

# COMMUNICATION & LANGUAGE at work

Issue no. 3 | February 15<sup>th</sup> 2014

**Social Media and/in Business Communication**

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### **What Your Corporate Communications Can Learn From Social Media**

Heidi Cohen

*(pp. 18-25)*

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## 7 Social Media Lessons To Make Your Corporate Communications Trustworthy

*What Your Corporate Communications Can Learn From Social Media*

Heidi Cohen

President of Riverside Marketing Strategies

### Abstract

*Do your corporate communications suffer from a lack of trust by your target audience? If so, your marketing professionals can benefit from these seven social media lessons that help guide you towards making your communications more trustworthy.*

Trust is everything when it comes to persuading customers to buy from you. Today, consumers trust other consumers--not what your business promotes through its marketing and other corporate communications. This is a seismic change from traditional marketing channels, and it is powered by social media where consumers, companies and the public engage in a multi-directional conversation.

To help get your corporate marketing on track, here are **seven lessons your corporate communications professionals can learn from social media** to ensure that your target audience consumes and trusts your information.

### 1. Talk human.

When people write company communications, they forget how to talk to other people. It's as if they become machines transferring information to other machines. According to the *Cluetrain Manifesto*, "Conversations among human beings sound human. They are conducted in a human voice." Social media enables people to interact one-to-many like most push or third party advertising works, to interact one-to-one like most direct marketing or interpersonal correspondence works or many-to-many. On social media, it's critical that your interactions sound like there's a real person at the other end of your exchange. It's *not* a push promotion.

## 2. Tell stories.

Chip and Dan Heath in their book, *Made To Stick* [LINK:

Figure out your organization's "once-upon-a-time". Where are the stories you can tell? Think in terms of your founders, your business, your products, your employees and your customers. Make the most out of what you have. Check out the [Hans Brinker Budget Hotel](#) which proudly proclaims that it's been disappointing visitors for over forty years. You have to work with what you have.

## 3. Incorporate a 360° brand.

Social media demands that brands are recognizable regardless of platform. This translates to a 360° social media brand that's important to integrate into all of your organization's content, communications and interactions. Here are five attributes to include:

- **Sounds.** Think jingles, voice and sounds.
- **Language spoken.** This applies to text, audio, video and live events. What audio ticks or regional accents does your brand have?
- **Colors.** Consider the colors associated with your brand and use them in all of your communications.
- **Visual cues and/or context.** Think store signage and/or conference booths. How does your brand appear in photographs and video including backgrounds and other elements?
- **Spokesperson.** This is the person, real or imagined, who represents your brand. Consider the elements that make them stand out in a way that's identifiable with your organization. Also, consider how your employees look in terms of the clothes they wear and how they present themselves.

