

SUBSCRIBERS

FANS AND

FOLLOWERS™

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REPORT
#8

THE SOCIAL BREAK-UP



INTRODUCTION

ExactTarget's SUBSCRIBERS, FANS, & FOLLOWERS research series is the first of its kind—a groundbreaking body of work that sets aside theories, assumptions, and widely-held beliefs to find out how consumers want to interact with brands through Email, Facebook, and Twitter. Our reports draw on real consumer experience collected through extensive focus groups, as well as online surveys derived from what we hear from people in those focus groups.

To date, SUBSCRIBERS, FANS, & FOLLOWERS has explored both “why” and “how” consumers engage with brands across the most popular interactive marketing channels: Email, Facebook, and Twitter. We identified the unique characteristics of these interactive channels and shared key strategies for capitalizing on the strengths of each to build an effective, integrated marketing program.

If you think of a consumer's online interaction with your brand as a treasured relationship (and you should!) the next logical step is to explore the termination of that relationship, or what we've dubbed: “The Social Break-Up.”

In this report, we explore consumers' motivations and actions as they terminate their relationships with brands through Email, Facebook, and Twitter:

- Why consumers end brand relationships
- How they go about terminating these relationships
- The impact of this “social break-up” on consumers' intent to do business with brands in the future

To get a complete picture of the consumer-brand relationship, marketers must understand the relationship from beginning to end. By examining the reasons why people *disengage* with brands, we gain valuable insight into what drives engagement through Email, Facebook, and Twitter—as well as what actions can inadvertently drive consumers away after the social honeymoon is over.

OVERVIEW: THE SOCIAL BREAK-UP

Like any interpersonal relationship, the consumer-brand relationship has a distinct and fascinating life cycle. The relationship begins with the initial “spark”—the decision by the consumer to become a SUBSCRIBER, FAN, or FOLLOWER—followed by a blissful honeymoon period in which the consumer gets to know the company better through communications and social interactions.

As the relationship progresses, the frequency and quality of interactions shapes the consumer’s desire to take the relationship to the next level—which may be a purchase, a recommendation, or even brand advocacy. Consumers want to know that companies are committed to the relationship—and that they care. Companies express their commitment to the relationship through engaging communications, delivered at appropriate intervals. **But marketers must realize that the definitions of “engaging” and “appropriate” vary by channel.** Communication practices that convey warmth and respect for the consumer through one channel can just as easily convey indifference—or desperation—through another.

If the company fails any of these relationship tests, a “social break-up”—i.e., an “unsubscribe,” “unfan,” “unlike,” or “unfollow”—is all but inevitable. When the consumer is no longer happy in the relationship, they will actively break off contact with the company...or just ignore their communications in the hopes the company will get the message that it’s over.



DATING PROFILE: SUBSCRIBERS



PERSONAL STATS

95% of U.S. online consumers use email

93% of U.S. online consumers are SUBSCRIBERS
(receive at least one permission-based email a day.)

TURN-ONS

83% of U.S. online consumers say they check
email at least once per day

64% say they check email several times per day

70% say they always open emails from their
favorite companies

TURN-OFFS

77% of U.S. online consumers say they've
become more cautious about giving companies
their email address over the past year.

91% of email users have subscribed to a
company's email and then later decided they no
longer want to receive the emails

18% say they never open email from companies

EMAIL: A RELATIONSHIP BUILT TO LAST?

Like an old married couple, U.S. online consumers have a long-standing and generally comfortable relationship with email marketing practices. They've grown accustomed to using email as a way of engaging with brands. However, as the old saying goes, sometimes familiarity breeds contempt.

Marketers must respect the fact that online brand relationships—especially email-based brand relationships—are built on trust. Over time, SUBSCRIBERS are becoming more selective about giving out their email addresses to companies. In fact, **77% of online consumers say they've become more cautious about giving companies their email address over the past year.** Consumers are also highly sensitive to the difference between permission-based emails from companies they know and trust and unsolicited messages from unknown companies.

