

GETTING SOCIAL

Changing hats

by Stephanie Caunter

Malaysians are one of the most socially connected audiences in the world, with 13 million Facebook users, 1.3 million Twitter accounts and 7+ hours a day spent online!

And did you know that 70% of Malaysian businesses rate themselves as at least fairly active on social media?

That's according to PwC Malaysia's recently released report on social media and Malaysian businesses: "Getting social: Social media in business".

As part of the team that worked on this report, I got up close and personal with our survey findings of over 100 prominent Malaysian brand names. And I must say I was surprised by the gap that exists between what the everyday social media user thinks, and how brands rate their own efforts.

Those who responded to our survey think they're doing pretty well. They "get" social media: after all, they're fairly active, only a tiny number (less than 3%) have no social media presence at all, and almost half actually have a team of dedicated social media practitioners.

There are some great stories of social media done well too, from entrepreneurs who run their business purely through social media channels, to companies built up entirely on getting the most out of these platforms for other businesses. Then there are the brands that can take a typical corporate video and turn it into a viral YouTube sensation.

But we also hear lots of stories about social media faux pas. Social media isn't really something any of us would call new anymore, but these things still happen to businesses at an almost alarming rate.

So what do businesses do next?

Hop on the bandwagon? Or off? Treat social media as a friend or foe? Hire your Gen Y employee with the highest number of Face-

book friends to manage your social media presence, perhaps?

I certainly don't have all the answers. But at the launch of our "Getting social" report, we were lucky enough to have some of Malaysia's leading digital minds share their thoughts with us. And what they had to say was telling.

When asked how companies should handle whining customers, Ahmad Izham Omar (CEO of Media Prima Television Networks and PrimeWorks Studios) had this simple tip to share: Treat any situation or person on social media just like you would in real life.

When managing your conversations on social media, imagine you're sitting around with a bunch of friends having teh tarik, that is, play nice.

Izham's advice makes sense.

Employ plain, old-fashioned good manners. But then again, not everyone was raised with similar values. So when employees who manage social media are left to their own devices to respond, not everyone gets it right. Especially when it feels like you or your brand is being personally attacked. That is why social media guidelines are so critical for any organisation. Yet, less than half of our survey respondents tell us that they have existing guidelines in place! Little wonder the faux pas still keep happening.

Now, what about business leaders? Should they get on social media? Do they have a role to play? Is social media a passing fad they can leave to their marketing department to handle?

More than 70% of our survey respondents agree that C-suite involvement in social media helps with a brand's reputation, managing a crisis, and engaging internal employees. But the majority of Malaysia's business leaders have yet to get on these platforms for business purposes.

I think it's worth acknowledging that

getting onto social media may not be for all CEOs. Some leaders make a conscious decision to keep their personal lives personal, which means staying off publicly accessible platforms. After all, as Jason Juma-Ross, PwC Australia Digital Intelligence Lead, says: "Your personal persona can't be too far off [from] your work persona. It's about authenticity."

So if you know you can't or won't cross that line, it's probably best to not be on it at all than to share a one-sided view of yourself.

But even if leaders choose not to get on it themselves, they need to recognise that social media IS a business issue. And like any item on the business agenda, there needs to be direction from the top, which means they'll at least need to understand it.

Of course, the leaders who can do both — be on it and be their brand's champion, while driving the charge for social media — will be uniquely placed to capture the hearts and minds of increasingly digital-savvy stakeholders.

At the launch of our report, I felt heartened by the responses of both our panellists and attendees. Malaysian organisations are waking up to the need to take social media seriously. And they're going to do it with the help of their leaders (or without, if they can't wait, so CEOs beware!). I'm looking forward to the changes a corporate Malaysia that truly gets social media will bring. ■

Read more about our report and its findings on www.pwc.com/my/social

Stephanie Caunter studied engineering but soon realised it wasn't meant for her. Today, she heads PwC Malaysia's marketing & communications team. She counts herself lucky to learn a bit more every day about being a better wife, daughter, sister, friend, mother and teammate.

