

# TWEET, AVATAR, VLOG, WALL-POSTINGS... WHERE'S MY BRAND?

**M**arketing has become more challenging with the advent of the internet that has moved consumers away from mass media and into fragmented media consumption. In addition, finding new ways to target consumers is now becoming harder with the introduction of new regulations within many countries restricting e-mail, telephone, and television advertising. Therefore, marketers need to explore and accept that there are new ways to engage customers through social media sites such as Second Life, Twitter, Facebook and Flickr. These social media sites can be categorised into three main areas:

- Communication;
- Multimedia; and
- Entertainment.

Although these social media sites offer brands a new way to engage in customer communications, they can also be prone to abuse. This can range from bad word-of-mouth to phishing scams. Therefore, brand owners should be taking a proactive approach to monitoring these sites to ensure that quick action can be taken to reduce the impact of any infringements.

## Communication

The two areas that have seen millions of users communicate with friends and others are social networking sites, such as Facebook, and microblogging sites, such as Twitter. In the last year there has been much publicity about Twitter with many companies now adopting it. Even celebrities are using it evidenced by Ashton Kutcher's recent challenge for CNN to attain a million followers.

For those not familiar with Twitter it works in a very simple way. Firstly you register an account and by doing so you create a username, for example @cscglobal. Then you can choose to "follow" other users or let others follow your account. When you post your message, known as a tweet, you are limited to 140 characters. This "microblogging" makes sites like Twitter different from other online communications.

Social media is now common place on the internet, changing the way people communicate – from a monologue to a dialog.

This has meant that brands have had to adapt marketing strategies and look into new ways to enforce against misuse.

**Justin Hartland reports**

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**All of these new social media sites offer a fantastic opportunity to engage brands with customers in new ways. However, there will be many cases of people misusing brand names either maliciously or naively.**

The main areas of concern for brand owners in Twitter are the misuse of twitter names. A brand name can be registered by anyone – even those not affiliated with the brand. However, Twitter has procedures in place to limit this activity, but brand owners should keep a close eye on new accounts containing their brand names. In addition, brand owners should also monitor links within Twitter that could lead to phishing scams.

The other major social networking site, Facebook, is currently the largest in the world with over 150 million registered users. This has many of the same infringement issues as Twitter, however it's important to recognise that all these sites are very fluid with their content with new comments and users coming and going all the time.

Like with many other social networking sites it's important to monitor what is being said about your brand for reputation management and copyright infringement.

## Multimedia

Sites that are common for multimedia sharing include Flickr, Youtube, and Justin.tv. This is where users upload their own content such as photos, videos, or streaming media. Brand owners with companies such as BBC and CBS have embraced this new media to provide content directly to Youtube. It has also lead to many adverts or television clips spread through viral marketing to a large audience in a matter of hours. At the time of writing Susan Boyle on *Britain's Got Talent* has had 57 million views.

The main issue for brand holders is that their content is used without their knowledge or permission. Youtube and others do provide mechanisms to remove misused materials, through DMCA (Digital Millennium Copyright Act), but there have been high profile cases against Youtube, most notably the case brought forward from Viacom in 2008.

## Entertainment

One of the most popular entertainment social media sites is Second Life. Current data shows that while there are

14+ million registered users of Second Life, there are only approximately 70,000 concurrent users at one time. Furthermore, 40% of users are based in the US and 35% are from Western Europe. It comes as no surprise that the user habits within Second Life are very similar to real life; visitors like to shop, listen to music, and meet with friends.

The companies that have succeeded in Second Life have predominately been B2B and technology brands who engage and enable avatars. A good example of a successful company in Second Life is IBM. They have set up the IBM Sandbox, which allows avatars to build and create objects and communicate with others working in the sandbox for a small monthly fee.

Second Life has also been a place where brand names have been used by third parties and in some cases for financial gain. Second Life has its own currency called the Linden dollar which can be transferred back to real money at a set exchange rate. Many Second Life users have profited within the system by selling clothes ranges or furniture based on other's brand names.

There haven't been many court cases on copyright infringement within Second Life, however, the most notable was the case of Kevin Alderman (avatar name: Stroker Serpentine) against Volkov Catteneo, who's real name turned out to be Robert Leatherwood. The case was about the infringement of the SexGen bed within Second Life, which after many subpoenas to find the identity of Leatherwood ended up with a default decision as he ignored the papers.

All of these new social media sites offer a fantastic opportunity to engage brands with customers in new ways. However, there will be many cases of people misusing brand names either maliciously or naively. The best approach for any brand holder is to set up a stable environment for your brand and get to fully understand the social networking environment. Then create a practical strategy for taking action against those who are damaging your brand. By ignoring these new technologies you could be putting your brands at risk.

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