This doesn't mean that consumers are souring on email in general—it simply means they've become more savvy about email marketing, and their expectations of marketers have increased. Today's consumers scrutinize email marketing content and practices more than ever before. They understand that companies have the ability to send highly targeted, personalized messages—**if they care enough to make the effort.** Relevancy has become a baseline requirement for consumers, and they are quick to judge companies when their email programs fail to live up to this standard.

“I hate it when I get emails from companies who bought bulk lists of addresses and send their marketing news without me asking for it.”

—Karen, 36, Little Rock, AR



“I’m happy to provide an email address if I can see a direct value of getting emails from the brand or company. On the other hand, I’m reluctant to share my email address if the benefits are vague—when they just say “sign up to receive our newsletter.””

—Jeff, 43, Boston, MA

“If after two or three emails there isn’t anything relevant or exciting for me, I unsubscribe myself.”

—Hunter, 19, Phoenix, AZ



SUBSCRIBERS' TYPICAL ACTION WHEN THEY ARE NO LONGER INTERESTED IN A COMPANY'S PERMISSION EMAILS

Click the link to “unsubscribe” 67%

17% Delete emails when they arrive

8% Click the “spam” or “junk” button

6% Nothing, just ignore the emails

2% Setup a filter in my email program

YOU KNOW IT'S OVER WHEN...

So what triggers the break-up? How do consumers make the break, and why do they decide to end the email relationship?

Two-thirds of consumers formally unsubscribe using the unsubscribe links in a company's email, while only 8% click on the “spam” or “junk” button to block emails from companies they know and trust. This challenges the widely-held belief that consumers click the spam button out of convenience, and that they don't understand the implication of this action. It also sheds some light on the level of frustration consumers must feel when they finally resort to the spam button.

When email does get tagged as spam, one of the following is likely true:

- The consumer doesn't recall giving the company permission, which may point to issues with the opt-in process, **or**
- The consumer has made unsuccessful attempts to unsubscribe through the unsubscribe link and use the spam button as a last resort, **or**
- The email content was bad enough to warrant “punishment,” and the consumer wanted to protect other consumers from repeating their bad experience.

17% of SUBSCRIBERS will continually delete or ignore email from companies with whom they no longer wish to interact, rather than making the effort to unsubscribe or hit the spam button. Given ISPs' increasing focus on engagement as a criterion for delivering emails, these SUBSCRIBERS' conscious decision to ignore your emails may have a negative impact on deliverability. Cleansing your email list of consistently unresponsive recipients is now imperative to avoid having your emails labeled as spam by ISPs. **Think of it as your opportunity to initiate the break-up instead of getting dumped.**

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REMEMBER ME FONDLY

Letting go can be very difficult, especially considering that 42% of SUBSCRIBERS say they're more likely to buy from a company after signing up for their emails. But in fact, a consumer's decision to stop receiving a company's emails may not have an especially negative impact on their purchasing habits—if their unsubscribe request is handled quickly and respectfully.

Handling a break-up properly goes a long way with consumers. Only 16% of consumers believe their intent to purchase from a company declined after unsubscribing. Either they weren't buying anyway, or they don't harbor negative feelings that would deter them from doing business with the brand after unsubscribing. On the other hand, making it difficult to unsubscribe can seriously damage a brand's credibility with consumers.

Clearly the best way to preserve SUBSCRIBERS relationships after the break-up is to make the unsubscribe process simple and painless, and to handle unsubscribe requests promptly and professionally. In other words, "If you love someone, set them free..."

PLEASE TELL ME WHY

We asked consumers to think of instances where they intentionally signed up to receive emails from a company, but later decided they didn't want to receive the emails anymore. What caused them to lose interest? (Multiple responses were allowed to this survey question.) The answers read like a how-to guide for break-ups.

"You're coming on too strong."

Overuse of the email channel is the biggest reason SUBSCRIBERS pull away. 54% of consumers say they unsubscribe when emails come too frequently from a particular brand. Marketers need to respect consumers' time and not bombard them with excessive communications.

"It's not you. It's me."