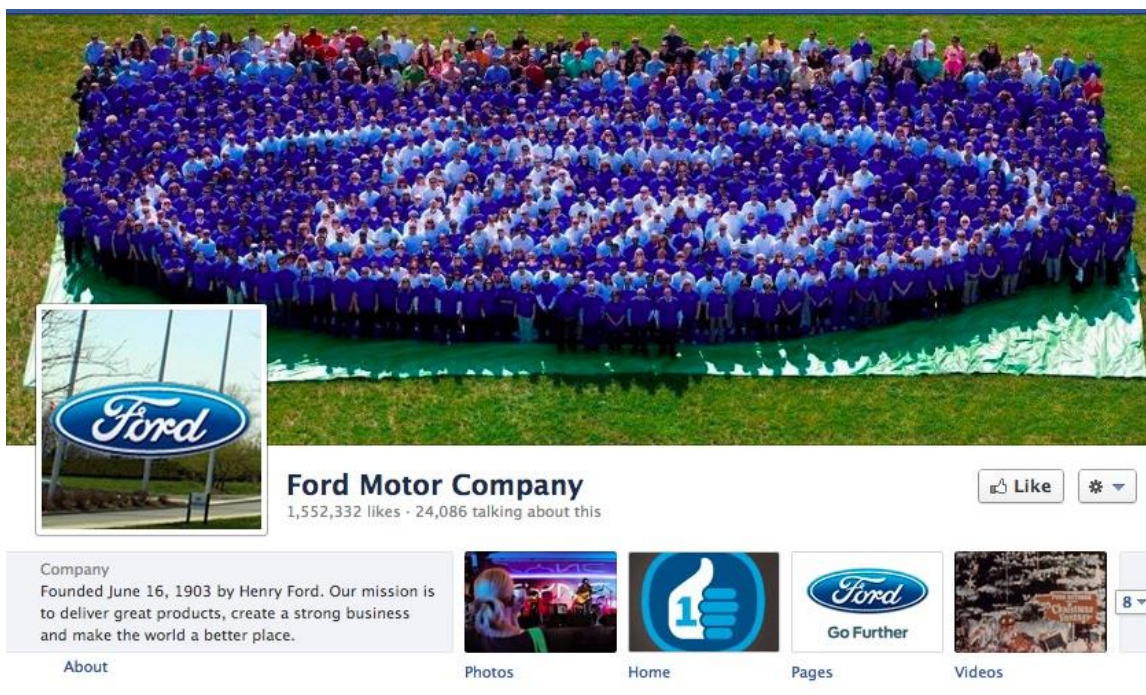
## 4. Create memorable images.

By nature, people are attracted to images of other people. Photographs are eye-candy that pulls readers into your content. With the ability to snap a shot on any smartphone, images - especially photographs - have grown exponentially. Add easy-to-upload functionality for social media sites like Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram and you've got a flood of visual content that makes your stock photos look like what they are:

boring images. To make your photographs more attractive to your target viewers, follow these three rules based on scholarly research by Phillip Isola, Devi Parikh, Antonio Torralba and Aude Oliva entitled, “*Understanding the Intrinsic Memorability of Images*”

- **Portray human beings.** Photographs of people are the most memorable since it’s in our DNA.
- **Make your image human-scale.** Put your image into context by showing it relative to people. Also use product close-ups.
- **Avoid landscapes.** They’re totally unmemorable regardless of how breathtaking they may appear. The exception researchers found was when images featured something unexpected. In other words, your image needs a story to make the scene memorable.

Here’s how [Ford Motor Company](#) gives their brand a human face on Facebook.



