

Socializing Your Brand: A Brand's Guide to Sociability

A GLOBAL STUDY BY WEBER SHANDWICK AND FORBES INSIGHTS



Foreword by

Chris Perry

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In considering the biggest influences on their brand's sociability, most executives look to external forces — winning the approval of the right media, achieving a target number of “Likes” on Facebook and dominating coverage of certain topics. The reality is that internal strategy, planning, cohesiveness and comfort in the digital space must come first — but may never come at all. As new research from Weber Shandwick and Forbes Insights shows, internal focus and consistency of vision are areas where substantial improvement must be made by most brands.

Weber Shandwick works with some of the world's most successful brands to align social activity with business objectives. Sociability for the sake of it carries significant risks, but sociability in pursuit of bottom line goals can reap rewards beyond initial expectations.

Being social online is fast becoming critical to being a world class brand. Despite the proliferation of social media outlets and growing penetration of the Internet worldwide, most organizations still struggle to build a brand with a distinctive social identity.

Social brands interact with their target audiences. They do much more than broadcast news, deals or events. They get their communities of interest engaged and develop meaningful ties over shared passions or commonalities. Social brands demonstrate a genuine interest in what their audiences say and listen carefully to responses. Technology has hyper-charged the ability for brands to be more social but it is not the technology alone that makes a brand social. Sociability ultimately rests on the collaboration of the entire organization and, more specifically, on marketers and public relations professionals who typically have responsibility for communications and branding strategies.

Global public relations firm Weber Shandwick partnered with Forbes Insights to identify what makes brands social – and how. We conducted an online survey in Spring 2011 of 1,897 senior

executives from high revenue companies across 50 countries in North America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia Pacific and Latin America. Executive respondents were selected for their personal involvement in marketing, communications or public relations strategy and utilization of digital channels as part of that strategy. They are on the front lines of “brand sociability” with all its risks and rewards.

Creating and nurturing a social brand is no longer optional. To support an effective social undertaking, brands need a strong social governance foundation so that their organizations can meet their business objectives. As sociability at the core of the organization becomes fundamental, brand managers are charged with developing a strong framework for enabling meaningful social interactions that allow the best of the brand to emerge.

Why does brand sociability matter?

It is no longer an open question as to whether brand sociability matters. Global executives attribute 52% of their brand's reputation to how social it is online today, up from 45% one year ago. They project that 65% of their brand's reputation will come from its online sociability in three years, a five-year growth rate of 44%.

Sociability is important not only to the brand, but also to the reputation of the entire enterprise: One-third (33%) of all global executives with digital and marketing responsibility consider

"quality of online presence or engagement" a primary contributor to a company's overall reputation. Whereas many of the traditional drivers of reputation such as customer experience and product/service quality remain at the top of the importance list, the addition of "online presence" as a factor in driving reputation today is long overdue for consideration.



Average per cent brand reputation attributed to online sociability

Recognizing how important brand sociability is and will be, large global companies say that they have jumped into the social media waters with both feet. They almost universally have social media brand strategies (87%) and nearly all (93%) are using at least one social media tool. Yet, fewer have integrated their social brand strategies into their marketing and communications strategies (63%), a sign they are struggling to master the challenges of brand sociability. Bringing social activities into marketing and communications strategies ensures a cohesive, holistic approach.

Global executives acknowledge that they have far to go before their companies are truly social: Only a small group of global executives (16%) describe their brand's sociability as "world class." Is it worth the intense effort to be a world class social organization? Global senior executives think so – they report that the rewards of using social media far outweigh the risks, by a margin of more than 2-to-1.



Since use of social media tools is nearly universal, the focus of our report is not to convince readers that they should adopt social tools. Rather, we concentrate on how to focus their social media communication goals and efforts to maximize their brand's sociability.

An impediment that companies in our study face is a lack of clear business goals for social media. First, no single item stands out as a strong objective of social media strategies among respondents. Second, response levels to goals for social media brand strategy show little differentiation — the most frequently mentioned objectives are strengthening customer loyalty and improving brand reputation, each cited by barely one-third of all global executives (32% each).

What do these results mean? Perhaps executives are not quite sure how social media exactly benefits their business, or perhaps social media is expected to deliver a host of many different benefits. In either case, this suggests that senior executives are scrambling to figure out where their businesses will ultimately benefit the most from all this social activity. Their crystal balls are fairly cloudy at this point and there is no clearly identified brass ring of social media.

