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 About 8 days ago [Jennifer Van Grove](#) 39

How CEOs Will Use Social Media in the Future

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Today's [CEO is not social](#). So says Forrester Research's CEO George Colony. Very few of the CEOs at top companies in the U.S. and the rest of the world have any material presence on the popular social media sites. Colony believes they should be social though, and all signs are pointing to a future filled with CEOs who can speak the language of the people — social media.

While one can only speculate about the future of CEOs and social media, there's no question that social media plays a huge part in life and the world as we know it right now.


As younger CEOs replace older ones, news consumption habits change and social media continues its trend towards ubiquity, there's little question that the man (or woman) at the top will need a firm grasp on social media — whether that be for recruiting, scouting, public engagement or social CRM.





The Next Generation of CEOs



When it comes to CEOs, there's a vast disparity between the young ones heading up startups and the more seasoned CEOs running the world's most powerful companies. That disparity is social media — the young are more versed than the old. The difference between the two groups can be attributed to different generations and different attitudes around content and information meant for the public and private domains.

No one is predicting that the venerable CEOs will be booted from their lofty perches for lack of a [Twitter](#)  account. In fact, younger CEOs with a predilection and savvy for social media may find their visibility to either be a contributing factor to their rise or a liability once they graduate to bigger, hence more vulnerable, publicly traded companies.

Let's have a gander at some stats on the status quo. In April, Colony let it be known that most CEOs are not social. In fact, by his own research and calculations, Colony has [concluded](#) that, "None of the CEOs of Fortune Magazine's top 100 global corporations have a social profile."

Social media abstinence even appears to extend to CEOs of tech companies. "Eric Schmidt of Google is an infrequent Twitterer and is not a blogger; Steve Ballmer at Microsoft has no blog and no Twitter account; Michael Dell is on Twitter but is not an external blogger ... Steve Jobs of Apple, and Larry Ellison of Oracle have no Twitter, Facebook , LinkedIn , or blog presences that we could find."

His findings paint a bleak present tense. In the coming years, however, there will be a changing of the guard that favors social media over silence.

We Live in a Social Media World



Let us pause and reflect on the fact online users spend [22.7% of their time](#) on social networking sites. That's twice as much time as we spend on any other online activity. Consider where people are [getting their news](#) today. More and more, it's not through direct sources like *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, or TV broadcasts, but [through social networks](#).

Plus, industry is social. In the future, every company, no matter how small or how big, will be influenced and impacted by social media internally or externally. In the entertainment industry, for instance, social media has the potential to significantly bump up live television viewing audiences. Network executives such as Greg Goldman, formerly an executive director at ABC and now CCO at [Philo](#), are nearly certain it's happening now and will [become more obvious](#) with time.

Take what you know about the world today and then ask yourself, can a CEO remain relevant if they're not versed in the new language of the people they serve?

[SCVNGR's](#) youthful CEO Seth Priebatsch doesn't believe so. The 21-year-old CEO says he's "never lived in a world where I didn't use social media."

Priebatsch compares social media to cloud computing, and makes the analogy of how building applications for the cloud is a given. "It never occurred to me that you would write software to run on machines as opposed to access it through a browser. Why would you do that?"

For Priebatsch, social media is a given.

"Those companies that actively monitor, react and engage with what people are saying about them are at a huge advantage. If I've just launched a new feature on SCVNGR and people like it (or don't) I know immediately. And that's powerful. And what's even cooler is that I can dig deeper. Someone says on Twitter: 'Hey @SCVNGR, love the new social check-in. Way cool!' and I can tweet back immediately 'Thanks @user. What have you been using it for?' And immediately get more information on how people are using SCVNGR, why they like it (or don't) and how to make it better. That's real power. It combines huge scale (tons of people talking) with massive granularity (ability to dig deep into one response)."

CEOs and the Future

The business leaders of tomorrow will be [versed in social media](#), and we don't need a crystal ball to predict how CEOs in the future will use social media. It's the socially versed CEOs of today who help manufacture the following:

Opportunity Knocks

LIVESTRONG CEO [Doug Ulman](#), himself a social media advocate and user, believes that perceptions around social media being too risky for CEOs are beginning to change.

"I would predict that more and more executives will see this as an opportunity rather than a risk," he says.

Certainly the opportunity is there. Ulman pulls from his own work at LIVESTRONG as proof of concept. "Transparency and authenticity are two important factors in our work and social media allows us to amplify both in a significant way."

Plus, given the digital landscape of the world we live in, future CEOs using social media is practically a given.

