

CLOSE-UP

Social ideas are the future, not social media

VCCP's Amelia Torode recounts how individuals took over the IPA's Social project and changed its entire conversation

Social media is the most irritatingly over-used phrase of the year. Not a week goes past without another social media conference being staged. So what made the IPA's effort stand out?

To understand the IPA Social project, we must go back to the start of the year when the IPA published *Social Media: The Future Of Advertising In A Networked Society*. This was presented to a sell-out audience. For such a future-facing topic the whole evening felt worryingly retro. Dull PowerPoint, nothing new, nothing shareable, just an expensive report and a panel of experts who didn't seem more expert than the audience. Disappointing.

Previously, grumbles would have been confined to the pub, but afterwards a Twitter-storm started brewing. To the IPA's credit, it realigned this fast. Contacting each person who had blogged or Tweeted negatively about the event, it asked for help to build the conversation and move it on. Ten of us took up the challenge. Our aim: to open up the social media debate and create a space for practical discussion and direction. With that in mind, we developed Ten Principles that could be social media building blocks.

Each conversation was hosted/curated on individual blogs, with content and comments aggregated by the IPA – www.ipa.co.uk/content/IPA-social.

The first IPA Social event was an “un-seminar” – no fixed agenda, no expert panel, no opportunity for people just to sit back and watch. Social media is all about conversations, so it was important that this was exactly that, a conversation. That took people by surprise.

The hope was that the Ten Principles would act as springboards for what participants wanted to talk about, not what we wanted to talk about and I believe six important conversations quickly emerged.

“Who is best equipped to look after social media?” was noisy, with potential for fist-fights given the number of agencies all claiming social media competency. I think it depends on the objectives of the initiative – is social media extending and amplifying an advertising campaign? Is it being used to diffuse a reputation crisis situation? Is the aim to extend customer care? Given the wide-ranging opportunities for social engagement there were arguments in favour of clients owning this space as they were the ones who are closest to their brand. The group's take-out was that the least important consideration was the name of the agency discipline, with the most important being their practical experience.

Next up: “Are there any brands that shouldn't do social media?” The consensus on this was that there are some organisations that are not structured in a way that allows for real-time social communications.



COLIN STOUT

Torode... “It was a fascinating night that saw the IPA moving away from its role as the expert guardian of answers to becoming a facilitator of conversation”



Obama... social media campaign couldn't be measured in economic value

If it takes 48 hours for the legal team to approve a Tweet, then maybe this isn't the right space for your brand. Agencies should be braver at telling clients that a social media solution may not be right for a specific project, but agencies are anxious and don't want to be seen as backward-looking in much the same way as clients. It became evident that it's less to do with the brand and more to do with how you want to use social media spaces that is important and whether you are actually set up for real-time communications.

“Can social media ever pay?” This was a large and vocal conversation. The fact that Dell made \$3 million this year via its outlet store on Twitter is usually held up as an indication that money can be made out of social media. However, it was felt that direct sales weren't perhaps the right metrics to attach but so-called value rather than economic value, such as the Barack Obama

The Ten Principles

- People not consumers
- Social agenda not business agenda
- Continuous conversation not campaigning
- Long-term impacts not quick fixes
- Marketing with people not to people
- Being authentic not persuasive
- Perpetual beta
- Technology changes, people don't
- Change will never be this slow again
- Measurement!

campaign. The reality of social media campaigns is that they are incredibly time-intensive and time-consuming. It is hard for agencies to make money on a social media project, but equally if they don't do social projects they will never get the hands-on experience that they need. Catch 22. One suggestion is that agencies charge for the idea, the hours involved in executing it and then move to a direct payment-by-results model.

Social media is inherently trackable, but what should we measure? Einstein said: “Not everything that can be measured is important, not everything that is important can be measured.” People talk about success being measured in mass numbers but perhaps value of influence is a functional of the objectives and the particular context of the industry vertical. Niche influence may be more valuable for repositioning a fashion brand, whereas mass reach is more important for an insurance product wanting to stay top of mind. There is no easy answer to the measurement question. “Why are clients sceptical?” Clients and agencies are sceptical because it is hard to know what to measure and what success looks like.

They are sceptical because they're scared, failing in social media is done publicly. The implications of social reach far beyond the marketing



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