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COMMUNITY EBOOK / JULY 2011 / www.radian6.com / 1 888 6radian

social media
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SOCIAL MEDIA
ETIQUETTE
minding your
MANNERS
on the
SOCIAL WEB



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Social Media Etiquette - Minding Your Manners on the Social Web

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CHAPTER 1

INTRO - WHAT IS ETIQUETTE?

"Sometimes being able to publish every whim that scans across your brain is the best thing in the world. Sometimes, it can become a real problem. The killer is this: when it is a problem, you're usually the last to know and the damage is done." - **Mitch Joel**

We probably all remember that big poster board from elementary school listing the rules for proper etiquette in the classroom:

"We say Please and Thank you"

"We use our indoor voices"

"We treat others the way we would like to be treated"

These were posted as reminders and were referenced whenever we fell off track. In terms of etiquette, not much changes over the course of our lives. Being polite and respectful to others is still Social Etiquette 101.

Etiquette is defined by Merriam Webster as: "the conduct or procedure required by good breeding or prescribed by authority to be observed in social or official life."

"Social and official life" applies not only to face-to-face interaction, but to our online interactions as well. In this eBook we will delve into what proper social etiquette looks like and how to ensure we are conducting ourselves accordingly.

So beyond the Merriam-Webster definition, how else can we define etiquette? Having proper etiquette on the social web means being aware of your audience, understanding how they communicate and being a valuable, welcome and positive contributor to the community.

It is all about how you should conduct yourself while engaging across the social web. It's about using good common sense, being yourself and acting like you would if you were having these interactions face to face. We've been doing the social part of social media for years – from playgrounds to professional meetings we've learned what is and what isn't appropriate for each space. So how does that extend to the online world? How do we put that into place on the social web?

This eBook will provide insights on what has become the norm for expected behavior in social spaces like Facebook, Twitter, Blogs and Forums. We'll talk about the benefits of displaying proper social etiquette and touch upon some things you'll definitely want to steer away from. Ever wonder if there's a difference between personal and professional etiquette? We've got you covered. Worried about how to handle difficult situations? Those

situations won't be difficult after you've implemented a few of our etiquette tips. And are you minding your Ps and Qs with the three Rs and Ds? We'll explain what they are in the coming chapters, and why it's important to know about them. This eBook isn't meant to dictate the only way to behave online, rather it is meant to be a guide to getting you started in the right direction.

CHAPTER 2 PROPER ETIQUETTE HAS ITS BENEFITS

There are several benefits to proper social etiquette and unlike kindergarten, they amount to more than simply avoiding a playmate squishing scented markers into your face.

There are three main benefits to exhibiting proper etiquette that we will highlight and review. They are:

- *Reciprocation*
- *Respect*
- *Reliability*

Reciprocation: Simply put, it's about give and take. You do not want to be known as someone who spends all their time online promoting themselves. Whether you use social media personally or professionally, you will want to make sure you are not solely sharing your content. A good rule of thumb is to promote others three times as much (or more!) than you promote yourself. For example, for every personal blog post or tweet you share across your social networks, share two or three that are not related to you and that do not necessarily promote your brand, yet are things that you believe your community will find useful.

Chances are that when you take an interest in others by sharing their content, they in turn, are more likely to take an interest in you and share your content as well. However, don't share merely with the intention of earning reciprocation. If you go in with this attitude you will likely be disappointed because things don't always work out fair and you might find that earning reciprocation can be challenging. When it is done with a genuine interest in sharing and engaging with your community, this comes across and will make others more likely to gravitate to you. Remember, sharing what others have to offer is a great way to connect with your friends and followers, as well as an opportunity to get to know them a little better and vice versa.

Respect: Following proper etiquette can earn us the respect of our peers and community members. Think back to the golden rule; treat others the way you would like to be treated. Simple? Yes, but it goes far beyond that.

