



By Chris Haught

I read it on the Internet so it has

Is it really?

This morning I watched the editor of *New Yorker Magazine* talk about the change in the way many of us get our information. He mentioned the widespread ability of anybody with an Internet connection to be able to post their thoughts and opinions via blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and all the other social media outlets. No longer do we get all of our information from investigative reporters and in depth articles, but from 140 character tweets or a Google search that could turn up... anything!

Fact vs Fiction?

How do you know what is real information or just someone's biased opinion? How do you determine the authenticity of the information? We have talked in the past about building social communities through the various outlets, how to reach potential customers, branding your company, marketing, etc. But how do you sift thru and find the the truth? How do you know if the blog, review, tweet or forum post you are reading is from someone who has real life experience in the field or is just some "wannabe" posting from his mom's basement?

It's all about transparency

Is your name recognizable? Not just your company name, but your own? Do you hide behind your company name or a "nom de plume"? Just like in real life, we have to be aware of the way we present ourselves. In real life, we make sure our clothes are neat, hair combed and our breath fresh before meeting a new potential customer. But what about our online presence?

How do you look on online?

Go ahead, Google your own name and see what comes up. Do you have a personal social presence? Are the profiles filled out? Do you have content online that potential customers and colleagues may find useful, or would they be offended by pictures of your beer bong? Are you considered an authority in your network? Do you provide useful information?

Being Authentic

With the use of social media comes some respon

sibility. If you are going to put something out there, be prepared to back it up! If you are going to claim that a certain product or method is the best, prove it! How do you do that? By showing case studies and demos. Posting pictures and videos is a great way to prove your point.

Stuff "App"ens

If you are active in social media and blogging, invariably you will run into a conflict. Just like in real life, people will have differences of opinion. It is often hard to "read between the lines" and comments can be easily misconstrued.

Forums

Many of us participate on online forums; I believe that you should be required to use your real name or company name. A recent forum post says it best:

Sadly, internet forums can be a cruel place when the anonymity they grant people empowers them to be downright cruel without fear of repercussion, even on a forum like this frequented mostly by professional adults.

Also, it can be difficult to perceive the points made, or emotions, in text. I can read a reply in one way, while the poster meant it in an entirely different train of thought.

Before you post on a forum, lurk! Read many of the threads and learn the culture, the "do's and don'ts" and the general tone. Look for the FAQ section and read it. Most forums have an introduction area, so make that your first post and provide as much information as you feel comfortable with. Before you ask a question, use the search feature and see if it has been asked. When you do ask a question, provide as much background information as you can. Asking "which is the best paint" is sure to get you ridiculed or ignored. If you don't like the answer you get, don't argue, ask for clarification.

There is often a lot of good natured bantering between the members, and it can often get heated. Try not to make it personal. Stay objective and respond on the topic and never use personal insults.

Blog Comments

If you write about a controversial topic or express

to be true!

your own opinion, be prepared for negative comments. It's how you handle them that will show your character.

Determine if it really is a negative comment or just a difference of opinion. It would be a boring blogosphere if everyone had the same opinions! Just acknowledge the comment and thank the commenter for the insight. If it is crude or uses profane language, you should delete it.

Reviews

Invariably, every painter will get a negative review on a site like Google, Yelp or Angie's List. It's one thing to deal with an unhappy customer in person, but an online review is visible to all! You need to monitor these sites—you can use Google Alerts on your company and/or your own name to be notified when either is mentioned online. It is very hard to not be defensive when your reputation is at stake. Showing that you can accept feedback and respond is important. Really listen to the complaint and ask questions, don't be afraid to admit to a mistake and offer to correct it. And you can always find the humorous side and turn it to your advantage!


Social media is here to stay

It is not just about educating yourself on new products, learning new marketing ideas or ways to improve your business. It is about connecting and sharing, being active vs. passive. It may be overwhelming to you at first, so page back thru your past issues of *The Paint Contractor* and read the articles on social media. Find one platform that works for you and get involved for at least 5 minutes everyday! See you out there!

More at bloggingpainters.com.

“You can't believe everthing you read on the internet.”

— Abraham Lincoln



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