Interestingly, inclusion into the brand conversation — an aspect of social media endlessly touted as the ultimate goal of social media – is very low on the list (18%).

Top Objectives of Social Media Brand Strategy	Global Companies (%)
Strengthen customer loyalty	32
Improve brand recognition	32
Locate new customers or prospects	31
Improve customer service	31
Improve brand reputation	28
Broadcast information quickly	28

Bottom Objectives of Social Media Brand Strategy	Global Companies (%)
Make us part of the brand conversation	18
Impact company reputation better than other marketing	17
Stay competitive: Our competitors use social media	16
It's the cost of entry for marketing goods and services	16
Allows us to charge a premium	14

Socializing Your Brand identifies the hallmarks of a world class social brand. This report provides both conceptual and practical guidance on what it takes to execute brand sociability that delivers on specific business objectives and become world class.

9 drivers of world class brand sociability:

Weber Shandwick has developed a guide to brand sociability rooted in the practices of the elite few whose activities, organizational structure, integrative nature and measurement focus are all at the high end of social brand creation. These global organizations have earned the distinction of "world class."

The 9 drivers of brand sociability are based on an analysis of the most distinguishing characteristics of world class social brands relative to those of the average global company in our study.



1



it's not the medium —
and it's more than the message

2



put your brands in motion

3



integrate or die

4



make social central

5



listen more than you talk

6



count what matters —
meaningful engagement

7



think global

8



go outside to get inside

9



be vigilant

#1

It's not the medium
— and it's more than
the message



Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase “the medium is the message” and foresaw the World Wide Web nearly 30 years before it was invented. As brands today strive for sociability, there is no question that there is a keen relationship between the medium and the message. Companies, however, may be concentrating too hard on the medium and not enough on the substance of the brand story, identity and message. In the case of Weber Shandwick/Forbes Insights’ research, you could say that it’s not the medium — and it’s more than the message — that is required to be among the best social brands in the world.

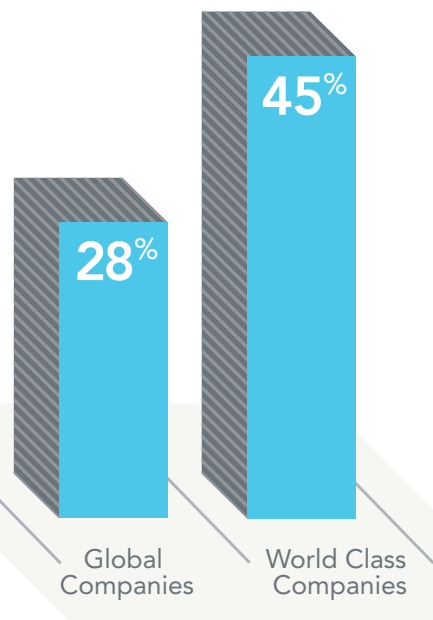
The vast majority of large global companies use social media, making the medium almost ubiquitous. What makes world class social brand organizations stand out is how they differentiate their brands through the medium. World class brands don’t depend on the medium to make them social. They strive to provide unique and engaging content that pull their fans in which allows the brands and fans to enjoy the interactive benefits of social media.

World class brands are much more likely than the average brand to create original content designed specifically for their community of interest and influencers.

Although fewer than half of world class companies are currently originating content, they are much more likely than other global companies to report they are creating original content for social media.

Messages are only part of what constitutes a brand’s social identity. Weaving messages into a brand’s story without the behavior to back it up will discredit the story. As most marketers and communications professionals know, style is important but substance is critical.

“We create original content specifically for social media”
(% strongly agree)



“Nothing turns off visitors more than old content.”
— Canadian C-Level Executive

Creating original material is important to brand identity because it differentiates the brand from its competitors, shows its responsiveness to meeting the varied interests of different communities through customized content and provides a measure of value-added exclusivity, i.e., “available only on _____.”



#2

Put your brands in motion

World class social brands are deeply entrenched in social media — eight-in-10 use social networks, three-quarters use blogs, Twitter and YouTube, and at least six-in-10 use mobile apps and crowdsourcing. Usage of all the social brand tools included in our survey are indexed much higher than the average global company.

World class companies don't just experiment with social media tools. They also apply their social media tools in more ways for their brands than the average global company. For example, they are much more likely than the average global company to host branded podcasts, brand-specific YouTube channels, video blogs, viral videos, proximity-marketing, brand-related mobile content and geo-location tools.

The social activities of world class brands are not static but in motion. They do not exist to occupy space on social networks but are activated for dynamic interaction with their communities of interest.



