

# Social Media Primer

## The Top 10 Truths of Social Media



- 1. Even if you're not using social media, your internal and external audiences are.** The rise of social media has forever changed your audience's expectations of the immediacy, authenticity and relevance of communications. When a Fortune 500 CEO, political leader or a rock star is just a Tweet away, the sense of connection, access and authenticity is profoundly altered. When news of a disaster streams through Facebook faster than through online news sites, the perception of time is compressed to a point where seconds matter. And when corporate titans and government leaders offer an unprecedented degree of transparency via social media, expectations of information are forever changed.
- 2. It will transform your organization.** Social media is not a self-contained bubble that can be kept in the back corner of the communications shop. It is a transformative medium that can have a profound impact throughout your organization, on your corporate culture and on how you engage with your stakeholders.
- 3. It is the death knell of command-and-control communication.** The old way of communicating was all about hierarchy and tight constraints on what is communicated to whom and on what schedule. Social media has turned this on its head, and there's no going back.
- 4. It is not free.** By nature, social media requires a long-term commitment to participating in online conversations in real time. While launching social media accounts may not have a direct cost, there are very significant costs to maintaining them in terms of staff time and focus.
- 5. It changes internal communications.** Just because your organization doesn't use social media externally doesn't mean you can ignore it internally. If anything, its impact is especially significant in internal communications, since it transforms the expectations and cultural context for the exchange of information. It's worth thinking about how this transformation can create opportunities to build engagement, collaboration and co-creation.
- 6. One size doesn't fit all.** Social media is a catch-all term for several different channels, each of which has its own particular strengths and applications. It's wise to think about your communications objectives and select the specific platforms that best meet your needs, because you probably don't have the resources to do all of them well. You must adapt your messaging, tone and approach to fit the medium.
- 7. It is infinite.** Traditional communications channels have a natural end: at some point, you run out of copies of your brochure or have reached the last speaking engagement in a roundtable tour. By contrast, social media is limitless in its scope, reach and scale. Keep this in mind as you create your activities, since there's no magic number of Twitter followers or 'likes' on Facebook that will spell success.
- 8. There is an opportunity cost to social media.** It can have a highly consuming effect on staff time, resources and mental space. Consider the opportunity costs involved to make conscious decisions about your focus and investments: if you're doing social media, what else are you not doing?
- 9. Social media effectiveness is a long-term game.** How many executives wake up and decide that they want a Twitter campaign for a major initiative next week? It's not possible. Social media has to do with building connections and profile through a sustained effort over time. Remember that expectation management is a core competency in strategic communications—and there may be no forum in which this is more true than in social media.
- 10. Get comfortable with the uncomfortable.** Social media is messy business; the velocity and volume of content is such that it can't be perfect. The key is to define your objective and then make the most of it.