Who Gives a Tweet? Social Media for Executives

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WHO GIVES A TWEET? (PART 1)

You’ve probably heard all the stats about social media – Facebook (which has just turned 10) would be the third largest country in the world with over a billion users; Twitter has approximately 289 million monthly active users who send over 500 million tweets per day; and LinkedIn sees two new users sign up every second.

The world’s largest “tweeters” have millions of followers – the singer Katy Perry has the largest number of followers with over 50 million users hanging on her every tweet. And while there aren’t many CPOs who are currently preparing to promote the release of their next album to their followers, there are a number of business reasons for you to start considering twitter, along with all the other social media vehicles, as part of your communication strategy.

So, even though procurement is really just getting started on social media, there are four good reasons why CPOs (and other procurement professionals) should consider using twitter.

Attracting the next generation of commercial leaders
If you believe the research, the next generation of talent – the so-called ‘millennials’ and ‘digital natives’ – have lost confidence in traditional hierarchical corporate structures. They are more likely to choose their next job based on how they rate their boss, over the company they are going to work for.

They will base their opinion not on your title, but on word of mouth, social groups, strong connections, and online presence. So the lesson from this is that to relate to and recruit the best talent, you need to have a strong presence in those places where your talent is talking, and there is no doubt that the next wave of talent is online.

Influencing your internal stakeholders and business customers
In terms of personal visibility to suppliers, your team and your management, social media is a great place to get noticed, as well as to reinforce your position as a connected business thinker.

The rapid pace of change has made staying ‘front of mind’ tricky. Remember, by being active on social media, especially now while procurement is still underrepresented online, you’re establishing yourself as a thought leader in the profession.

Get Noticed
You may ask, “Is my CEO really reading social media?”. While they might not be trawling status updates, they are undoubtedly being briefed daily by Corporate Affairs who monitor and feed trends to the C-level to help tailor their communications.
Becoming a customer of choice with your supply base

Marketers have been using social media to connect with customers for years and although the reverse – using social media to connect with suppliers – is still in its infancy, be assured that savvy sales executives are scanning LinkedIn, Twitter and other platforms to understand your industry (and you as a customer) better.

The Faculty’s 2013 Roundtable research Future-Ready highlighted that use of social media in procurement is still a blind-spot for the profession. The research goes on to recommend that “as a facilitator of connections across the organisation…Procurement should take the lead in the use of online networks…for example setting up a private group for the supplier network to discuss ideas and engage with the organisation.”

Top Tips

So, if you are convinced of the business reasons to use social media, as a CPO – how should you use these new communication channels?

• What are the topics that only you can talk about? This is probably the toughest part to getting started – what do you have to say that is unique…and who will be interested? This is the biggest hurdle to getting started. Every CPO has a unique vantage point from which they are gathering really interesting information that is unique to the industry, communities and businesses they work in – recognise your unique position and share some of the amazing learnings and insights that come your way. There are very few people with this wealth of information flowing their way every day.

• Start “following” people you admire and respect. See what they comment on and how they communicate. This will provide you both inspiration and direction.

• Don’t overwhelm yourself – master one medium, whichever you feel most comfortable with (generally LinkedIn is the easiest first step), and become actively engaged with that audience. After starting with LinkedIn, you might think about starting your own blog (try Wordpress or Blogger) or making a foray into Twitter.

• Try to plan ahead – not everyone can spend countless hours a day on Facebook or Twitter. Fortunately there are tools (such as HootSuite or TweetDeck) that allow you to ‘schedule’ social posts, meaning that you can spend a few hours every month writing updates, and then spread them out over the course of that month.

• Social means social, not selling! – The reason social media is quickly overtaking traditional media is because it allows people to interact with each other. Instead of simply talking at people, get involved in the discussions that are happening everywhere online, and your credibility will only increase.
At the end of the day, why are we doing all this? What’s the point? The point is that you need to keep on increasing your influence. Influence is the ability to drive action. CPOs are all about driving action, activity, delivering change and response to the 360 degree audiences that surround them.

When you share something on social media or in real life and people respond, that’s influence.