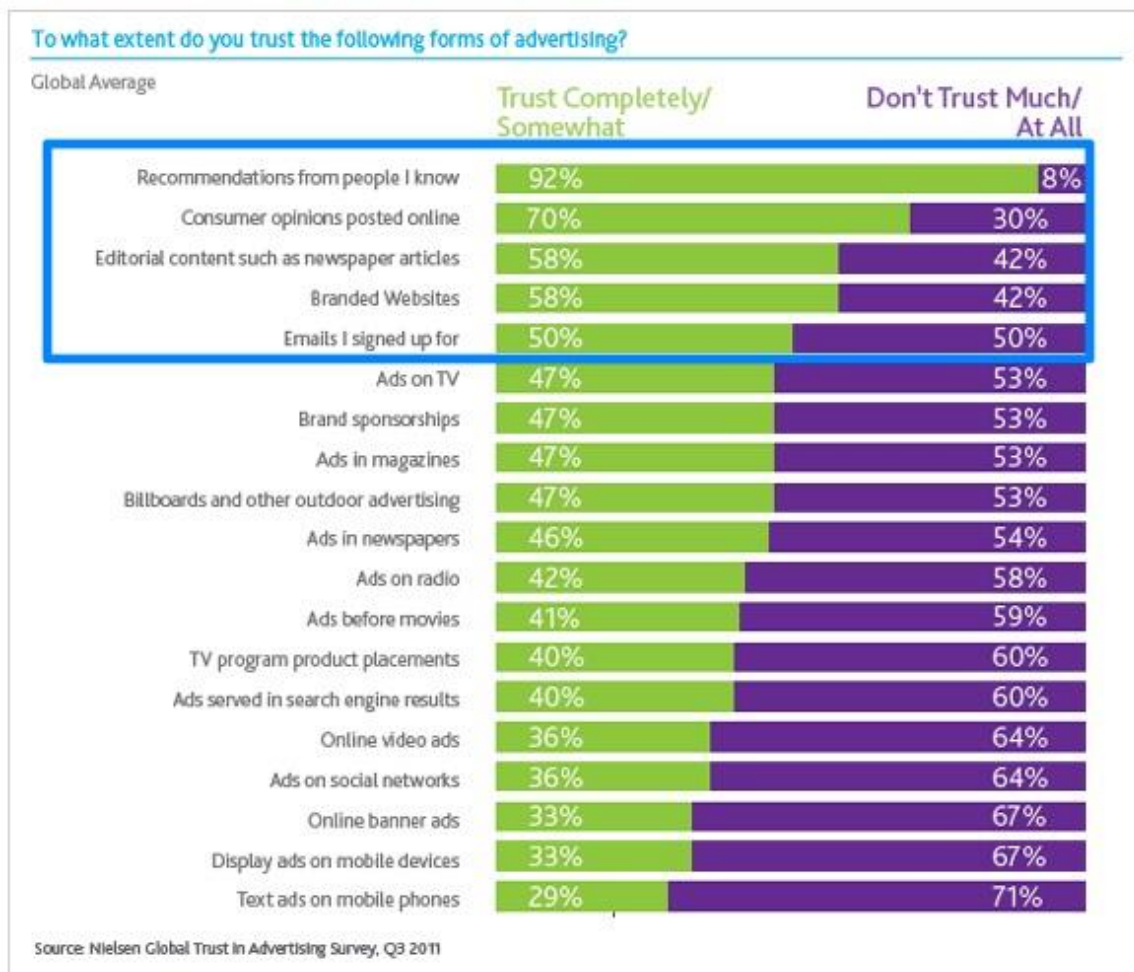
## 5. Put your company in film.

To make your communications effective, they have to be findable. YouTube is the second biggest social media entity (although it’s often classified as a video site) and the second biggest search engine – at least in the United States. Understand that many customers turn to YouTube to figure out what your products look like in the context in which they will use them and how they work. While most companies find that video is the most expensive form of content they create, don’t assume that you can’t afford it. Both [Blendtec](#) (aka “Will It Blend”) and [Orabrush](#) built products and brands with low

budget videos. If you're still not convinced, take a lesson from [Khan's Academy](#). This not-for-profit organization shows how you can break complex information into small easy-to-consume chunks. Do low-budget interviews from your computer. Alternatively, interview experts at conferences and other live events like [Ian Cleary of Social Razor](#)

## 6. Make your content trustworthy.

Customers don't trust advertising. It's well-documented according to [Nielsen](#). Even more important is that your consumers don't trust advertising in any form; they put their faith in content and editorial. Therefore, your information must be void of promotion.



This by itself is necessary but not sufficient, according to research by [Elizabeth Sillence, Pam Briggs, Lesley Fishwick and Peter Harris](#) entitled “*Trust and Mistrust of Online Health Sites*”. Based on their research, ten design elements are responsible for 94% of visitor mistrust. As a result, visitors, including your prospects, will not even read one word of your information if it's presented poorly. Consider these ten elements.

- **Is unsuitably named.** Your target audience and to a lesser extent search bots, must be able to understand your blog name and URL without the context



of supporting content. Use an easy-to-understand and spellable name (URL). Skip the bunch of corporate letters and abbreviations no one outside your firm or department knows.