	Global Companies (%)	World Class Companies (%)	Index
Brand sociability tools currently using...			
Social network	70	81	1.16
Online community	67	76	1.13
Blog	61	74	1.21
Twitter/other micro-feed	58	74	1.28
YouTube/other video channel	58	75	1.29
Mobile app	54	68	1.26
Location-based mobile app	50	69	1.38
Crowdsourcing	42	61	1.45
Social activities that MOST distinguish world class Companies from Average Global Companies*...			
We offer brand-related mobile content (e.g., games, ringtones)	25	36	1.44
We participate on Foursquare and/or other "check-in" apps	23	33	1.43
We do proximity marketing (e.g., geo-tracking, offers based on location, offers based on context)	27	38	1.41
We have our own branded channel(s) on YouTube	35	49	1.40

*World Class organizations over-indexed on every activity measured in our survey, those listed here are the highest indexing.

Weber Shandwick/Forbes Insights' research found that world class social brands are pioneers — they lead their industry in the use of emerging social media tactics. Interestingly, these pioneers are so rapidly refining their "toolbox" that nearly half of them (48%) have already closed a corporate blog. Of course, they were probably more likely to have a corporate blog than other companies to begin with. World class brands realize that it is essential to test tactics and iterate or eliminate as necessary. "Failing better" is a key to success for any endeavor.

These companies may also realize that they cannot afford to rest on their laurels in the social space. As new platforms and streams of attention-getting content are created at a rate faster than most of us can comprehend, it is not enough to try to freeze today's success for tomorrow. Bringing value — in the form of solutions, personality, context and other social commodities — is the only way to stay on top. Evolution has to be tackled daily.

The current focus of world class brands, by a 2-to-1 margin over the average global brand, is on mobile. In particular, they are currently more likely to do proximity marketing (38% vs. 27%, respectively), offer brand-related mobile content (36% vs. 25%) and participate in Foursquare or other check-in apps (33% vs. 23%).

% Strongly agree that...	Global Companies (%)	World Class Companies (%)	Index
We are generally among the first in our industry to adopt emerging social media tactics	27	56	2.07
We are focusing most of our social media efforts on mobile-based tools	25	50	2.00
Increased use of smartphones and tablets will change how we approach social media	32	50	1.56
We have closed a corporate blog	21	48	2.29

#3

Integrate or die

Building a truly global social brand with a clear identity that optimizes the customer experience requires rock solid integration.

Senior executives of world class social brands are more likely than the average global executive to report that their social strategy is fully integrated into their overall marketing/communications strategy. For world class companies, brand sociability is an enterprise affair. The brand's social identity is a team endeavor — all levels of the organization are involved.



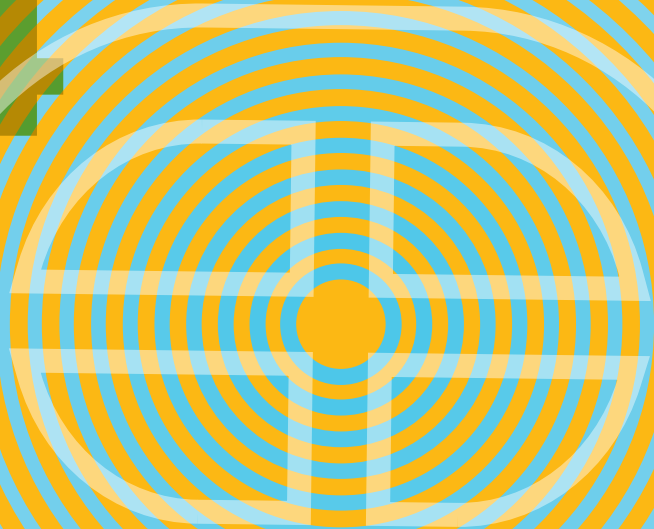
Because of this higher level of internal social devotion, world class organizations are more rigorous in their social media operations than the average global brand. Results indicate that world class companies are more likely to review and change their social media strategy at least quarterly, enact employee policies and guidelines for social media and use an editorial content calendar to coordinate efforts across different social media platforms.