Being polite and kind to others shows that you value them and people appreciate being valued. People will respect you for the way you behave online, and with respect comes trust. Keep in mind that respect is earned and not always given lightly. A few kind interactions are not all that is required. It is based on consistent behaviour. Think of those in your life who have earned your respect. Think about the ways they have acted to do this. They probably were people that were nice to all those around them and who you knew you could rely on, trust and expect a certain level of etiquette from.

Add value and be helpful and others will treat you with respect. The added benefit here is that this creates a strong foundation for your community. It ensures all your actions are fostering a positive community and this can only serve to help it to grow. As we discussed last month, in relation to competitive intel, when we are respectful in the marketplace towards everyone, including our competitors, we are respected in return.

Be aware of your environment and the conversations going on around you and adjust your behavior accordingly. One way you can do this is to take the time to ensure your social interactions are courteous and well-thought out. When you do, it will help you to build valuable relationships both personally and professionally. Behave like a valuable community member and you will be looked upon as one. Be helpful and considerate and should you ever need help, you will find plenty of people willing to give you a hand. Perception is reality and you will be perceived based on your actions across the social web. Conduct yourself appropriately and you will certainly reap the benefits.

We've heard about the drunk tweets and the inappropriate references to world events. These can shine a negative light on your brand. Imagine this, your are doing a real-time search to find a party planner for your sister's upcoming birthday. You come across vendors who are knowledgeable about party planning in your area. After a quick check of their social profiles, you are interested in reaching out to one of them to get more information. You're not quite sure who to reach out to when, suddenly, you see one of them making lewd remarks. You are not amused. You'd prefer to do business with someone who conducts themselves professionally. The moral of the story? With the immediacy and transparency of the social web, we are an extension of our brand. People will make judgement calls based on the limited information they see and what bubbles to **the top of Google search results**.

Reliability: Build relationships across your social networks before you actually need them. When you do this, you will have a community that you can rely on and your community members will know that they can rely on you too. Your community will learn that they can expect the right behavior from you at all times. It's important to set these expectations early on. Sometimes even one slip-up can be a challenge to overcome. Once something is out on the social web it's almost impossible to take back. Set clear expectations of how you will behave and interact online right from the get-go. This can be done through your social bios/profiles and most importantly by the way you act.

For example, **Foiled Cupcakes used social media** to research the market, learn about industry events, and connect with like-minded individuals. They interacted, mingled, chatted, shared insights, tips and other helpful information for 3 months before they began marketing their cupcakes. Through their use of social media they made some great connections and new friends along the way, well before they had a product to sell. They branded themselves by being an active part of the community. Because they were already a familiar name in the industry and had established relationships, when the time came to launch their website and sell their cupcakes, people were more interested in checking them out. The community knew they were a reliable resource.

Remember, while the class clown may have been loads of fun in high school, it is probably safe to assume he wasn't the first person people were turning to when they needed someone they could count on. That's because he probably wasn't perceived as responsible or reliable based on his behavior.

The same can be said when it comes to social etiquette. Part of being reliable means keeping your word. If you make a promise, keep it. If you say you're going to do something, do it. Keep your appointments and be on time. Online meetings are just as important as offline meetings.

Why is this important? Because your community, and potential clients, want to interact with people they can rely on. No one wants to do business with someone they can't count on. If you can demonstrate that you are reliable through your interactions and respond to any concerns that arise in a polite and respectful way, your consumers will feel more comfortable.

Let's look at a simple example through Facebook. Imagine you are looking for a business card vendor. You search online and find two that have card styles you like. You notice both have Facebook pages and decide to check them out for possible promotions, discounts and to get more information. While reviewing you notice one company is much more engaged and interactive than the other. They are chatting with the community, responding to questions, and sharing helpful information about things that will help your business card stand out from the rest. The other company doesn't give fans the opportunity to comment on their wall, ask questions or interact in general. They are solely interested pushing their own content. Though both have beautiful cards, who would you be more inclined to do business with?

Etiquette makes all the difference. Your community wants to interact with and buy from companies that will treat them with respect and since social networks, for the most part, are public, you have the opportunity to show them you will.

