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The Chartered
Institute of Marketing

SOCIAL MEDIA BENCHMARK WAVE 3 RESULTS JUNE 2013

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

Managing social media risk and reputation is a priority for marketers, but in need of a more robust approach. Explore the latest findings.

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THE NEW POWER

Isn't social media fantastic? Minute by minute, consumers from across the planet congregate in the same place to share what they think, what they like and what they're up to. What's more, businesses and brands are able to join this conversation, connecting directly with their customers in a way never previously achievable. Add to this the cost efficiencies of social media and it's almost too good to be true.

The benefits of social media are indeed significant. Social media is a cost-effective tool offering up a wealth of benefits; not least the ability for businesses to successfully achieve highly targeted customer reach while fostering meaningful conversations with their audiences. This can ultimately lead to the dissemination of key messaging and values of a brand which, in turn, helps to build loyalty and create brand ambassadors for your business. The problem is, everything comes at a price.

What's developed over the last decade isn't merely a new, low-cost marketing channel. Rather, we are witnessing a paradigm shift in how people interact, communicate and consume information.

The permeation of technology and adoption of social media platforms has led to a fundamental shift in power. Whereas businesses may previously broadcast their messages and ideals to a public audience, we are now seeing the amplification of individual consumers' opinions and influence through their social networks. There has been a power shift, and it sits with the consumer.

What does this mean for businesses? Risk and reward in equal measures.

These days, a single frustrated customer or a disgruntled employee can launch a media-grabbing campaign against a company before the business even hears of their complaint. It's what we call the democratisation of conversations and the implications for a brand can be profound.

## MANAGING SOCIAL MEDIA RISK AND REPUTATION

The Social Media Benchmark is an on-going research initiative exploring how marketers are adapting to, investing in and getting value from social media. In the third wave of this survey, we explore marketers' attitudes towards reputational risk and how their organisations are trying, or not, to mitigate this.

You can find out more about this research initiative, as well as see and share an infographic of these results, at **www.smbenchmark.com/results**, or read on for a summary of our views.

DON'T STOP, JUST BE READY

This isn't to suggest retrenchment in the face of a brand battering, we simply recommend readiness. Whether or not an organisation chooses to engage with customers, clients, consumers or citizens in a social space is irrelevant – the conversation will happen regardless. It's how prepared businesses are for it that will make all the difference.

What's essential, as with any risk or vulnerability, is for an organisation to understand the issues and make the appropriate preparations to mitigate or avoid them.

FIGURE 1: Business's attitudes towards the reputational risks presented by social media.
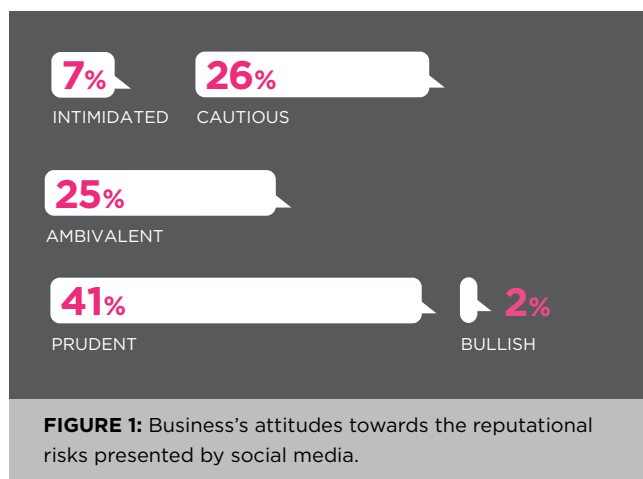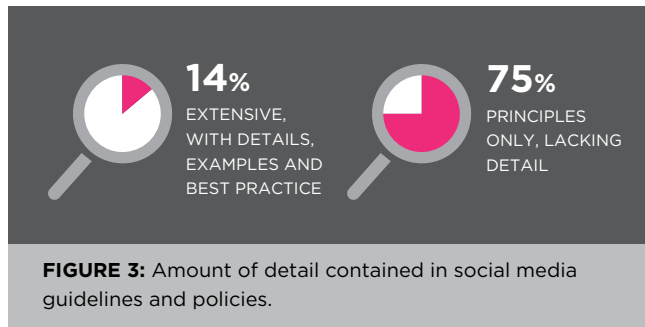
In this free flow of information and communication, an organisation can't hope to control the conversation or silence its critics, but it can make sure its own people – whether they work in marketing and communications or not – understand the role of social media in business and how to best represent an organisation's brand, beliefs and opinions online through well developed and internally communicated social media policies and guidelines.

RISK IS REAL, BUT...

In this latest research, readiness to address risk fell short of expectations - whilst 98 per cent of businesses acknowledge the risks and vulnerabilities of social media (figure 1), only 44 per cent of organisations currently have a defined set of social media guidelines and policies in place (figure 2).