- **Suffers from complex and busy layout.** Where online content is concerned, less is more. Assess the necessity and importance of each design element.
- **Needs navigation help.** First time visitors must be able to find the information for which they're looking. Make your navigation bar easy-to-find with well-labeled buttons that make sense to newcomers. **Provide** more than one way to navigate your site.
- **Lacks interesting web design.** Use graphic elements including photographs to attract visitors' attention and pull them in. Ensure that graphics, fonts and color convey your 360° brand message without your corporate name.
- **Contains pop-up ads. Readers find pop-ups annoying.** If you *really must* display pop-up advertising and/or email registration, set cookies and timers to prevent them from appearing until a visitor's been on your site for a while or your visitors will be gone before they read your information.
- **Loads slowly.** The more time your content takes to load, the greater the chances are that prospective readers will leave without ever seeing it. Also, this affects search rankings. BTW- Here's a [blog speed checklist](#).
- **Uses tiny print.** Given your audience may be using a tablet or smartphone this deserves consideration especially if your audience is over 40 and wears reading glasses. Select a 12 point easy-on-the-eye font face like Arial or New Times Roman.
- **Has text overload.** Break content into quick-to-consume chunks with sub-titles, outlining and bolding to guide readers through your information.
- **Looks corporate.** Blah generic design is a reader turnoff. If your information can be applied to another business, forget it.
- **Is unable to be found.** If your information doesn't appear on search engines and social media, no one will read it.

Instead, here's how your content should look to engage readers:

# Heidi Cohen

actionable marketing expert

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## 30 Social Media Definitions

← Strong title

Posted on May 9, 2011 in Actionable Marketing 101, Social Media | 33 Comments

← Metadata & Comments

 Like 108
  Tweet 449
  Share 259
  Pin it 13
  +1 30

← Social proof



As **social media** continues to *evolve* and its uses change and expand, so does the **definition of social media**. In part, this is attributable to the fact that social media relates to the technology and platforms that enable the interactive web's content creation, collaboration and exchange by participants and the public. Yet, many users, business executives and the public consider the marketing around these networks and the content created on them to be social media.

To clarify how social media, marketing and PR professionals define social media, I surveyed a group of my peers. Given social media's dynamic nature, I expected a range of responses. The biggest surprise was that one long-term practitioner responded that he was not sure what social media was anymore.

In their own words, here are thirty **social media definitions** from active participants. (Editor's note: For formatting purposes, some multi-paragraph answers appear as one paragraph and typos were corrected.)

1. To start, **Wikipedia**, the social media go-to reference created by the public in the form of thousands of contributors, defines **Social media** as "media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue."

Link

List

### 7. Include a social media call-to-action

You can't assume that visitors and prospects will take the next step in your process unless you lead them there. A social media call-to-action accomplishes this by creating

a sense of urgency--like the direct response television ads that say “call within the next sixty minutes our agents are standing by” --to get you to act before you move on to something. Incorporate a promotional code or other tracking mechanism that’s tied to your analytics. Since social media interactions and other corporate information are just small elements in a longer purchase journey--where attribution is difficult at best, make sure that prospects recognize the place that you direct them to, whether it’s a tailored landing page or a product page on your website, by continuing your branding and other brand elements. Here’s how [Social Media Examiner](#) gets readers to register their email address.



The bottom line is that by integrating your social media practices into your corporate communications you’ll make your interactions more accessible to your target audience and therefore more effective. The goal is to make your information easy-to-consume, findable and trustworthy.

Happy marketing,

Heidi Cohen



## Author

### Heidi Cohen

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As president of [Riverside Marketing Strategies](#), an actionable marketing consultancy, Heidi Cohen has over 20 years of experience simplifying the complex concepts behind evolving marketing challenges. Heidi has held senior-level marketing positions at global businesses including *The Economist*, Bertelsmann/Bookspan and Citibank. She has also taught university-level marketing at New York University, Rutgers and CUNY. Additionally, she develops and delivers both online and corporate training. Since 2004 Heidi has written for marketing publications and blogs at [HeidiCohen.com](#), a top ranked marketing and content blog.

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