



S T O N E W A R D

The Case for CEOs and Social Media

by Emily Reeves / 3.2013

Overview

For business-to-business marketers, there is a constant conversation around whether the executive-level audience is using social media and if they are, whether they are open to business discussions in those channels. Specifically, are CEOs using social media? Are they paying attention to the conversations? Are they contributing to the conversations? The bottom line question is: can marketers reach CEOs through social media? The answer—right now—is “no.” But they should be.

The numbers, at-a-glance.

- 66% of the CEOs of the world's *top 50* companies are social.
- 18% of CEOs *worldwide* are social.
- 49% of corporate reputation is attributable to the CEO; companies with a higher reputational status *have social CEOs*.

CEOs are
UNSOCIAL

Video is the social CEO hotspot:

- 40% of CEOs appear in videos on the company website or on a company YouTube channel.
- 75% of executives watch work-related videos on business-related websites at least weekly.
- 52% of executives watch work-related videos on YouTube at least weekly.

The longer a CEO has held office, the more likely he or she is to be social:

- 3 years or less: 48%
- More than three years: 79%

*Why are CEOs **not** personally using social media?*

1. Though they are under pressure these days to appear accessible and authentic, social media—with its demands for quick, unscripted updates that can quickly go viral—poses risks for top managers and the companies they represent, in the form of lawsuits, leaked trade secrets or angered customers.
2. Many corporate leaders say they are too busy running a company to spend time posting 140-character messages to Twitter, or retweeting posts from followers. Social takes significant time and commitment, plus it's an entirely new way of engaging with the world.
3. For many CEOs, the business case for using social can seem unclear, with no direct correlation between social media engagements and sales.

Those CEOs that are personally using social media, are seeing *positive results*.

Corporate leaders such as Yahoo Inc.'s Marissa Mayer have struck a balance on their Twitter accounts between personal and professional. When she was tapped to head the struggling Internet company, Ms. Mayer, who was then pregnant with her first child, rallied her troops and investors by posting photos of Yahoo-themed baby clothes on Instagram. *Showing personality and delivering a personal message allows fans and followers to connect with the people behind the brand.*

Aetna CEO Mark Bertolini started his account three years ago. He has used the platform to share personal news, such as his son's kidney transplant in June. Though Mr. Bertolini started tweeting to communicate with friends, he became a lightning rod for critics, one of whom tweeted a wish that he would die of a stroke, or that his family would perish in a car crash. But he also has used the platform to show a different side of the insurer. Last summer, when a colon-cancer patient tweeted about hitting the cost ceiling on his Aetna health plan, hundreds of Twitter users directed angry posts at Mr. Bertolini, who then reached out to the patient, also via Twitter. The result: Aetna agreed to cover the man's medical bills through the end of his latest plan year. Though this is not a result that can happen for every customer, *it is a story that may never had made it to the desk of the CEO had he not been a part of the conversation.*

Fortune 500 CEOs who do have Twitter accounts have an *average of 33,250 followers*. A business celebrity such as former GE chief Jack Welch has 1.3 million followers. *Clearly, people want to hear what these CEOs have to say and who they really are day-to-day.*

How do CEOs approach using social media?

Many executives who tweet get a helping hand, either in the form of edits from their public-relations staff or ghostwritten posts.

CEOs who do mind their own accounts have to steer clear of bashing competitors, disparaging customers or opining on polarizing topics like religion and politics

Even CEOs who don't personally use social media, require that their companies do.

CEOs openly acknowledge the importance of the use of social media for their companies yet don't see the need to be socially active themselves.

- 94% of corporations are using social media in one way, shape or form
- 85% credit social media for providing increased exposure to their business
- 74% indicated an increase in website traffic thanks to as little as 6 hours a week on social media
- 58% say it's use for lead generation & developing brand loyalty
- 65% say social media is key to learning about their competition

The Case For Social Media Use

Why should CEOs start personally using social media?

“Any leader who isn’t engaged in social media today is like the leaders of 50 years ago who insisted on sending a telegram instead of dialing a phone.”

Social media isn’t a passing fad. The primary reason to be social is because that is where customer lives. Even if executives are not leveraging it to close business and interact with customers, they need to be spending enough time online to at least understand the shift in the world. This lack of engagement would be similar to 50% of the world using email with big CEOs holding out; or 50% of your customers shopping online but no CEOs trying it.

Getting on board with social is manageable. It can be intimidating, problematic, time-consuming and just generally scary. But, the world has changed and there’s no hiding anymore. There’s no denying that sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are now part of the daily fabric of life. CEOs have a responsibility to their shareholders, customers and employees to be visible. CEOs who shun social media risk losing touch with some of their most lucrative customers, prospects and influencers.

Employees want their CEOs on social media. Employees feel that companies with CEOs who use social media are much better positioned for success. In addition to enhancing the brand, employees believe that social CEOs help the company on most every front including recruiting, trustworthiness and sales.

The point is that CEOs need to champion innovation wherever it exists. Social media is just one form of innovation; there is much more coming down the pike.

Some video tips for CEOs.

Since video seems to be the most popular form of social media communication and consumption for CEOs, here are some tips for video:

- YouTube says you have a total of 15 seconds for your video to engage your viewer, at which point they decide whether to stick with your video or jump ship to your competitor’s video.
- Keep your videos short. If you feel like you have a lot to say, create a series of short videos.
- Create videos with a purpose by setting goals. Is your goal awareness? If so, then create a video that introduces your company and tells its story.
- Add emotion! Create videos that allow your target the ability to share the videos with other decision makers.

Why CEOs should blog, at a minimum.

Whether time, immeasurable ROI or something else be the issue, many CEOs who begin blogs abandon them in short order. Whether at a maturing start up or a Fortune 500 stalwart, CEOs have a store of practical knowledge interesting to current employees, potential employees, customers and the general public. A CEO who blogs consistently and well can build an enormous amount of goodwill for the company he or she leads. And generate great search engine fodder to build ranking results when searching for information about a company.

Interested in learning more?

Contact Emily Reeves at ereeves@stoneward.com for help planning your brand's digital engagements.

About Stone Ward

[Stone Ward](#) is a full-service ad agency. Established in 1984 by Larry Stone and Millie Ward, today the agency employs 52, with capitalized billings exceeding \$40 million. The agency's offices are in Chicago and Little Rock.

About Emily Reeves, Director of Digital Strategy & Planning

As the agency's digital champion, Emily Reeves proves that Stone Ward has the offerings, expertise and alliances to bring sound, measurable digital innovation to our clients' marketing efforts. A seasoned communications strategist with a passion for all things digital, Emily has distinguished herself as an avid blogger, social media speaker, industry observer and moderator. In her role as digital thought leader for Stone Ward, Emily collaborates with our team of agency leaders in creative, brand management, public relations, media, digital technology and video production to create relevant ways to tell our clients' stories in the digital space and to provide meaningful measurement and analytics as a tool for calculating our efforts. Emily's focus on measurement extends to her duties as the agency's research leader, where she works with Stone Ward clients to develop and execute research plans that inform integrated client marketing efforts.

Sources:

[CEOs Afraid of Going Social Doing Shareholders a Massive Disservice](#)

[CEOs on Social Media: Do As I Say, Not As I Do](#)

[How to Use Video for Social Media in B2B Sales](#)

[Some CEOs Fear Twitter](#)

[Unsocial CEOs](#)

[9 CEO Blogs to Watch](#)