



first direct

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GET IT RIGHT OR GET OUT – THE MESSAGE FOR COMPANIES MANAGING THEIR BRANDS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

- **Social media is changing the way brands build trust**
- **'Brand personalities' begin to change as employees act as spokespeople**
- **Organisations face up to the challenge of social media tone of voice**

As social media enters its era of maturity consumers are becoming weary of being packaged up and sold to with marketing messages hijacking their personal online interactions, according to a new report published today.

According to the new report, "*Maintaining your brand voice in the social era*", commissioned by one of the pioneers in the use of social media for financial services, **first direct**, and authored by social media consultancy It's Open, organisations are having to rethink the ways they have historically managed their brands.

Social media channels are proving pivotal in the process of rebuilding consumer trust in the post financial crisis world. They are important tools in the shift of trust from traditional authority figures like the chief executives and senior managers to informed employees, peers or eloquent academics and independent experts.

But if customers trust an organisation's employees more than they trust its management, how does the organisation learn to trust those employees to speak on its behalf?

Rebecca Dye, Social Media Manager at **first direct**, said: "We've built our reputation on the relationships we have with customers and our unique telephone service is result of recruiting skilled communicators. However, in an environment where voices can't be heard, the brand personality is much harder to distinguish and so the need for brand differentiation becomes even more important.

"We commissioned the report to look at best practice as well as highlighting the issues and potential pitfalls facing an organisation in managing its brand. The report also sets out the 10 brand management principles for the 'mature era' of social media and can be downloaded in full at <http://socialmedialeadershipforum.org/> *"

*NB – full link, directly to the report can be found in the Notes to Editors below.

Suw Charman-Anderson, the report's author, said: "Companies need to embrace social media, to 'go deep or go home', and that means acknowledging that companies don't tweet, people do.

"As social media matures and becomes a part of everyday life, brands are struggling to find ways to stand out amongst the social media chatter. They have to develop a brand voice that's consistent across different channels, and flexible enough to adapt to each customer's needs.

"Brands need to add real value to the social media conversation, to be interesting, entertaining or useful. Only through creating strong relationships with customers will they develop the trust that has become so pivotal in the current media landscape, and which is increasingly hard to gain."

Companies have realised that it's not the corporation that speaks but their workforce and that a consistent tone of voice is key. Conversations with consumers now take place across a variety of platforms at various levels of corporate seniority. Companies are learning to show humility and let their online communities solve business problems.

Justin Hunt, Founder of ItsOpen and the Social Media Leadership Forum, said:

"Companies doing business via social media promised to treat consumers as individuals, and instead they are often talked to as if they are part of a faceless mass. They are fed up of the truth of the mantra *if you're not paying, you are the product*.

"Organisations treating people as products are alienating them. Having an authentic brand voice and forging strong relationships with customers, for example by listening to their ideas for improving products or services, builds greater trust, reducing the likelihood that they will disengage from your brand."

The report's findings are based on interviews with social media experts at well known organisations including O2, Sainsbury's, GiffGaff, The Met Office and Teleperformance, and one of the regular themes highlighted is the concern over the proliferation of social networks. Companies can become overwhelmed by the sheer number of channels they are expected to be active in, and in turn consumers are finding themselves overwhelmed by social media spam as less experienced brands try to grab attention with ill thought out campaigns.

This, in essence, is the biggest challenge for organisations highlighted by the report. Although there needs to be some leeway in the way those running corporate social media accounts can respond, staff need to be able to quickly develop and use their own judgement to avoid alienating the online community.

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Notes to Editors

The new report, "*Maintaining your brand voice in the social era*", written by Suw Charman-Anderson on behalf of **first direct** and It's Open, is available to download at:

<http://socialmedialeadershipforum.org/index.php/blog/news/report-maintaining-your-brand-voice-in-the-social-era/>

About First Direct

first direct is recognised as one of the more advanced banks in the social customer revolution. As well as its Facebook page, **first direct** uses social media to engage with customers through sites like YouTube, Twitter and Flickr. The bank has recently launched firstdirecthelp@twitter as an extension to its customer service offering. The company has an award winning social media newsroom, its own customer social crowdsourcing network, **first direct** Lab, and has won awards for individual social media campaigns such as 'Live', a campaign that aggregated what people were saying about the bank.

About It's Open

It's Open helps organisations become social enterprises.

Its consultants work collaboratively using web-based applications, across geographies, time zones and areas of expertise to deliver the highest quality consulting and research within social media enterprise solutions.

It's Open also founded the Social Media Leadership Forum, a business network where executives collaborate, learn, share ideas and agree best practice strategies for successfully engaging with social media to improve the performance of their organisations.

www.itsopen.co.uk

www.socialmedialeadershipforum.org

About Suw Charman-Anderson

Suw is one of the UK's social media pioneers. With a decade of social media experience, Suw has helped clients worldwide use social tools for collaboration and communication internally and to build customer relationships externally. Suw writes a blog about publishing, self-publishing and crowdfunding for Forbes.

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