

# B2B marketing

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# You are what you tweet

Not even the most proficient social media practitioners have total control of what happens in the tangled 2.0 web. Do you know what to do when things go wrong? By **Alex Aspinall**

**S**ocial media has transformed the way businesses are engaging with the outside world; genuine conversation and interaction have now replaced the monologues of old, and the benefits are numerous. Relationships can be individually nurtured with ease, brands can be reactive to real-time events and they can present a more informal fun image. Social media allows marketers the opportunity to listen to what the market is saying and it offers numerous opportunities for innovative marketing campaigns.

But it's not all fun and games. Engagement in social media can bring about unexpected negative consequences, as Powwownow discovered with its recent 'Up for a three-way' campaign.

## Hijacked hashtag

The 'three-way' in question saw the conference call provider stage the world's longest three-way telephone conversation, with celebrities Phil Tufnell, Patrick Monahan and Jodie Marsh stationed at three different transport hubs in London, briefed to engage in a continuous 24-hour conference call.

The campaign attracted a great deal of attention, especially online thanks to the dedicated live Twitter feed. But decisive action was required when dissenting voices were heard echoing around the Twittersphere.

Powwownow had encouraged tweeters to send questions to the celebrities, which they did. But when some people realised there was no censoring or monitoring on the campaign's dedicated hashtag channel, it flooded a series of negative comments, abuse and information about what certain people were eating for lunch. One person even decided to pen a blog openly criticising the campaign.

Powwownow had to make a quick decision regarding how to respond to the hijacking of their channel. Rather than selectively deleting or responding angrily, it opted to continue allowing the comments through. Andy Pearce, CEO of Powwownow, also replied using his own Twitter account, stating, "As CEO of @powwownow I'm totally chuffed that Twitter is alive with talk of #pwnthreeway



**Powwownow employed celebrities Patrick Monahan, Jodie Marsh and Phil Tufnell as part of its Twitter campaign**

please let our hashtag know what you had for dinner."

The negative feedback stopped almost instantly. Public comments were posted in praise of Powwownow's handling of the incident and, most importantly, a potentially damaging social media outing

was turned into further positive PR for the company and its campaign.

## Appropriate action

The result was not brought about through chance though. Powwownow obeyed the first rule of social media engagement.

## Five steps for social media measurement

**Christian Howes**, head of solutions engineering for online intelligence specialist Webtrends, outlines the vital stages of social measurements B2B brands should bear in mind on the social web

### 1. Choose your channel

Social media is the new buzz, but businesses can misjudge their potential appeal in this channel. Consider how you will make your brand appealing to potential followers.

### 2. Take the pulse

When you've set up and decided on your approach to social media, keep track of your audience using analytics tools.

### 3. Engage

Make use of workflow tools and delegate responsibilities to your workforce. This way you can quickly monitor, answer responses and supervise engagement opportunities.

### 4. Gauge the power of influencers

Monitor the buzz around your brand. Who is commenting, what they are saying and how is your outreach driving traffic?

### 5. Decide

Make better, more informed business decisions based on the insight you gain from social media.

Guy Levine, CEO of digital marketing agency Return On Digital, explains, "The first essential skill of online reputation management is to know the point at which it all goes wrong. So many companies don't even know when they are being spoken about online and find out when it is too late. Using services like Google Alerts, Social Mention or Radian 6 will inform you straight away." (Look out for our Jan '11 issue for a review of social media monitoring platforms.)

Once you are aware your brand is taking a battering on the Internet, you can start doing something about it. This is where the important decisions need to be made. It is vital to remain calm, as Gary Schwartz, SVP marketing, at software vendor Confront, says. "Don't assume that everything you hear about your brand on Twitter is either accurate or representative of how your broad customer base feels about your company. Without doing some follow-up work, it's impossible to know whether the chatter is reflective of your brand's reputation."



So many companies don't even know when they are being spoken about online and find out when it is too late



**Guy Levine**  
CEO  
Return On Digital

But this should not be read as the green light to do nothing, as it could easily be as damaging as wading in without thinking. Indeed, swift action is almost always advocated. Also, it is often advisable to address the people taking issue with your brand directly. The key objective is damage limitation – wrestling back control of the situation – but also, if possible, you should aim to turn the negative press into something beneficial. This is much more difficult but all the more rewarding.

### Taking control

Powwownow managed to silence their critics by presenting a human face. Directly addressing the trouble causers and showing the company's commitment to the 'social' element of social media enabled Powwownow to transform criticism into a positive message.

This is perhaps the key to successful online engagement. The beauty of social media is that it facilitates meaningful exchange, much like a conversation. You can't always predict or control what people are going to say about you. Accepting this fact, as hard as it may be when your brand's name is on the line, is vital. If you can't, you should probably think twice before dipping your toe in the water.

It is fair to say that social media is not for every business. But, since pretty much everyone else in the world is tweeting, Facebooking and Link(ing)In, there does have to be one final word of warning.

As Katrina Gallagher, online marketing manager at marketing agency Push On, says, "Some business don't want to be involved in social media but the fact of the matter is that they already are. The chances are that someone somewhere is talking about your brand, your people, your products and services or your business sector. The question is whether you want to join the conversation or leave that to the competition."

## Jargon buster

**RFM**



by **Richard Lees**  
chairman  
DBG

### What does that mean?

RFM stands for 'recency, frequency and monetary value'. It's a method for analysing customer behaviour and defining market segmentation. Categories can be created for each term, and segments can be made by pick-and-mixing the categories.

### And in English?

It's a relatively straight-forward way to segment your customers so that you can target them more effectively.

### Where does it come from?

This segmentation model has been used since the early days of database marketing.

### What does it mean for my business?

This targeting technique is simple and effective. It requires no specialised statistical software, the results are easily understood and it can lead to increased ROI.

### What do I need to do about it?

Make a plan (which could involve support from a specialist agency) to create sensible and useful categories and segments, then apply them to forthcoming promotions.

### How do I find out more?

Most data management/marketing text books will devote space to RFM strategies and the DMA lists agencies specialising in data management.

### Is it a paradigm shift or just jargon?

RFM is clever, well-used and extremely useful but it isn't without its limitations. For example, it doesn't try to predict behaviour by looking at potential life stage transitions and it can lead to over marketing if the higher spending segments are targeted more frequently than the less profitable ones. So I wouldn't say it was a paradigm shift, more 'essential jargon'.

**Jargon rating:** ★★★★★

**Do you have an idea for a jargon buster? Email your suggestions to: victoria.paley@b2bm.biz**