

# Social Media, Hugs, Marines, and You:

## 240 Million Reasons To Pay Attention

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### The rise and rise of social media

There has been great change in how people perceive social media. It's shifted from debating over the value social media provides to mass acceptance at a grass roots level.

Now the discussions are more about figuring out how to use social media, and looking at social media shaping world events. Not so long ago, we witnessed how satellite and cable broadcasters redefined exposure of news with 24 x 7 coverage. Now social media provides a 24 hour open communication platform for these issues to be broadcasted, shared, and discussed – sometimes even in countries and organisations where it has been difficult for people's voices to be heard.

Research carried out by digital marketing agency twentysix showed that social media usage in particular developing markets, such as China, is evolving faster than in Europe and North America – 49 % of Chinese respondents access their favourite social media sites from work, compared to 24 % in the UK and only 20 % in the US. Moreover, Chinese consumers are also much more amenable to promotions and special offers provided by social media: over two-thirds (68 %) are likely to take up these offers, as opposed to 42 % in the US and only 40 % in the UK

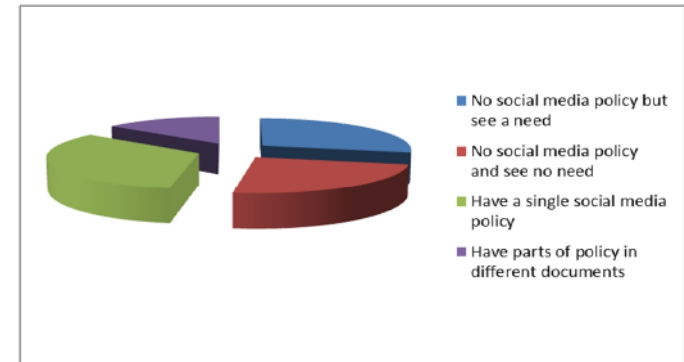
### Social Media FUD

**Fear** – most of the fear of social media is generated by a belief that a brand loses control of their brand position and reputation. The reality is that it's happening independently if you make no efforts in social media.

**Uncertainty** – stems from the fact that there isn't a precise formula or procedure that defines social media success.

**Doubt** – is usually linked to the fact that people doubt the ROI. Social media is a relationship development tool. You can't measure the ROI of a hug, or a warm smile or lunch had with a potential client.

In the last two months of 2010, we conducted a poll of twenty one organisations, asking a simple question – does your organisation have a social media policy? The results were illuminating; more than half the organisations polled had no such policy in place, and only one third had their organisations policy crystallized into a single document, leaving a full 14 % of respondents have references to social media scattered through a range of sources. Much media attention in the closing weeks of 2010 was devoted to Wikileaks; this has a clear bearing on the social media sphere.



Deliberate or inadvertent sharing of information organisations would rather keep confidential is considerably easier using social media. Additionally, the Wikileaks phenomenon has snowballed partly through viral growth via social media channels. To this end, parts of the US military, for example the US Marine Corps, have developed very specific published guideline for “unofficial” social media postings. Additionally, they have adopted an active policy of co-ordinating content on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr and various blogs, providing a powerful two-way communications channel to stakeholders.

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GreyReview estimates that, taking into consideration unique Twitter accounts, and all the users of all the various Twitter APIs, the total number of users in the Twitter “eco-system” is 240 million. It is estimated that the UK alone has upwards of 27 million Facebook users – a number that continues to grow. You might not like or use either, but what about your staff? What about your customers?

Ignoring social media policy is rather suggestive of some confused thinking – social media is now all pervasive. Your organisation may block access from the desktop, but what about the phones and mobile devices that your staff carry? And if the organisation’s leadership have a desire to stop staff talking about the organisation online, how will you control what people do when they get home In the absence of a clearly articulated policy, how will your staff know what is expected of them, and what constitutes reasonable comment in the organisation’s view ?

### What’s next?

YOU need to get engaged both in terms of your business strategy and execution.

A cogent approach to social media is implicitly improves your organisations security – and delivers real business benefits. A sound policy framework sets the rules of the game- for your organisation, and the stakeholders within it. You set expectations of and for your staff, including a definition of what is acceptable, while opening up the possibility of a powerful - and low cost – marketing tool. improve timely communication to your customers.

Greater executive ownership of social media strategy will be evident in 2011. Many businesses, particularly in the SME space, have shied away from the social media black arts in the past, or pushed their Web 2.0 presence to web-savvy enthusiasts with little business experience. This is not necessary; social media is, after all, a tool for customer intimacy, so a grasp of customer wants and needs is every bit as vital as a grasp of the technologies. Consistency and regularity of communication is key – moreover, that communication should be based around value-added content, not mere enthusiasm for the medium. Converting customers into advocates for your organisation involves capturing their hearts and minds, so the mode of communication needs to be in tune with your customers. The best way to do that is to talk to them – and for many businesses, there will be no more effective way of doing this than deploying a joined-up social media approach.



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