FIGURE 2: Percentgae of organisations with social media guidelines and policies in place.
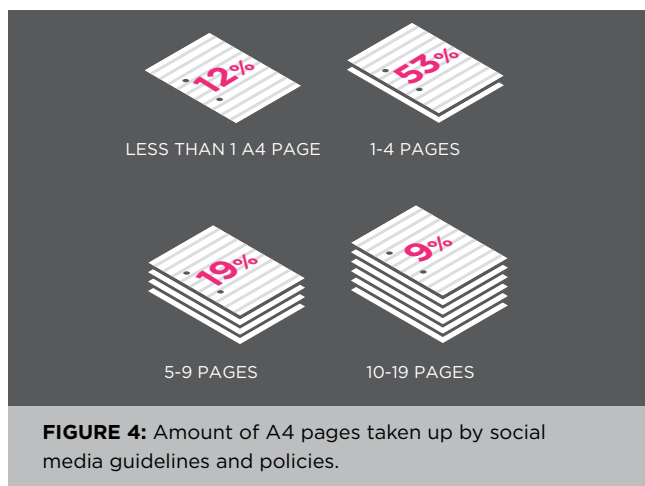
In a world where 'red tape' is often met with disdain, it's understandable that some may shy away from rules and procedure, however the potential damage that can stem from mismanagement of such a visible and fast-growing medium cannot be ignored.

14% EXTENSIVE, WITH DETAILS, EXAMPLES AND BEST PRACTICE

75% PRINCIPLES ONLY, LACKING DETAIL

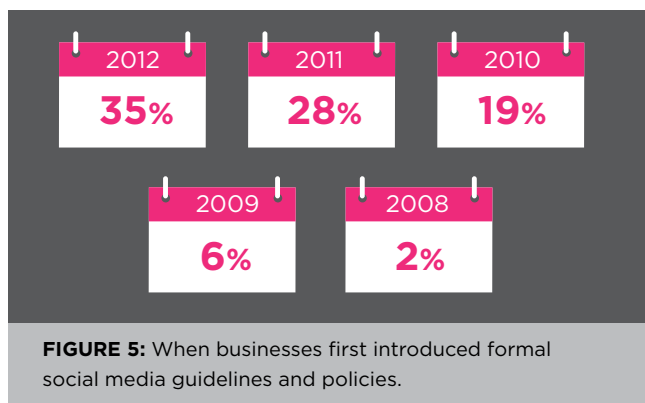**FIGURE 3:** Amount of detail contained in social media guidelines and policies.

TOO LITTLE DETAIL?

Of those organisations who have invested time in creating social media guidelines and policies, our research reveals a surprisingly light-touch approach. Only 75 per cent of businesses (figure 3) say that their policies contain only 'principles' - high-level guidelines lacking detail, best practices or case studies - and 65 per cent say these policies fill less than four pages of A4 (figure 4).

12% LESS THAN 1 A4 PAGE

53% 1-4 PAGES

19% 5-9 PAGES

9% 10-19 PAGES

FIGURE 4: Amount of A4 pages taken up by social media guidelines and policies.

What's more, 6 out of 10 organisations only introduced these policies as recently as 2011 or 2012, raising the question as to how road-tested or effective they may be given their relative newness (figure 5).

2012 **35%**   2011 **28%**   2010 **19%**

2009 **6%**   2008 **2%**

FIGURE 5: When businesses first introduced formal social media guidelines and policies.

Whilst we advocate the use of guidelines rather than rigid or cumbersome rules, the fast-moving, ever-changing world of social media necessitates a level of support and guidance beyond merely 'pointers'.

THE DEVIL'S IN THE DETAIL

Even if you try to restrict it, social media permeates an organisation – it simply can't be isolated to one department or individual's responsibility.

For guidelines and policies to be of use, instruction and context becomes key – to simply hope that all employees, irrespective of job function, might have the same level of knowledge of the digital world would be a mistake. What's clear from these results, however, is that more needs to be done to equip employees to act responsibly and appropriately.

RULES REGARDING COMPANY ASSETS ON SOCIAL MEDIA	**67%**
TONE OF VOICE	**62%**
RULES REGARDING COMPANY OR CONSUMER ANNOUNCEMENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA	**57%**
BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES	**47%**
SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY	**47%**
DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES OR IMPLICATIONS	**47%**
HOW SOCIAL MEDIA IS MONITORED/POLICED	**44%**
OFFICIAL SOCIAL MEDIA SITES/ACCOUNTS	**39%**
HOW TO REPORT A BREACH OF POLICIES	**34%**

FIGURE 6: Percentage of businesses including the above information in social media guidelines and policies.

That less than half of businesses include details of their social media strategy or official sites and accounts in guidelines is concerning, as is the shortage of good practice examples and rules regarding company announcements on social media.

DON'T GO THERE

Despite most businesses failing to guide employees on what they can do with social media, a surprisingly high number of businesses are telling them what they can't do, thus proactively restricting employees from using social media platforms for business purposes (figure 7).

