

CMOs and Twitter - have they joined the celebration?

By [Willem Smit](#)

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LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND: Twitter users now send more than 140 million Tweets a day. With more than 20% of the tweets being related to products and/or brands, this means that every day 28 million tweets potentially concern your brand or company.



The microblogging sphere has undeniably become a worthwhile place for listening to customers and potentially influencing perceptions, attitudes and behaviours by engaging into their conversations.

The relevant question has therefore moved from if marketers should get involved to how they should deal with it. Not only Twitter, but also social media in general poses novel challenges to brand building and management. Basically it comes down to the fact that control is handed over to consumers. The times in which the firm controls what the brand stands for are gone. Consumers own the brand. Having lost control, today's competition necessitates that brands learn to respond more quickly. It would make sense that marketers keep their own fingers on the pulse of a dynamic and vast media space like Twitter, and follow sound marketing advice: listen, listen, listen! Doing so enables marketers to learn first-hand about what customers are saying about brands and competitors. Yet is there something else that can be done? If so, what should be done?

What are CMOs of the leading brands doing? As Twitter recently celebrated its fifth birthday, have they joined in the celebrations? Are they even on Twitter? If so, how often do they tweet? And what do they tweet? We systematically examined CMO's Twitter presence of Interbrand's 25 most valuable global brands. Of the top 25, 17 brands have assigned a CMO. Only half of them have a clearly identifiable Twitter account.

#	BRAND	CMO	twitter account	locked	tweets	following	followers
	CMOs with Twitter account						
1	Coca cola	Joseph V Tripodi	@JVTRIPODI	Yes	n.a.	1	0
2	IBM	Jon Iwata	@coastw	.	217	10	1399
4	Google	Lorraine Twohill	@lorr2hill	.	1	11	40
5	GE	Beth Comstock	@bethcomstock	.	463	404	3782
8	Nokia	Jerri DeVard	@JerriDeVard	.	n.a.	1	0
10	HP	Bill Wohl	@billwohlHP	.	808	83	655
13	P&G	Marc Pritchard	@PGCMO	.	-	-	15
14	Cisco	Blair Christie	@BlairChristie	.	14	17	321
19	Samsung	Ralph Santana	@ralphsantana	.	12	27	65

Source: Twitter - accessed 22 March 2011.

Very different Twitter styles

It seems that the nine top brand CMOs active on Twitter have not found one single right answer. They have very different tweeting styles. On one extreme of the spectrum are Joseph Tripodi from the world's largest brand Coca Cola, Lorraine Twohill from Google, Jerri DeVard from Nokia and Marc Pritchard from P&G. They have an account, but have not tweeted

and as a consequence their number of followers is limited. It could be that they only use it for listening.

On the opposite end of the spectrum we find CMOs with a more active style, like IBM's Jon Iwata, GE's Beth Comstock and HP's brand-new CMO Bill Wohl. Jon's tweets come in waves. Days pass without a tweet from him, and then there are four to five days a months on which he sends out larger numbers of messages. The topics of all his tweets are IBM-related: announcements about the opening of an IBM branch, strategic priorities and investor briefings.

More regular and frequent are @bethcomstock and @bill_wohlHP's tweeting behaviours. Beth is GE's long-time CMO and she regularly shares her experiences about events and customer visits. Bill was recently appointed to the position after he joined from SAP. He immediately took it on himself to start tweeting and in fact has done so 20 times in the last 15 days. His content is a mix of company press releases and personal experiences.

Even more personal and experimental is Barry Judge from US retailer Best Buy (@BestBuyCMO, barryjudge.com/). Barry sends two / three tweets every day mixing work with play. A striking example is: "Trying this to see what happens. I have a room at Little Nell's in Aspen from 23-27 March. I can't go. Anyone know how I can find a renter?"

Your own voice on Twitter

Within this spectrum, it is key to find your own voice. It is important to determine what style is appropriate for you and your brand. There are a couple of issues needed to take into consideration. A more active tweeting style has both benefits and drawbacks. It is up to you to weigh them.

Benefits of active tweeting are informational and reputation building:

- Quicker speed in customer sensing - Twitter is one of the fastest ways to identify what is happening with your brand
- Less dependent on internal customer insight sources. Having your own direct channel of information disciplines the insights that company channels provide you with.
- More approachable - opening a Twitter account gives external audiences the possibility to contact you instantly. At least it shows that you and your brand are open for feedback and sends a signal that you personally care.

Drawbacks of active tweeting are time-consuming, distraction and confusion:

- More distraction - the content of many tweets, according to research firm Pear Analytics, is 40% filled with pointless babble, plus much of it is conversational and self-promotion. If "lists" are not carefully designed and "Whom-to-follow" is not well done, it is difficult to filter what is important. Then tweeting creates a lot of useless distraction.
- More confusion - personal branding can get confused with company branding. It is dangerous to post a disclaimer that says: "what I post here is really my opinion, and not necessarily the opinion of my company"

If you do not want to make this trade-off, is it still an option to just open a Twitter account and then only listen? No, not really, because remaining a wall-flower may violate a critical communication law formulated by Austrian-American

psychologist and philosopher Paul Watzlawick who claimed that: "no one cannot communicate." Meaning that staying silent on Twitter also sends a signal. A signal of silent presence may well be interpreted as ambiguous and could easily be explained as being "uninterested", "too busy with other things than with customers", or even "arrogant." It is up to you, and your company to weigh the pros and cons of a more active Twitter style.

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