	Global Companies (%)	World Class Companies (%)	Index
Social strategy is part of the overall marketing/communications strategy	63	83	1.32
% Strongly agree that...			
All employees are encouraged to be involved in building brand's social media presence	31	53	1.71
Our company CEO supports social media brand efforts	30	49	1.63
We review and change our social media strategy at least quarterly	29	51	1.76
Our company has social media policies and guidelines in place that describe what employees can and cannot do or say online about our brand	29	50	1.72
We have a content calendar that we use to coordinate our efforts across different social media platforms	28	48	1.71

World class organizations are also much better integrators of brand personality – they are nearly twice as likely as other organizations to have a consistent brand personality across all social media and traditional media channels and much more likely to include a social media element to traditional print or broadcast messaging. This is not to say that world class companies have mastered the fine art of content integration. World class organizations recognize that they are not yet good at integrating it completely across social media, online media, and traditional broadcast/print media.

% Strongly agree that...	Global Companies (%)	World Class Companies (%)	Index
We have a consistent brand "personality" across all social media and traditional media channels	29	54	1.86
We always include a social media element to our traditional print or broadcast messaging (e.g., encourage Facebook followers, follow on Twitter, etc.)	29	52	1.79
We are not yet good at integrating our brand messaging completely across social media, online media, and traditional broadcast/print media	23	44	1.91

#4



Make social central



“The most important thing we can do is to centrally plan social media activities across all channels to amplify key messages.” — US Executive

How do world class brands accomplish all this? World class companies are fundamentally structured for social media – they are more likely to employ a dedicated social media strategist/manager and centralize their social media strategy.

	Global Companies (%)	World Class Companies (%)	Index
Brand has a dedicated social media strategist/manager	71	86	1.21
Social media is coordinated from one department	41	61	1.49

In fact, the absence of a centralized function is deemed a governance risk by the Institute of Internal Auditors:

“Separate departments often take completely different approaches. A single department will have a champion for social media – someone who has seen what it can do and convinces the department head to move forward. Six months later, another department, unaware of what the first has done, has its own champion and starts its own presence. There is no communication, no standardized approach, and no awareness at the top that the customers may be getting mixed messages. Aligning brand, message, and image is never so important as when an organization is about to send daily messages to millions of people.”

While core strategy should be primarily owned by the brand or “social” officer, it is crucial that talent throughout the organization have the skills to execute as part of a fundamentally social approach to the brand’s business. It is a fact of business life today that employees, intentionally or not, will participate in online conversation about their brands and companies. Therefore, a centralized function needs to support and inform their activities and ensure that clear and accessible social media policies and procedures are in place.

For this reason, companies often adopt a “hub and spoke” model in which strategic decisions are centrally made but the business units (“the spokes”) are able to manage their individual social needs. The spokes are aligned around the brand’s social media policy and leverage the resources of the central “hub.”

Such a model allows brands the utmost flexibility for social engagement while adhering to the strategies, objectives and policies of the brand.

“The most important thing our company can do in the next 12-24 months to increase the sociability of our brand is to have a consistent tone of voice from a dedicated team.”
— UK Head of Business Unit

A stylized graphic of an ear, composed of overlapping curved shapes in blue, green, and orange, positioned to the left of the main text.

#5

Listen
more
than
you
talk



The social activities of world class brands aren't limited to just pushing out information and thinking the job of brand sociability is done. Executives at world class social brands listen intently to their social media consumers and act on what they hear and learn. For example, they are much more apt than the average global organization to monitor/research fan pages to determine what customers want, make product or services changes based on fan recommendations and refine messaging based on user demographics or attitudes. They clearly have their ear on their influencers.

% Strongly agree that...	Global Companies (%)	World Class Companies (%)	Index
We constantly monitor or research our fan pages to determine what our customers want from us	30	53	1.77
We have changed a product or service based on specific recommendations from social network "fans"	26	51	1.96
We change our social brand messaging based on user demographics or attitudes	27	49	1.81
We post to our social media "fan" pages at least daily	27	51	1.89

True social brands take full advantage of technology's unique benefits for two-way engagement to co-create high-demand products and services. World class social brand companies also fine-tune their messages to customers on an almost daily basis and integrate what is on their fans' minds into their brand stories. They can see past the shiny social media objects to the connections and affinity they enable between customers. If a brand does not impose itself into the equation, customers will organically let it in — and the company can make use of that closeness to build customer-centric brands that stand the test of time.



#6

Count what matters — meaningful engagement

Nearly all companies report that they are using at least one form of measurement to prove the effectiveness of their brand sociability. There aren't many differences between the metrics that world class brands use compared to other global brands, but world class brands are more likely to take a big picture view by measuring the most social of metrics, contributors and the business impact of social, such as reduced call volume, revenue contribution and conversion.