13%   **14%**   **21%**   **27%**   **19%**

FIGURE 7: Number of organisations which ban employees from using social media platforms for business purposes.
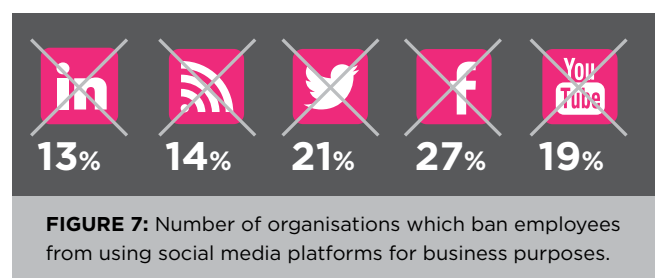
INSTITUTIONALISING GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

Social media guidelines aren't designed to be dry, restrictive documents which rarely see the light of day once published. Rather, they are intended to serve as a management tool to help mitigate reputational risk, and to enable businesses to derive value from their efforts and investments in social media.

44%
PROVIDE TRAINING ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES AND POLICIES TO ALL RELEVENT EMPLOYEES

40%
SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES AND POLICIES ARE COVERED IN EMPLOYEE INDUCTIONS

33%
SOCIAL MEDIA AMBASSADORS WHO CHAMPION AND MONITOR SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY BY EMPLOYERS

18%
ADOPTION AND ADHERENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES A CONTRACTUAL REQUIREMENT

FIGURE 8: Organisations which take the above approaches to embedding guidelines and policies into the business.

This latest research, however, reveals (figure 8) there's still work to be done to employ relatively low-cost methods of driving greater engagement with, and understanding of, social media guidelines – and to help their risk-management intentions to be more effective:

- Providing training and support to those expected to manage, implement or adhere to social media guidelines or policies can often be done at low or no cost by colleagues or agency partners.

- Enlisting a network of employees as 'ambassadors' across different teams, functions and locations, can help guidelines to permeate an organisation and benefit from the credibility of 'one of the team' advocating its contents.

- Less than half of organisations include social media guidelines and policies in employee inductions – concerning given the widely accepted benefits of 'catching people when they're fresh'.

- There are different views on whether to make adherence to social media guidelines and policies a contractual requirement: for some, the mantra of 'what gets measured, gets done' should only be used as a last resort, but for others it's an effective and quick way of focusing people's attention on what's important.

IT'S NOT [JUST] A MARKETING PROBLEM

A robust set of social media guidelines and policies can only be constructed by looking outside of the marketing team and utilising companywide expertise. Governance, oversight, training, crisis management and disciplinary processes are well-worn terms in HR, IT and legal departments, and it is through harnessing this experience that marketing and digital teams can create social media policies that will effectively defend a company's reputation and allow it to reap the benefits of social media.
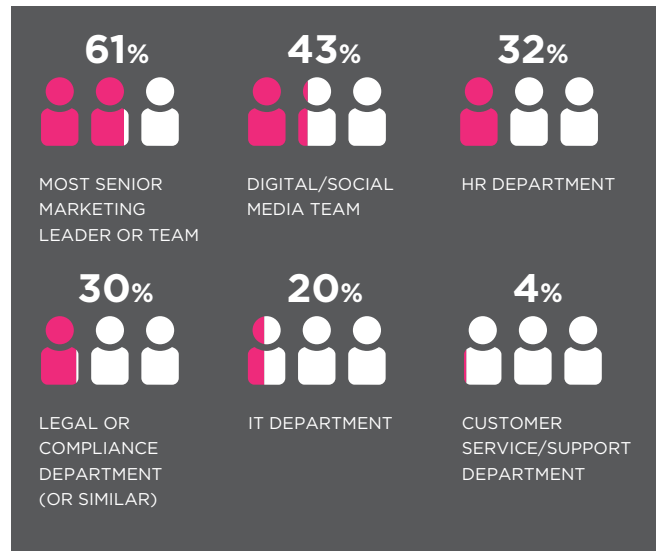
61%
MOST SENIOR MARKETING LEADER OR TEAM

43%
DIGITAL/SOCIAL MEDIA TEAM

32%
HR DEPARTMENT

30%
LEGAL OR COMPLIANCE DEPARTMENT (OR SIMILAR)

20%
IT DEPARTMENT

4%
CUSTOMER SERVICE/SUPPORT DEPARTMENT

FIGURE 9: Functions involved in the creation of social media guidelines and policies.

However, our research reveals that organisations have, on the whole, taken a narrow approach to formulating social media policies and guidelines (figure 9). Of those surveyed, 60 per cent of marketers say their most senior marketers were party to their formulation, but only 32 per cent say their HR and only 30 per cent say their legal and compliance teams had any input, while less than 20 per cent of IT departments were involved.

Organisations need to break down silo walls: social media can't be restricted to any one part of an organisation; it can be championed, and pockets of deep expertise and skills will undoubtedly be needed. But if social media guidelines and policies are truly to be of value as a management tool, they will be stronger for bringing the right parties to the table in their creation, roll-out and on-going management.