

## 16.12: Advantages and challenges

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People are finding it easier to switch off or ignore traditional advertising, particularly through traditional media channels such as TV or radio. Social media gives brands the opportunity to interact with customers through relevant and targeted communications that customers can choose to engage with on their terms. For example, a consumer may visit a branded YouTube channel as opposed to deliberately ignoring advert breaks on television.

Social media's potential shareability can be one of its greatest benefits; if users like your content enough, they may share it with their own communities. This is increasingly rare and difficult to engineer.

Social media allows you to engage with an online community and connect your brand to the appropriate audience. Together these create an online community for your brand and its supporters. Social media has created a forum for brand evangelists.

The numerous interactions on social, allow you to garner feedback from your communities. Such feedback helps drive future business insights and innovation, as well as marketing strategies. You can learn more about your audience's likes, dislikes, behaviours and needs.

However, companies need also be aware that bad messages spread as quickly as good ones. The connectedness that can prove so useful can also be a conduit for negative messages and brand attacks. Social media facilitates a two-way conversation between customer and company. This necessitates that the company shifts approach from 'deploy and watch' to one of constant involvement with the audience.

This new landscape is one in which the customer really is king, and any attempt to dethrone the king can have dire consequences. Efforts to control the conversation in social media are soon found out, and can backfire horribly. Any company embarking on a social media strategy needs to be sure to monitor their reputation online regularly. It is crucial to know what is being said about your brand online, and to respond timeously when communicating in the social media sphere.

Finally, never forget that special rules and laws apply when you are dealing with personal information provided by users so be very careful how and where you use this data.

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