic you look at. Social media has clearly reached critical mass and become a way of life for many people. You find people checking their favorite social media applications everywhere—at the supermarket, on the train, in the car, and I can only guess, but probably in bed. It makes me wonder what people spent their time doing before Facebook, Google+, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and Twitter. It also makes me wonder if some wouldn't be better off without social media.

Don't misunderstand. I know social media offers many benefits. Social media enables friends to stay in touch, business acquaintances to exchange information, and ideas to be shared to name just a few. However, there are also liabilities. People become so engrossed in their virtual world of informational updates that they ignore opportunities for genuine old-fashioned face-to-face conversation. They ignore their work and family responsibilities. They even crash their cars because they look at their phones instead of the road.

From a marketing perspective, social media and messaging can be a liability too—especially to the consumer. Marketers frequently abuse their unlimited ability to send information to the masses by bombarding us with a cacophony of sales and marketing noise. They generate messages daily that drown us in advertisements and superfluous updates. In retaliation, as if in a battle, we use software filters to delete their unwanted spam.

So here we are. People are employing systems to send messages to people who don't want them and people are employing systems to filter out unwanted messages from those who send them. Systems are talking to systems and Internet usage statistics continue to set new records. Am I the only one who thinks that the quality isn't going up with the quantity?

Social media and messaging are here to stay because they offer many benefits, but don't believe all the hype. If you are marketing a product or service, be careful about replacing quality with quantity. Just because you can send information to everyone doesn't mean you should. Volume alone isn't effective. As a consumer, neither is all the information you receive worth the time to read it.

Regardless of your social media and messaging intentions, here are five social media and electronic messaging liabilities to be wary of:

- 1. Hiding behind an online facade** – Use online messaging to complement your communications, not replace it. There is still tremendous value in creating genuine relationships based on old-fashioned face-to-face communications. People still want to conduct business with people they truly know and trust. People still want to have real-time interactive conversations, not simple batch exchanges of 140-160 character messages.
- 2. Being careless with distance** – When people are surrounded by the protection of their automobile, they say and do things they wouldn't normally do. The same holds true for messaging. In the same way that people regret their actions behind the wheel of a car, so do people who are too quick to say what's on their mind and hit the send button. Use discretion in what you choose to put online. Realize that it is equivalent to publishing content on the front page of a newspaper.
- 3. Allowing quantity to replace quality** – Big usage statistics and subscriber numbers might seem impressive, but they are meaningless if they don't translate into results. Volume only counts when it produces value. Landing in someone's spam filter is not valuable and nothing to be proud of. Neither are messages that make false claims, sensationalize the foolish, and set low standards for writing style. Don't succumb to the philosophy that mediocrity is all right. It isn't.



Social Media – The Untold Liabilities

- 4. Putting more value on knowing than doing** – Knowledge is valuable and staying informed is a worthwhile pursuit—to a point. When you find yourself spending more time being informed and entertained than doing, know that you've become a spectator rather than a practitioner. Consider that you don't have to know constantly what people are doing, or let them know what you are doing. Replace some knowing with some doing. Don't let your experience be conceptual.
- 5. Losing focus and being eternally distracted** – When you have work to do or a project to complete, turn off your messaging. When you are in a meeting or talking to someone, turn off your notifications. When your mental presence is supposed to be part of your physical presence, allocate your attention commensurately. Be respectful and disciplined enough to give your attention to that which is most important, not merely that which vibrates or rings every few seconds.

Use social media and electronic messaging to complement great communications and enable great results, not supplant them.

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