CHAPTER 3 EXHIBITING PROPER ETIQUETTE:

So we've defined etiquette and explained why it's important, but what about the actual act of exhibiting proper etiquette? In this chapter we will review what proper etiquette looks like as we interact as individuals on the social web. Then, in the next chapter, we will take a look at whether there are any differences for corporate or professional interactions.

Just like you wouldn't barge into the middle of a conversation at a party and try to dominate it, you shouldn't jump into the middle of a conversation online without listening to the discussion first. Join conversations because you're interested in the subject matter or because you have something beneficial to add – not because you have an agenda or want to push your material.

Hello and Goodbye - There are some basics everyone should know for interacting across the social web and they aren't all that much different from interacting offline. For example, on a real-time platform like Twitter it might be a good idea to say hello and goodbye. Saying hello when you jump online is a nice way to start your daily time online and encourage conversation. Saying goodbye at the end of your time online lets people know when you're heading offline. No one likes to be left hanging in the middle of a conversation. If you do this consistently, your community will come to know when they can expect you to be available.

Introductions - Introduce yourself and introduce others. Anytime you friend, follow or engage with people who may not know you, it is always a good idea to introduce yourself and share some of the basics like who you are and where you are from.

Start with a simple hello, who you are and where you are at geographically. If you are connecting for business purposes, be clear about that and add what you do. If you are connecting on a personal level add a little about the interests you share. Introducing yourself helps to break the ice and open the door to conversation.

Connecting people together is another great way to be socially adept. Introduce like-minded individuals and help others build their networks. One example of how you can do this online is by using email to connect two or more people together. Try leading in with something they have in common as a starting point for discussion. For example, Bob, I'd like you to meet Joan. You both work in the nonprofit sector and have an interest in using social media for causes. I think the two of you will have plenty of ideas to share with each other. Naturally, you can do this directly on social networks like Twitter and Facebook as well.

Just remember, if you are going to use email for introductions, be sure that you have permission to share the email addresses of the people you are connecting. These days, sharing an email address is like giving out a telephone number. Be sure both parties are on board before you share.

Please and Thank You - Say please and thank you. If you want to share content ask politely. If someone has shared yours be sure to thank them whenever possible. Though you may not be able to respond to every comment on your blog or Facebook page, you can take a moment to respond to a few and perhaps make a general statement thanking everyone who shared your content.

Don't limit saying thank you only to people sharing your content. If someone has taken the time to share their thoughts with you then take a moment to show your gratitude. Thank them for sharing their thoughts and, if time permits, start a conversation. Stop by their blog and leave comments on the articles that resonate with you. Share their content when appropriate. In other words, take it a step further and take an interest in the people who are connecting with you, whenever possible.

Cliques - If your social circle online is a large one, there are probably people in it that you don't know as well as others or not at all. Review your friends/follower lists frequently. Set some time aside each week to manage your following/follower ratio. It's ok to step outside your comfort zone and expand your horizons when it comes to connecting. Not everyone you connect with has to be like-minded. Diversity breeds inspiration.

Be sure you're reaching out to people you haven't connected with yet, rather than just communicating with the same select few. Invite new followers/friends to reach out to you regularly and make it easy for them by sharing the best ways they can connect with you. Do the same for those whom you haven't had chance to communicate with for a while. When you do, you will make your new followers and old friends feel welcome and valued.

Think of your time online as building a social resume, a body of work if you will, that represents who you are. What do you want your resume to portray?

The Three Ds

No one wants to get a call from the company legal department letting them know something they shared online got them into a heap of trouble. Whether you are using social media for personal or professional purposes, take some time to familiarize yourself with The Three Ds.

- *Disclosure*
- *Defamation*
- *Discrimination*

Remembering what they stand for should help you steer clear of potentially disastrous situations.

