

What Makes Social Media Trustworthy?

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Venues and relationships affect how social media users perceive advice

One thing that makes social media marketing powerful is consumers' trust in "people like them" — their friends, family, and other online peers.

Marketers want to tap into that trust through the power of earned media or by engaging in a conversation with consumers, but where social conversations take place has an effect on their perceived trustworthiness as well as who is taking part in them.

A study of frequent social media users by market research firm Invoke Solutions found that the most trusted information was posted by people respondents knew.

But blog posts were more likely to be trusted "completely" than posts on Facebook, and trust dropped off sharply when it came to Twitter, even among friends.

Postings by brands or companies were trusted less, but levels were similar whether companies posted to Facebook or blogs. Online community sites did not hold the same trustworthiness as Facebook or blogs, whether postings were made by companies or fellow members, and respondents had an even more skeptical eye for independent bloggers.

And across all categories of content creator, Twitter streams were trusted less than other media.

Asked to rate what was most important to making social sites trustworthy, users' top concerns were that the dialogue be open to both positive and negative comments, the quality of content and the responsiveness of the content creator.

These all point to best practices for companies participating in social media, which must show they are willing to deal with consumer complaints in a constructive way and be authentically involved in the conversation with social site visitors.

Some other seeming signs of authenticity mattered less to users, however, including length of participation and number of participants.

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