Perhaps their greater focus on more rigorous business results has to do with the pressure to prove return on investment from their social media efforts, or perhaps their progression along the social evolutionary scale mandates a close look at their investments. Regardless of the circumstance, executives of world class brands are much more likely than the average global executive to admit challenges with measuring ROI on social efforts and, consequently, realize that more is required of them to ensure that they get the funding they need to experiment with being social.

The average global company is stuck on metrics that don't effect true social meaning – page views are their #1 effectiveness measure. Brand social companies measure the number of people participating and contributing to their social communities, whether this includes consumers who tweet or retweet about brand activities, those who share, like or link to brand sites or post about the brand on their own social networks. Contributors assist in creating content for the brands. World class social brands recognize that these social media contributors are worth watching and engaging — they add value, deepen brand identity and multiply messages rapidly. They are the reward for brand social smarts.

Not only are world class social brands much more likely than average to gauge efforts on social contribution, but it is their #1 measure of social effectiveness (tied with number of posts). It ranks as #6 for the average global company. This indicator that user participation in the business of the brand is highly valued reinforces why world class social brands are admired and outpacing their peers. This openness to contributors yields richer, deeper and more innovative content.

Metrics used to measure social media effectiveness...	Global Companies (%)	World Class Companies (%)	Index
Use any effectiveness metrics	97	98	
Number of posts	33	38 (#1)	1.15
Number of contributors	28 (#6)	38 (#1)	1.36
Revenue contribution	27	36	1.33
Number of positive customer mentions	34	35	1.03
Number of fans/friends/members	33	38	1.15
Number of brand "likes"	31	35	1.13
Site traffic	38	34	0.89
Average sales value	30	32	1.07
Conversion	23	31	1.35
Page views	36 (#1)	31	0.86
Reduced call volume	20	29	1.45
Average # metrics using	3.3	3.7	1.12

It is worth noting that not all contributions are equal. For example, a highly respected fan writing a positive blog post about your company is worth more than a retweet from a random Twitter account. Brands that are ahead of the curve realize that the numbers only tell part of the story, and do not fixate on only that which they can measure.



#7

Think global

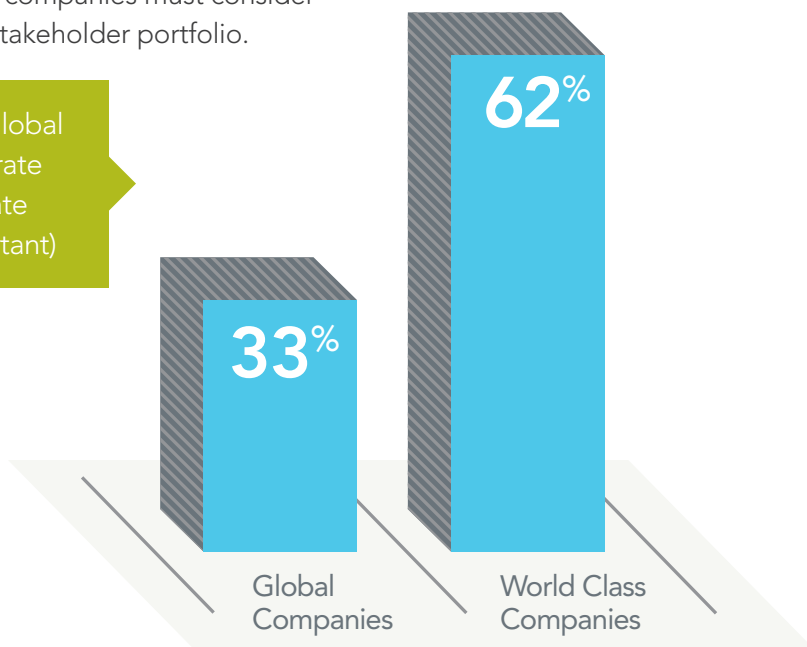


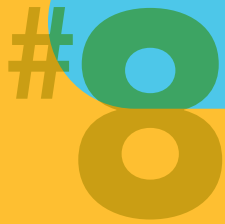
A strong social brand reputation is directly related to greater recognition of all corporate reputation influencers. When global executives were asked to rate nine drivers of corporate reputation, companies with brands at all social levels agreed that “customer service” is the top driver of a solid reputation. However, executives managing world class social brands consider a company’s “global reach” to be just as important as customer service, while the average global executive ranks it last.

World class social brand executives recognize the global potential of social media and that to have a good reputation, companies must consider the entire stakeholder portfolio.

