

How Is Your Social Media Etiquette?

By Tamar Weinberg

Try this checklist on netiquette no-nos.

Social media mimics real relationships in many cases. Would you do the following in real face-to-face relationships?

- Jump on the friendship bandwagon without properly introducing yourself?
- Consistently talk about yourself and promote only yourself without regard for those around you?
- Randomly approach a friend you barely talk to and simply ask for favors – repeatedly?
- Introduce yourself to another person as “Pink House Gardening”?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may need a refresher course on social media etiquette – and perhaps real-life etiquette too. Here are some egregious sins that you must not perform on social media sites. Avoid these violations and learn how to manage and maintain online relationships on a variety of popular sites.

Facebook

If you value your Facebook friendships, **please do not:**

- Add users as friends without proper introductions. If you’re looking to make friends, tell people who you are. Don’t assume they know you – especially if they, well, don’t.
- Abuse application invites and consistently invite friends to participate in vampire or other games.

- Abuse group invites. If your friends are interested, they’ll likely join without your encouragement. And if they don’t accept, don’t send the group request more than once by asking them to join via e-mail, wall post or Facebook message.
- Turn your Facebook profile photo into a pitch so that you can gather leads through your Facebook connections. Thanks, but no thanks. Facebook is about real friendships – not business.
- Use a fake Facebook name. I can’t tell you how many people have added me whose last name is “Com” or “Seo” – who is that? I’m not adding you unless you



can be honest about who you are. Once upon a time, Facebook deleted all accounts that portrayed people as business entities or things. I wish they'd employ the same tactics again.

- Publicize a private conversation on a wall post. In case it isn't obvious, Facebook wall posts are

completely public to all your friends (unless you tweak your privacy settings). Private matters should be handled more privately: via e-mail or even in Facebook private messages.

- Tag individuals in unflattering pictures that may even cost your friends their jobs. Never portray anyone in a negative light, period. Further, if your friends request to be untagged, honor the request.

You should remember that some individuals won't network with you on a *personal* site like Facebook without knowing who you are, even with the proper introduction. If you're looking to establish a professional relationship with someone, consider **LinkedIn.com**. Otherwise, consider building up rapport with people before randomly adding them as your friends.

Some people require face-to-face meetings before they invite you into their private online lives. After all, Facebook was a tool that college students used before it was open to the public, and some still use it purely as a personal communication tool. LinkedIn is still seen as the more professional of the two.

Considering the above, here's a question on Facebook etiquette: *Is it appropriate to let these requests sit in "pending" mode or to reject them outright?* In many instances, these requests are probably better off sitting indefinitely (and it's healthier than the rejection). Plus, in the future, you may want to end up responding to that friend request positively.

LinkedIn

If you value your professional networking opportunities on LinkedIn, **please do not:**

- Gather the e-mail addresses of users. Some spammers go so far as to locate e-mail addresses of LinkedIn Group managers and use this mailing list to promote their own company or service off-site.
- Ask for endorsements from individuals you don't know or who didn't do a good job in your employ. Why would you want to be endorsed by someone who might be considered a bad choice by others?
- Write a recommendation for someone a few days before firing that person. If anything, it may tip him off that he's about to get the axe. Worse yet, it makes your word unreliable.

Twitter

If your cell phone friends help you feel connected moment-to-moment and bring joy to your day, **please do not:**

- Follow a user and then unfollow her before she has a chance to follow back, or as soon as she follows you.

- Mass-follow everyone so that you can artificially inflate your numbers. Some clods then use that number as a success metric for influence. And worse yet, they submit a news release about it.
- Consistently use your Twitter stream for nothing but self-promotion and ego.



“Think about the consequences of your engagement on any social site.”

