

**Marketing Messages****MARY CHARLESON*****Do you risk being unsocial with your use of social media?***

The new shiny toy gets all the hype. It's the one that gets talked about, wished for and idolized. It promises to be better, stronger and faster. It replaces those before it in the glance that it takes to rip the paper from its cover. Many shiny toys of Christmas past are still with us. Some with 50-year staying power like Barbie, never really having fallen far from favour. Others were a simple flash in the pan fad, befallen and buried with pet rocks and mood rings.

Social media is our new shiny toy. But, far from a fad, it represents a fundamental shift in the way consumers communicate. At the root of social media is online creating, sharing and connecting. It's like one big cocktail party, where other people get to talk about you. The key of course is that although you may provoke a conversation, you cannot control it. It's a conversation that everyone at the party believes holds more truth than what you would say yourself, or pay to be able to tell others. That is the fundamental difference, and ultimately the power that it holds.

Let's consider some facts:

- 34% of bloggers post opinions about products and brands.
- 20% of Tweets contain a reference to a product or brand.
- 78% of consumers trust peer recommendations. Only 14% trust advertising.
- 56% of journalists said social media was important when reporting stories. 89% use blogs when conducting online research.
- 31% of mobile handsets are smart phones, further enabling all of these activities in real time and location based.

Clearly, social media and mobile platforms, is where the future of media and advertising is headed.

Or is it? With so much emphasis on social media - utilizing Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Foursquare and blogs, and monitoring or updating all this activity with tools like Nutshell, Hootsuite or Tweetdeck, I fear we may risk becoming "unsocial by being so social." I sense an infatuation with the new shiny toy right now that I suspect will settle as we figure out what tool to use when, and for what audience.

Consider a campaign running right now for Shaw home phone. It cuts through the clutter by suggesting we use a phone to talk. This simple creative insight shows how far we have migrated. The inference is that rather than announce a new job or grandchild on Facebook or Twitter, that hearing the refreshing ring of a voice call on a phone, and the suggestion that, "what they really want is to hear the sound of your voice" is powerful. BBDO is the agency responsible for the creative. This campaign is running on radio and TV right now. It uses traditional media, with a creative insight that connects with the target customer. And there's not an ounce of social in sight. Brilliant.

I conducted an experiment at a convention I recently spoke at. I was talking about marketing, with an emphasis on new media. Attendees would naturally expect emails, newsletters, hash tags on Twitter and the like as my promotional tools of choice. So when I sent them a Vancouver postcard in advance, by mail, hand addressed with a personal note inviting them to the break out session, they were understandably intrigued. Most arrived with the card in hand, and the session was packed. I had to do some negotiation with the convention organizers to have them mail the card on my behalf for privacy reasons. The gesture was unexpected, got attention and cut through the clutter. I was quickly able to dispel any notions of being a dinosaur with my traditional approach. Most appreciated it for what it was, a clever plot to have them attend. Who wouldn't read a personally addressed, hand written postcard from the most beautiful place on earth?

Now I'm hardly suggesting that you walk away from social media. Far from it. I am however suggesting that you look critically at your objective and your target audience. In our rush to be social with social media, we risk becoming unsocial for some projects and targets. You want to achieve a connection with your customer. Choose your tool wisely - new and shiny, or not.

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