"Those who are currently growing up using these tools and mediums will have them integrated closely with their daily lives as they begin to enter the workforce, so they will come to expect their colleagues to be engaged as well," according to Ulman.

Colony also sees social media as a platform paved with opportunity. He believes that CEOs should be social if the CEO "has something valuable and distinctive to say," and has "a specialized strategy for social."

For CEOs looking to start their social path, Colony prescribes a four part methodology that involves targeting the right audience, defining a clear reason to be social, setting up social expectations, and choosing the right platform(s).

Public Engagement



Edelman Digital's Senior VP and Director of Insights Steve Rubel also sees great opportunity for how CEOs will use social media in the future.

One opportunity lies in public engagement, or as Edelman CEO Richard Edelman calls it, "[the third way](#)."

"Companies need to complement their usual paid and earned media strategies by embracing new, social and owned media," Edelman argues.

Rubel believes that CEOs will drive adoption of the third way. "They [CEOs] will lower the internal barriers within the organization so that it can engage the public at every level directly in achieving shared outcomes."

Rubel's own personal use of social media, his day-to-day dealings with the CEOs of client companies and his astute observations of corporate and market dynamics make him an expert on the subject.

While bullish on CEOs making organizational changes to better incorporate social media, Rubel does not see reason to predict a huge uptick in social media broadcasting from the CEOs themselves. "I see CEOs more laying the groundwork in vision and process than necessarily participating actively themselves," asserts Rubel.

Recruiting and Scouting



Talent is a commodity. Facebook, [Google](#) and Twitter often cherry pick each others' employees. The company with the brightest minds is the one that's most likely to excel. As such, recruiting is key and social media gives CEOs the ability to scout out potential hires and follow what they're posting and what others are posting about them.

In a related fashion, CEOs will scout out the competition and search for potential acquires via social media properties. Many executives have already been doing this for years. Venture capitalists like [Fred Wilson](#), for instance, have discovered the added benefits of maintaining a professional blog.

Wilson [uses his blog](#) to find companies to invest in and build relationships with entrepreneurs. It's certainly no coincidence, then, that Union Square Ventures has an impressive portfolio of companies that includes [Fousquare](#), Twitter and [Tumblr](#) .

Social Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

“Every CEO has a CRM dashboard right now. In the future, every CEO will have a social media dashboard,” predicts [Miso](#) CEO [Somrat Niyogi](#).

Niyogi asserts that the social media dashboard will become a fixture inside the enterprise. “Every business unit will be using social media within the enterprise – customer support will use it to answer questions using tools like CoTweet , sales organizations will use it to get a better read on what’s happening with their customers in real-time, marketing organizations will be using it as a new channel to connect with new or existing customers. It’s already happening right now.”

What are your thoughts on how CEOs will use social media in the future? Let us know in the comments below.

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 [Malik Thomas](#) 1 week ago

Riveting article. You're dead on in many facets. CEO's continuously evolve as does social media and the constant is the fact that inter-connection and new media is for everyone...including CEO's. Do you think that CEO's, who once were very isolated will utilize new media to share in best practices with one another or do you think that CEO's will continue to operate on an island?

[Like](#) [Reply](#)

 [Jennifer Van Grove](#) ★ 1 week ago [in reply to Malik Thomas](#)

I personally think that older CEOs are a bit too set in their ways to change. That doesn't mean they can't or won't, but that they see the obstacle over the opportunity.

 [Roskey Dicoster and 1 more liked this](#) [Like](#) [Reply](#)

 [Website Design](#) 1 week ago [in reply to Malik Thomas](#)

In the ever changing position of CEO at Fortune 100 companies do stockholders really want their CEO to grab headlines and attention with a cult like social following? What happens when the CEO moves on? Chaos that could lead to a CEO vs. company mentality.

What about one slip up and missed tweet that causes controversy and damage. There's too many unknowns and the risk is too high for individuals to run their own CEO social network. Maybe if the CEO had a team managing their online PR... but then what's the point because it's all scripted...

[Like](#)[Reply](#)

[Chris Dessi](#) 1 week ago

Great post, with some great quantitative analysis to back up your thoughts and ideas. I'd love to hear from more CEO's regarding where they see social media within their organization. The reality is that many CEO's need to tread very lightly in social media. However I love that certain progressive CEO's are using social media to help facilitate their companies message by installing an organizational structure that supports social communication. Would also love to see more follow up posts on this topic.

[Like](#)[Reply](#)

[markjohn1](#) 1 week ago

Between myself as CEO and our CIO we spend a great deal of time using social media to not only get our message out there but to recruit new activists for our grassroots organization for diabetics. At first I wasn't sure about whether it would be helpful or scare people aay but as we use it daily it has not only increased our followers but also increased our network of connections in the medical field and the grassroots field.