Disclosure: Do not disclose trade secrets or intellectual property (yours or your clients'). It's safe to say it would be in bad form to have an online discussion about what goes on behind closed doors at your company. Not only could it cost you your job but it could actually give your company's competitors an unfair advantage. **The competition is online and they are listening.**

If you visit websites and discuss or promote your brand and live in the U.S., the **Federal Trade Commission** requires that you disclose who you are or it could be considered false advertising. The Canadian equivalent is the **Competition Bureau**, but if you live elsewhere, you'll want to be on the safe side and check if your country has a similar policy.

The FTC gives us a good example in their endorsement guidelines PDF: an online message board designated for discussions of new music download technology is frequented by MP3 player enthusiasts. They exchange information about new products, utilities, and the functionality of numerous playback devices. Unbeknownst to the message board community, an employee of a leading playback device manufacturer has been posting messages on the discussion board promoting the manufacturer's product. Knowledge of this poster's employment likely would affect the weight or credibility of their endorsement. Therefore, the poster should clearly and conspicuously disclose her relationship to the manufacturer to members and readers of the message board. This is just one of several examples they have included. For additional examples or to learn more you can read the FTC's endorsement guidelines **PDF**.

Defamation: Do not make statements about someone that are false and could potentially cause economic consequences. If you do, you may find yourself facing a judge. Social media enthusiasts are not exempt from the general laws of libel and privacy.

One example of this would be **the case against David Milum**. In May 2004, upset that his \$3,000 retainer wasn't returned, David Milum began blogging about his former attorney Rafe Banks. Milum accused the lawyer of bribing judges on behalf of drug dealers. He even went so far as to add at the end of one posting, "Rafe, don't you wish you had given back my \$3,000 retainer?"

Banks stated the postings were false and sued Milum. In January 2006, Milum became the first U.S. blogger to lose a libel suit, according to the Media Law Resource Center in New York, which tracks litigation involving bloggers. Milum was ordered to pay Banks \$50,000.

Discrimination: Do not make rude statements about any of the protected classes (age, sex, race, religion etc.) or share/make inappropriate jokes. Don't forget that social sites

do not allow you to know your complete audience and you don't want to say anything to offend anyone. While sites like Facebook have privacy settings that allow you to limit what you put out to an audience, there is nothing to guarantee that it won't be shared externally. Most companies also have discrimination policies such as this great example by **3M**. The important thing to note from 3M's policy is that it covers not only intentional discrimination, but anything that can be said or done that another employee might be offended by or feel is discrimination. The policy highlights that respectful behaviour is expected at all times and to keep in mind that the employee's actions reflect on 3M. Take note of any company discrimination policies and keep in mind that if you have fellow employees on your social networks, the policy can often transfer there as well.

Quick Tips for Twitter, Facebook, Blogs and LinkedIn

Twitter

- *Share great content & create conversations*
- *Watch your language*
- *Keep automation to a minimum*
- *Promote others more than yourself*
- *Keep the caps lock off*
- *Review before you retweet*
- *If you have an issue with an individual/company, rather than attack, reach out for resolution*

Facebook

- *Send your friend request only once and be respectful if it's not accepted*
- *Choose photos that represent you well*
- *Use status updates to invite conversation*
- *Tag photos judiciously*
- *Keep private subject matter off the public wall*

Blogs / Forums

- *Be a part of the community*
- *Leave thoughtful comments*
- *Don't use comments to self-promote*
- *Welcome differing opinions*
- *Help promote tolerance*
- *Don't have music or videos that start automatically*
- *Pop-ups are pesky*
- *Be transparent*

LinkedIn

- *Connect only with people you know*
- *Use email for connecting and communication not just promotion*
- *Include how you are connected when sending invites*
- *We all have busy outside lives - stick to regular business hours*

These are just a few quick tips, for more detailed and in depth looks at proper social media etiquette across platforms check out these great posts:

An Insider's Guide to Social Media Etiquette - Chris Brogan

The Ultimate Social Media Etiquette Handbook - Tamera Weinberg

Do we Need to Revisit our Settings for Trust and Transparency? - Valeria Maltoni

The Uncharted Territory of New Spaces

All these tips and suggestions are great, but what about venturing into new spaces? Every network/channel has its own standard of etiquette that changes over time. It's important to view each network as an anthropologist before you go charging in and participating. When there are new spaces to venture into or when we are entering unfamiliar territory, consider the following tips to ensure that you are not breaking any social etiquette rules.

