

Mind your manners online

Tips on how to keep social media from becoming anti-social media

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Though you may be sitting behind your laptop in your skivvies without consequence, it doesn't mean you can act however you want online. (Shutterstock.com)

We all know the saying, what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. But human interaction has changed, and so too must expressions.

Today, what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas, unless it is uploaded to Facebook or Twitter.

And then it can stay online - for-ev-er.

Still, just because human interaction has changed with the advent of social media, it doesn't mean that being social has.

There are no rules, but there is etiquette. And it's not about being Miss Manners all the time; rather, it's about not missing out on authenticity. Be yourself.

Think of the Internet as the world's biggest party. You don't want to be the e-hole at the party, do you?

Scott Stratten is president of UnMarketing and a bestselling author who travels the globe speaking about customer engagement.

As he explains, people have always loved gossip, and today it spreads faster and bigger than ever. "It takes a lot of time to phone 20 people to tell them something, but it takes five seconds to share it with thousands online.

"You risk virtual shunning by behaving like that guy at a party nobody wants around."

Though you may be sitting behind your laptop in your skivvies without consequence, it doesn't mean you can act however you want online.

"Social media is usually quite casual and reaction based, which means people have their guard down. It's a dangerous combination," says Stratten.

And as he warns, online is offline. So there can be a lot on the line.

Dave Larson is an Internet entrepreneur and co-founder of TweetSmarter - one of the most influential Twitter accounts in the world. He says, "There's an entire industry built around salvaging online reputations. Certainly if negative information about you is easily accessible online, it directly translates to your offline reputation."

Stratten and Larson (@unmarketing) and @Tweetsmarter have each offered some key tips to help you keep social media from becoming anti-social media.

Stratten says:

Social media is real life. It is reflections and observations about us. Never say, text, tweet or upload anything you don't want to see on a billboard with your name, face and logo on it with your boss, mom and best client driving by.

It's a conversation, not a dictation. Don't talk at people, talk with them and listen. It's not a new way to send bad advertising messages.

You can't have presence without being present. Trying to automate social media is like sending a mannequin to a networking event. Sure, you're "there," but not really.

Larson's laws:

Seek others you can help and help them. And seek others to help you. (Sometimes that's how days are made, lives are saved, or even how newspaper articles get written.)

Work at striking a positive tone in all your communications. The emotions that we naturally pick up on when meeting in person can be missing in short written statements, sometimes making us look harsh and distant. Adding a little positivity to what we say online, helps to restore that natural emotional balance.

Be biased toward setting a good example. Instead of telling people who are still learning what you think they should do differently, it is better to set a good example than to tell other people they are "doing it wrong."

Now, if you think you could get around these rules by anonymity, you're right.

But, don't be a "cyber-wuss," as Stratten says.

"People are passive in person and aggressive online. If you're going to say something, stand up and say it."

How appropriate that @shanselman on Twitter (Scott Hanselman) summed that up in fewer than 140 characters that went viral: "Why argue on Twitter? Try speaking to someone in person in monotone short sentences, while blindfolded without context."

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