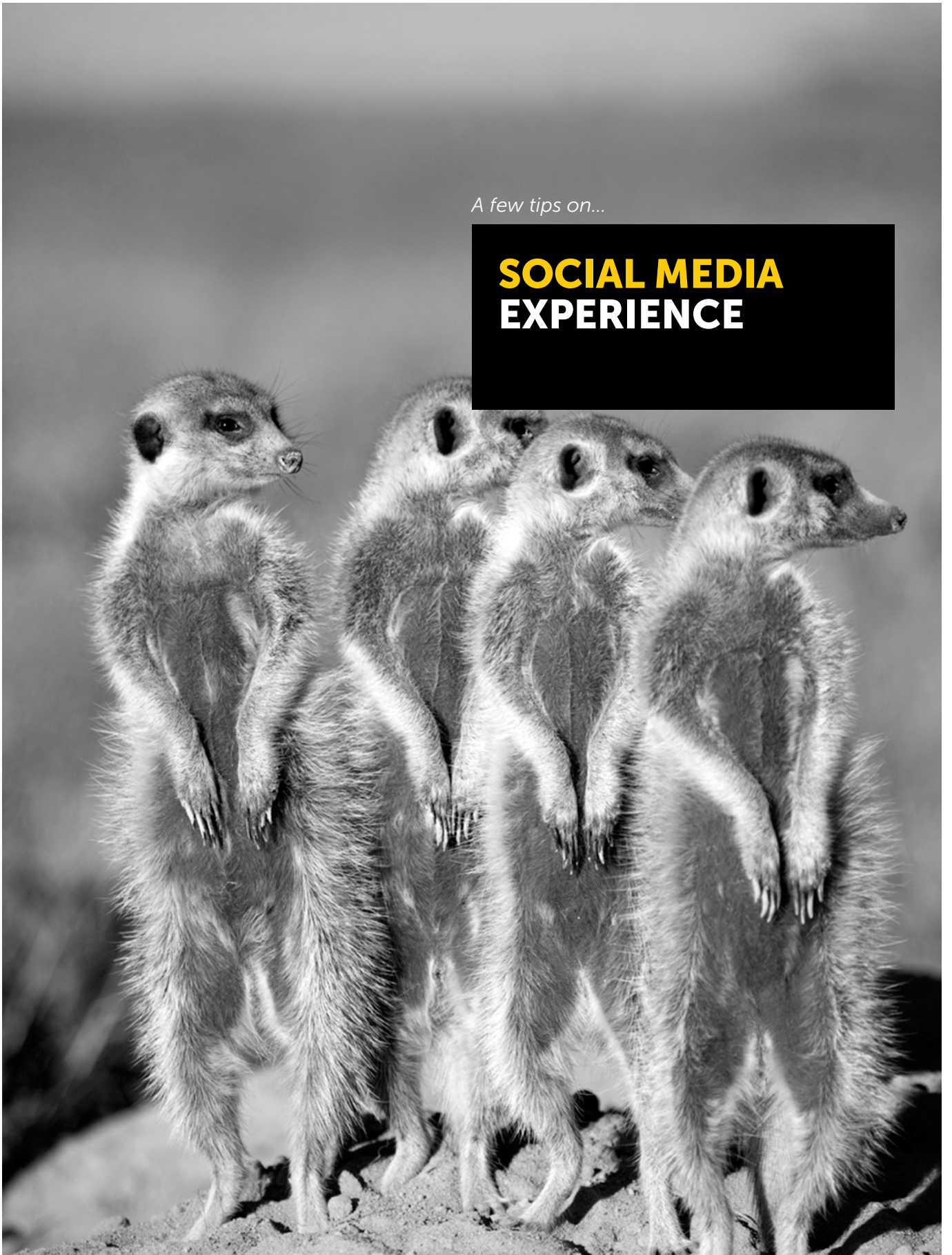


A few tips on...

SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIENCE



SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIENCE

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Social media is like teen sex. Everyone wants to do it. Nobody knows how. When finally done, there is surprise it's not better

Avinash Kaushik
Google

Google guru Avinash Kaushik's tweet probably sums up the dilemma facing so many of us in business. What the heck to do about social media?

And according to a recent Forrester forecast, we're all planning to do quite a bit. Their prediction is that spending on interactive marketing will reach \$55 billion by 2014*. This will be driven by spend on social and mobile marketing that will see compound annual growth rates of 34% and 27% respectively through 2014. The question is, how much of this investment will result in creating true differentiation for these brands and increased customer loyalty?