Spend some time observing: Before you begin participating in a new to you space, take some time to listen to the conversations, watch how people share information and how they interact with one another. Determine who is respected in the space and take note of how they are participating in the space. What things, if any, are unique to this new space? Since there is rarely a need to participate immediately, take the time to survey your surroundings and ensure you understand how the space and the people populating it function.

Seek out best practices: Many spaces will have **engagement guidelines** or information about how the space should be used; take **Intel's** or **Oracle's** guidelines for example. Often times these can be found on the "About Us" page. Another great idea is to look to the area's most avid users. Many will have written articles covering this topic on their blogs. Take for example **Pinterest** which is a relatively new space which is used to catalogue "Things you Love." They list the rules to proper etiquette right in their email that invites you to join their site. Many spaces list their etiquette rules on their site - read them! Don't forget, it's also ok to simply ask someone. Seek out people who are active and respected in the space and reach out to them, letting them know you want to make sure you are following proper etiquette for the space. People will appreciate that you are taking the time to learn and will be likely to point you in the right direction.

Tread lightly: Once you have a grasp of how to interact in the space and what proper etiquette will look like it's a good idea to dip your toe in before doing a cannonball into the space. Start interacting with community members and take it slowly at first. Building relationships and respect with those first few will ultimately take you further than focusing on high numbers - shallow relationships with tonnes of people in the space.

CHAPTER 4 THE PERSONAL VS. PROFESSIONAL - DO THE SAME RULES APPLY?

Oftentimes on the social web we will be speaking from our own voice but for some of us we will have the opportunity to speak from a corporate voice. This may be through a corporate twitter handle or Facebook page etc..

We talked in the previous chapter about how to exhibit proper etiquette as an individual, but let's now review how to do so when speaking from a corporate voice. Do the same rules apply?

We'll start off by saying that, yes, a lot of the same rules apply and the basics are still the same, but let's go over some key differences:

1. Think about the We vs. I response. For example will "we" as a company respond as a unified brand through corporate channels saying things like "We thought you might find this useful" vs. "I thought you might like this." "We" might be better used when sending general mentions. If you are speaking from a brand point of view and want to say "I", consider identifying yourself to show who "I" is.
2. Don't jump in where you are not welcome. How do you know?
 - Ask
 - Determine who is "hosting" the conversation
 - Know who you are reaching out to before jumping in
 - Does the conversation warrant a response or outreach or is it a peer to peer conversation?
 - Decide if it would be better to reach out from a personal voice.
3. In some situations where a person jumping in might be welcome a company is not.
4. Since you are speaking on behalf of an organization there is less of a need to disclose biases (they will be evident).

Though subtle, there are differences between how you conduct yourself on your social networks personally and how you represent yourself as a professional. Think about your behaviour at a friend's party compared to how you would behave at a company party. Now think about the same for social networks. Maybe you are more relaxed when you are tweeting from your own account than when you are representing your company – perhaps you use colorful language. Keep in mind though, if your social profiles share information about where you work or what you do, you ARE representing your company, whether you are speaking in an official capacity or not.

Should you behave differently when you are engaging in social spaces professionally than you do personally? The choice ultimately is yours. Perhaps when determining the answer, you should consider that when it comes to the social web, what you share could very well be in the cloud forever, and easily found with a simple Google search.

Regardless of whether you're using your social networks for business or pleasure, everything you are sharing has the potential to be shared by others – that's the whole point of the social web. Though it may not be fair, as we mentioned in chapter 2, you can and will be judged based on how you are representing yourself online (that means what groups you're affiliated with, who your friends are, what photos you share or are tagged in, etc.) so put your best foot forward at all times.