“Our social branding goals involve a very firm commitment to increase the recognition of the company’s globalization.”
— Brazilian Executive

Importance of Global Reach to Corporate Reputation (% rate extremely important)





Go outside to get inside

In this new era of multi-channel, multi-discipline marketing, it is often necessary to engage outside experts to achieve or maintain world class status. Our research found that world class companies are more likely to engage outside support to measure their brand's social performance. More than the average global executive, those at world class companies hire third parties to measure the effectiveness of their social networking and microblogging. These preeminent social companies are intent on engaging the right partners to measure their enterprise-wide social media initiatives with precision.



Additionally, world class social brand executives know the value of deep customer experience. By engaging third-parties to manage their micro-blogs or Twitter more efficiently than they can do internally, world class companies, more so than average global companies, ensure superior customer engagement. For many brands and companies, social media measurement and customer relationship management are not their core competencies and they recognize the value of going outside for these services. Close integration of internal goals and objectives with external competencies is key – as is ensuring that those within the enterprise are well-versed enough to provide checks and balances on what third parties are doing.

% Strongly agree that...	Global Companies (%)	World Class Companies (%)	Index
We use an outside partner to measure social media effectiveness	25	49	1.96
We use a third-party to manage Twitter feeds	23	35	1.52

That is not to say that companies can't manage their social activities internally. Ultimately, the brand is responsible and the buck stops at the brand officer's desk.



#9

Be vigilant

Executives of world class brand social companies are 35% more likely than the average global company to report their brand experienced an online crisis in the past year that affected its reputation. These social champions who have dealt with a recent online crisis are no stranger to the risks of the hyper-connected world — two-thirds (66%) report that they deal with negative online commentary on a daily basis (vs. 51% of total global companies).



Are these companies more crisis-prone? Or, as socially vigilant organizations, are they naturally more inclined to be on the lookout for negativity toward their brand? Their keen social senses are rooted in their hyper-sensitivity to brand identity, careful online monitoring of customer satisfaction and content, employee engagement and their use of third parties to alert them to any early warning signs in their marketing strategy.

“Weber Shandwick also sees this brand vigilance in some of the most culturally significant, profitable brands thriving today. They all share the willingness to make what they do fundamentally social, so that customers can carry them further than they ever could under their own steam. That means taking calculated risks — and enjoying rewards that only engaged customers can bestow: profits, advocacy and the emotional investment in a brand that makes them want it to succeed.”

— Micho Spring, Chairperson, Global Corporate Practice, Weber Shandwick

In a survey of global corporate social strategists conducted by Altimeter Group, fewer than one-half (44%) report their companies have a formalized social media crisis escalation plan. “Companies are quick to deploy the latest social media technology, yet most companies are not prepared for the threat of social media crises, or the long-term impacts to their business. We found that social media crises are on the rise, even though most of these crises (76%) could have been diminished or averted, had companies invested internally.”

— Jeremiah Owyang, Altimeter Group

On the other hand, if world class brands are in fact more susceptible to crisis, it is possible that they have been forced to master brand sociability to survive. In either case, the lesson companies can learn from their world class peers is vigilance. There are dangers lurking online that can destroy a brand’s reputation instantaneously.

	Global Companies (%)	World Class Companies (%)	Index
Experienced online brand reputation crisis during past 12 months	40	54	1.35
Experience negative online commentary at least daily (among those who experienced crisis in past 12 months)	51	66	1.29

Consistent with their propensity for daily management of online crises, world class companies assign more risk than reward to social media than the average global company. Companies that are at the head of their class in terms of brand sociability are realistic about the present-day dangers facing them such as data security breaches, ‘brand jacking,’ rumors and lack of control. For these reasons, they are more likely than the average global company surveyed to perceive the online risks exposed by Wikileaks and privacy violations. To protect their social brand integrity, they are always on high alert.

% Strongly agree that...	Global Companies (%)	World Class Companies (%)	Index
Wikileaks has made us increasingly concerned about using social media	27	50	1.85
Privacy issues are a major concern for us when using social networks such as Facebook	31	49	1.58

Socializing your brand

Despite the rapid integration of social media into marketing plans, only a handful of global organizations are mastering its potential for brand-building. Never before have marketers been presented with the vast and meaningful audience engagement opportunities that social media offers. Yes, they have adopted the tools and they know that the rewards are plentiful. Yet, tapping into the opportunities takes careful consideration, enterprise-wide commitment and ample resource allocation. *A Brand's Guide to Sociability* offers brand managers with a starting point for developing their own "world class" practices for creating an authentically social brand.

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