

Is social media all hype?

 By [Louise Marsland](#)

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OMG! Could it be true - is social media all just hype of its own making? Are brands actually wasting time and money on Facebook, Twitter and the like, as Forrester Research said this week - ICYMI? Awkward!

Okay, social media slang aside, it would mean that the rise of the digital agency and social media guru's is negated, plus one of the biggest trends in recent years: content marketing or conversation currency, as savvy marketing experts like to bandy about.

It all comes down to the quality of the relationships you have with your customers and whether you are deluded in thinking you have a real relationship with your customers or a commoditised one. The [Wall Street Journal](#) reports that brands "don't really" have a social relationship with their customers as top brands' Facebook and Twitter posts only reach about 2% of their fans and followers; and less than 0.1% of fans and followers even interact with these brand posts.

In a report entitled, [Social Relationship Strategies That Work](#), Forrester is also urging marketers to invest in their own social tools on their own web properties because of continuous changes to the algorithms on social media sites like Facebook.

As Forrester analyst, Nate Elliott, is quoted as saying: "It's clear that Facebook and Twitter don't offer the relationships that marketing leaders crave. Yet most brands still use these sites as the centrepiece of their social efforts - thereby wasting significant financial, technological, and human resources on social networks that don't deliver value."

The analyst, Elliot, advises that brands build "social relationship strategies around sites that can deliver value" like niche or specialist sites. But isn't that what Facebook and Twitter were five years ago?

Top trend

Forrester predicts that a trend for 2015 and 2016 will be a shift away from the top social media platforms by brands as they, Facebook in particular, will become a repository for "display ads" as Facebook makes it harder for branded "unpaid" content to be seen.

Possibly, but the power of Facebook is that it is where communities coalesce around things they are interested in, actively seeking out like-minded communities and brands. It is up to brands too as to how effectively they also engage with their followers, not only up to platforms like Facebook as regards advertising or paid versus earned content. Facebook has just made it more challenging.

Also, consumers do engage with brands actively, especially when there are challenges, which creates a massive opportunity for brands to provide thoughtful feedback and create loyal customers for life. Social media does that. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter created that opportunity.

Content marketing is earned media and earned media takes effort and an authentic voice.

What brands should not do is only rely on social media platforms - of course they have to have their own websites and social plug-ins to collect and mine customer data, particularly as social media platforms wax and wane. We've been reporting that for years.

A smart strategy right now is to follow the Millennials and try predict where they will be hanging out in the next decade and get there first; and to always try get customers to engage with your brand directly - be it in store, at experiential activations, secret pop up events, competitions, and on your own website or social channels.

Social media is a marketing tool, it's not a marketing strategy.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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