CHAPTER 5 HANDLING DIFFICULT SITUATIONS GRACEFULLY

How do you deal with those who are being rude or 'breaking the rules'? Don't fret, we aren't suggesting that you police the social web. Those who are not acting in a way that is acceptable by the community will most likely find themselves ostracised. The court of public opinion doesn't look too kindly upon trolls, spammers and the like.

Handling difficult situations doesn't have to be difficult. The best way to handle any difficult situation is to be prepared for it. You can do that by creating guidelines for handling issues so that if and when one arises you can follow the steps to successfully resolving it. Use your company handbook as a reference when building your social media handbook as many of the same rules will apply.

Until you have your **playbook** in place, here are a few suggestions. If someone is behaving badly, maybe ranting and raving about how your customer service team didn't make them feel like their problem was important, take ownership of the issue

and start working toward a resolution. Not sure where to begin? Start by always being polite and considerate of the person's feelings, and apologize when you can – even if you feel you've done nothing wrong. It's not personal, so don't take it personally. In other words, keep your emotions in check.

What if someone in your company fires off a rogue tweet? Don't worry, we all make mistakes and everyone knows that. Though company policy might be to delete the offending tweet, don't pretend it didn't happen. And remember that it might have been shared before you could delete it. So be swift! Explain, apologize and move forward. The longer you go without an explanation the more speculation builds. It doesn't have to be the end of the world.

In February 2011, Toyota handled a sticky situation, quickly and graciously, when its brand was hijacked by MommyNetworks.org **creating a public relations nightmare**. MommyNetworks.org offered mom bloggers a \$10 Amazon gift card if they would post positive reviews about Toyota. The problem? **MommyNetworks.org** wasn't acting on behalf of Toyota and did not get their consent for the promotion. Toyota's response was not only swift but clever. They incorporated #toyotafail - the hashtag associated with the backlash - to ensure their response was received by those in the community affected. In the end, Toyota's response brought them kudos from the community.

The **American Red Cross** is another example of an organization that deals with difficult situations on a regular basis with ease and grace. You can follow them across social networks and learn from their lead.

So what shouldn't you respond to? It's probably best not to respond to snarky, or potentially inflammatory comments as that may only add fuel to the fire. If your company has a blog or forum, consider **creating etiquette guidelines** so your community knows what's expected. (e.g. Profane comments will be deleted, spammers will be banned from comments, etc.) You should also list what your organization will and won't respond to so your community knows that up front as well.

CHAPTER 6 WRAP-UP

We hope that this has been a helpful guide for proper social media etiquette and provided tips and tools you can use to ensure that you are adhering to proper etiquette in your social spaces. We also want to remind you that it is not always black and white. There are always exceptions, and the rules for proper etiquette in various spaces can shift

and change over time. The important thing is to remain mindful of how you are being perceived in any social space in which you are participating.

As we said before, perception is reality and you will be perceived based on your actions across the social web. It's not only about how your actions are intended but about how they are perceived. Sarcasm can often be hard to decipher in written form. Think about all the ways that a comment can be taken before posting it. Could it be perceived in a negative way?

It's also important to keep in mind social, political, cultural and religious differences in etiquette. Social spaces are often global spaces - remember that there will be different social norms in one space. This goes back to knowing who you are interacting with and keeping this in mind.

So to recap, through this eBook we have covered what social etiquette is, the benefits of exhibiting proper etiquette and the difference between the personal and professional voice. We also shared tips to adhere to so that you can ensure you are following proper etiquette for specific spaces. Hopefully now you will know what to do when someone else isn't following proper etiquette, or worse, putting you in a position where you might not want to!

It doesn't stop here though! We challenge you to think about how you participate on the social web. Do you 'mind your manner's? Are there ways you can improve? Do you manage a social space where the rules of proper etiquette have not yet been defined? How can you help people along and let them know what's expected in that space? Lastly, let us know your thoughts on social etiquette. Are there any questions you'd like to ask? We always look forward to your feedback!

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