- Request that your friends retweet your tweets on a consistent basis. This is much more bothersome when the request comes via IM or e-mail and not on Twitter itself. The bottom line: If your content is good enough to stand on its own, it will be retweeted.
- Miss the chance to humanize your profile. Twitter is also about real relationships. Add an avatar and a bio at the minimum. Let people know who you are. To take it a step further, make it easy for people to contact you outside Twitter if necessary. This is especially important if someone on Twitter needs to reach you but can't direct message you since you're not following them.
- Use Twitter to repeat personal and confidential correspondence. If you're not happy with the way an e-mail communication progressed about a private matter, take it up with that person. Broadcasting your dissatisfaction with a private conversation makes you look unprofessional and untrustworthy.
- Use your Twitter feed as a chat room for conversations that are exclusive in nature and not as a broadcast medium. It's nice that Twitter empowers you to use the @ symbol to talk directly to individuals, and that's fine in moderation. As a friend recently said to me, "I'm tired of my Twitter feed being a venue for a private conversation between person X, person Y and person Z."
- Leverage your Twitter connections to send spam via direct messages to those who follow you. Two days later, you may wonder why they don't follow you anymore.

- Abuse Twitter during a crisis. It's a shame when large-scale tragedy strikes, but this is not an appropriate opportunity to use viral marketing techniques.

YouTube

If you want to make the most of your video connections with friends and acquaintances, **please do not:**

- Ask someone repeatedly to watch your low-quality video or subscribe to your channel and give you a five-star rating. Instead, you should post only your best videos and allow your viewers to form their own opinions.
- Force people to subscribe to your YouTube channel by any nefarious means, such as viruses or other malware that signs people up before they even know who you are.

Blogging and Commenting

If you want your blog posts to be read and valued, **please do not:**

- Comment on other articles using names, such as "Yellow Brick Plumbing." Isn't your name actually Alan? There's no SEO value to these comments (they're not followed by default) and this approach only makes you lose credibility in the eyes of the blogger. This isn't the way to *network!*
- Use content from another blog without attribution. Sometimes a specific blog will get an exclusive. Then, another blog will write on the story using the original blog post as its "source" without attribution. Even popular blogs will rip off stories from lesser-known blogs in their space. Don't let greed get in the way of your own blogging habits, and be sure to link out where appropriate.
- Send a pitch to a blogger requesting a link exchange even though your site has no relevancy to the blogger's content. I write about *social media*, people, not about skateboarding. And, well, they say that social media is the new link exchange, so instead of asking for an old-fashioned link (which might have worked in 2002), consider using a more viable strategy for this modern time period.
- Turn a blog into a flame war against someone you don't like. If you are in the wrong, acknowledge the wrongdoing and don't use other blogs to tarnish someone else's image.

Other Social Sites

As new social networking sites appear, you'll want to join in the fun and share the excitement of your new discovery, but **please do not:**

- Allow a new social network's automated system to invite everyone you've ever e-mailed. Your friends and you pay a price when you submit your entire e-mail address book just because the service requests it. Read the fine print on the page, and you'll see that you don't have to do what is asked. Besides, you should *never* volunteer your e-mail account password to any social site. And for good measure, your e-mail account password should not be the same as the password for your social networking account.

Social Media Etiquette in General

You're leaving your digital signature on the Internet right now. Think about the consequences of your engagement on any social site. Racial slurs, criticisms without warrant and blatant abuse don't work in real life, and they have no place in the social media channels simply because you can be more anonymous on these sites. If you were living in New York and you walked up to a stranger

with the same foul-mouthed comments that are rampant on many social media sites, you might never make it home. Consider how your comments could be perceived before you actually post them, and think about logic above emotion at all times.

Above all, think about maintaining a certain level of professionalism, since people can use whatever you make "permanent" on these sites against you. Not all blogs will remove a comment after you've requested that they do so simply because you were angry when you wrote the comment. Before you hit "post," realize that this will be a permanent reflection of your identity and that it may never be erased. It may even be used to judge you.

Remember that social media communities are real relationships, real conversations, and as such, they should be treated as if they are real. It's not about a mentality of *me, myself and I*. It's about the collective, the community and the common good. ■

Tamar Weinberg is the author of *The New Community Rules: Marketing on the Social Web* (www.newcommunityrules.com) and blogs about social media marketing at www.techipedia.com.

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