As of now I don't see a downside as long as it isn't misused to the extent of spamming the message you want to get out.

[Like](#)[Reply](#)

[@keithprivette](#) 1 week ago

I would venture a thought that if CEO's, CFO's, COO's, CFO's were more socially plugged in, they would not make the socially wrong decisions for their company, employees, and brands. I have seen so many decisions made by this C-Suite group that if they were plugged in a little more, they would have already gotta the sense, oh this decision is not going to go over very well and maybe take a better approach. We will see!

1 person liked this.

[Like](#)[Reply](#)

[Jennifer Van Grove](#) ★ 1 week ago [in reply to @keithprivette](#)

Agreed. You're exactly right about being "plugged in."

[Like](#)[Reply](#)

[Thearetical](#) 1 week ago

I work for an executive development firm in our social media and technology division, so this topic is very relevant to my day-to-day work. The biggest stumbling block I've seen leaders trip over is their inability to place trust and faith in their employees or customers, enough to let them

basically drive the business and its needs. They can be highly resistant to opening up internal or external networks that encourage ideas and innovation, foster trust and collaboration, or simply share proprietary information.

Honestly, I doubt that many CEOs in the future - at least for large firms - will be very engaged in social media on an individual level, and I'm not sure they should be. I think it's more likely that their greatest impact will come from setting precedent and policy, driving toward a social media-savvy business, and leveraging technology to make their business have a longer-lasting impact. Basically, having open minds and open eyes to see what innovations are relevant, and not being afraid of taking risks to explore those possibilities.

3 people liked this.

Like

Reply



matthixson 1 week ago

Great article - I think that the last part is the most intriguing. The most interesting part of social media is the amount of data that is available about the network and how it works. This should allow companies to really mine that data to understand the social networks that are relevant to them. This would be one of the central pieces to a social media dashboard.

Most CEO's that I know are scared of what they don't know and right now social media is very much one of those things. They were brought up in the old school of control everything and only let them know what they want to know. I think the wave of companies realizing that period of business is over. It will be very interesting to see the pace of change. I'm not sure if it will be 5 years or 10 years. Anyone have a guess?

Like

Reply



Jesse Goldman 1 week ago

Great article! I'm confident that CEO's in the future will embrace social media simply because they'll have to. Everybody's doing it. There's another phenomenon that CEO's will need to adopt: social media within the workplace.

Social media is such an important part of how we operate day-to-day that more and more people expect it at work. They want immediate insight into how they're doing, what people like or dislike about their work, and they want to know what everyone's up to - all the time.

Given today's workforce, CEO's can use this real-time feedback and visibility to keep people focused, motivated and participating. Even if they're not outwardly engaged in social media, CEO's need to look inward and make sure they're maintaining a social culture. That's why I'm so excited by services like Rypple (<http://bit.ly/a5n6dy>).

1 person liked this.

Like

Reply



Jesse Goldman 1 week ago

Great article! I'm confident that CEO's in the future will embrace social media simply because they'll have to. Everybody's doing it. But, even if they're not outwardly engaged in social media, CEO's need to look inward and make sure they're maintaining a social culture in the workplace.

Social media is such an important part of how we operate day-to-day that more and more people expect it at work too. They want immediate insight into how they're doing, what people like or dislike about their work, and they want to know what everyone's up to - all the time.

Given today's workforce, CEO's can use this real-time feedback and visibility to keep people focused, motivated and participating. That's why I'm so excited by services like Rypple (<http://bit.ly/a5n6dy>).

Like

Reply

Digital Biographer 1 week ago



I think anyone in the C-suite in 5 years time who is not plugged in and visible socially is going to look very out of touch, and their organisation is going to suffer from that isolation as a result. Nice insight, and some clued-up comments and references.

Regards, David

Like Reply



Steve Schildwachter 1 week ago

This is the most comprehensive article on SoMe in a while -- CEOs should read it not just for guidance for for up-to-the-minute education. Social Media is fast becoming a specialty that dominates, hence, good generalists have to know it, too. We'll always need specialists, however:

<http://admajoremblog.blogspot.com/2010/08/we-will-always-need-specialists.html>

Like Reply



micksay 1 week ago

I don't think we should give CEO's a hard time. We should be blaming their PR and Marketing teams who are failing their organisations and their CEO's because they don't understand social media.

Mick

1 person liked this. Like Reply



Chuck 1 week ago

Steve Jobs doesn't need to be on social media for two reasons:

- 1. He's Steve Jobs
- 2. See number one

1 person liked this. Like Reply

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