So here are a few quick guidelines for making that \$55 billion deliver some results...

Customer experience first; social media second

The 'State of Customer Experience 2011' report by Forrester found that:

86% of the executives surveyed thought that customer experience was the most important strategy for their companies. 76% tried to differentiate by using it, particularly through the online experience. But they felt the biggest obstacle was a clear strategy for implementing it.

Many brands take a fragmented approach to implementing customer experience. We suspect their approach to social media will be the same.

The first challenge for many brands will be to resist the impulse to invest in technology and resource without a clear customer experience strategy to provide the context. Unless you have a clear strategy for embracing social media as an integrated component of the end-to-end customer experience it will fail to deliver results.

Cross the social divide

The second challenge for many brands is their contact centre.

Many of these are designed to support traditional in-bound telephone calls, whereas customers are now communicating about your brand over social channels. The communication is all too frequently about you, not to you.

Salesforce.com Chairman and CEO Marc Benioff calls it 'The Social Divide', and it represents a gulf that organisations must cross. To bridge this gulf, companies need to go through three stages:

1. Get in the flow
2. Be in the know
3. Build a community

Get in the flow

Brands are frequently left out of critical discussions, and when they don't participate, the discussion continues without them – for better or worse.²

First Direct – the telephonic and online bank – monitors social media and reports what customers are saying live on its 'Talking Point' web page. Customers can view topics and post contributions so the bank is constantly in the flow of feedback.

This is easier said than done. Dipping into social media can be like sipping from a fire hose. So you need to invest in the right technology and resource to sort the important from the irrelevant and, more importantly, get your people in the know and help them respond appropriately.

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Our customers really understand the challenge of what we're doing...and are passionate about being part of enabling this to happen. What they don't want from us are golfing days and expensive corporate hospitality; what they do want is great communication and what they really want more than anything is privileged access to this brand community

Stephen Attenborough
Commercial Director
Virgin Galactic

A few guidelines

Be in the know

Develop an employee social network so your people are kept up-to-date in real time. Week after week, we read 'Marketing' magazine's spy reports when they phone up a contact centre with a query. No surprises, the worst ratings result when the contact people don't know about the latest products and services, or indeed their customers. In an instant you've created a detractor and they spread the word like no other.

And you will get detractors. The RightNow research found that nearly a quarter of British adults have posted a negative comment about a company on a social networking site.

Of these:

- 65% want to inform others about their negative experience.
- 46% want to vent their frustration.
- 30% want to discourage others from buying from the company – and they frequently succeed. The study revealed almost 40% decided not to buy from a company following something they read on social media.

But detractors aren't necessarily bad. Frank Cooper, PepsiCo's Chief Engagement Officer, sums up:

You, as a brand, have to be completely confident about your position, because you will get criticism. You will have a negative reaction. If you didn't get a negative reaction, that means you're standing neutral and you have no point of view. Who wants to participate in that?

Detractors are only bad if they are your target customers and have a legitimate reason to complain. Sometimes customers are just not the right fit for the brand and the best response is to encourage them to move their business to your competitors. So engage with them. You can't control social media, but you can control how you engage with it. And that engagement has to be on brand.

Take the US bank Umpqua. When one of their customers tweeted *'Umpqua stinks because they charged me a fee'*, Umpqua's contact centre saw it and tweeted back *"Hey, sounds like you're having some issues, why don't you give me a call?"* Well, the customer did, they talked, and then five minutes later he tweeted to hundreds of his followers *'Umpqua is the best, I love them'*.

Build a customer community

Create a customer social network so that your customers can co-create and become part of your product development process. This is as true for B2B as for B2C. Strong communities of target customers can help you increase not only your marketing impact as they spread the word, but also your R&D capacity as they become involved in testing out ideas, recommending improvements and providing insight into their needs and aspirations.

However, setting up a community is not just a matter of launching your Facebook/Twitter/LinkedIn pages and newsletters. It's about being very clear from the start about your brand, your target audience and how your online community will help fill a genuine need of those customers and deliver value to them.

SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIENCE

Which takes us back to the customer experience...

As Deborah Eastman, CMO of Satmetrix, says:

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Word-of-mouth marketing isn't about giving customers talking points, as if they were brand spokespeople. It's about delivering an exceptional customer experience that makes customers want to recommend you

So if you are one of the organisations intending to contribute to that estimated \$55 billion spend on social media marketing by 2014, get your customer experience strategy right first.



For a more in-depth discussion on this, see 'Creating the social enterprise', extracted from an article produced for Salesforce.com

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defining customer experience