People change jobs, kids grow up, interests and preferences change. 13% of consumers unsubscribe when their circumstances change. Remember, just because you get someone to subscribe doesn't mean you have a commitment for life.

"The spark is gone."

Keeping the relationship fresh is a constant battle for marketers. 49% of consumers say they unsubscribe because content became boring or repetitive over

time. To stay relevant, marketers need to continually take inventory of what individual SUBSCRIBERS respond to, and keep a broad content library to make sure messaging remains varied and fresh.

"I just don't have time for a relationship right now."

Nearly half of consumers (47%) unsubscribe because they're overwhelmed by the amount of email they receive in general. Remember: your competition in the inbox isn't the same as your competition in the marketplace. Every email a consumer receives is competing for their time and attention. In order to win the SUBSCRIBER's attention, your content must be more engaging and more relevant than anything else in the inbox.

"We just never clicked."

25% of consumers said they unsubscribe because the email content was irrelevant from the start. In the current environment, consumer expectations are high and relevancy is no longer an option for interactive marketers.



“I’m on too many mailing lists and it’s just taking up space in my inbox. So if I notice that I never buy anything from them or haven’t been reading their emails, I unsubscribe.” —Lindsay, 27, Fort Collins, CO



DATING PROFILE: FANS



PERSONAL STATS

73% of U.S. online consumers have created a profile on Facebook

65% of U.S. online consumers are currently active on Facebook

42% of U.S. online consumers are FANS (use Facebook and have “liked” at least one company)

TURN-ONS

64% of Facebook users are “FANS” (have “liked” a company on Facebook)

84% of Facebook users check Facebook at least once per week

68% of Facebook users check Facebook at least once per day

TURN-OFFS

55% of Facebook users have “liked” a company and then later decided they no longer wanted to see that company’s posts

51% of FANS say they rarely or never visit a company’s page after “liking” them

71% of FANS say they have become more selective about “liking” companies on Facebook

11% of people who created a Facebook account have stopped using Facebook

FACEBOOK: SHE LOVES ME, SHE LOVES ME NOT...

As we discovered in **SUBSCRIBERS, FANS, & FOLLOWERS #5: Facebook X-Factors**, consumer motivations for becoming a FAN of a brand (or “liking” the brand) on Facebook vary widely. These motivations were reinforced in our latest round of research, where respondents’ answers regarding motivation fell into four general categories:

- Self-expression, identification with the brand, or public endorsement of the brand
- The opportunity to connect with like-minded consumers
- The ability to learn about and interact with the company behind the products
- Desire to learn about products, stay updated on sales and promotions, and take advantage of exclusive offers

Because their motivations for “liking” a brand vary, consumers’ expectations of how brands should engage with them on Facebook are also varied. This creates something of a love-hate relationship with Facebook marketing practices—while many consumers “like” brands in order to receive discounts and promotions, nearly as many others are turned off by this type of messaging.

“I hate when brands think of Facebook interactions as an opportunity for sending advertising messages.”

—Melanie, 32, Madison, WI



SENDING MIXED SIGNALS

After “liking” a company, 51% of consumers say they expect the company to send them marketing messages, while 40% say they **don’t** expect to receive marketing messages from the company. (The remaining 9% don’t know what they should expect. Talk about sending mixed signals to marketers!)

Companies have a considerable challenge when it comes to maintaining relationships on Facebook. Some consumers want brands to entertain them with fun posts, while others only want to see posts that provide direct, tangible benefits. When a consumer “likes” a brand, what kind of signal are they sending? Should marketers interpret the “like” as permission to market to the consumer, or not?

The age and gender of the FAN are important factors in deciding whether “like” is the equivalent of permission. Consumers 24 and younger are the least likely to expect marketing messages via Facebook (40%), while those who are 35 and older are far more likely to expect marketing messages after becoming FANS (55%). Similarly, men are less likely to expect marketing messages through Facebook than women. Only 44% of men equate “liking” a brand with permission to send marketing messages, while 55% of women make this connection.

Although these numbers show some ambiguity, it’s clear that a “like” can be read in a variety of ways. So, tread carefully when it comes to assuming that “like” equals permission. FANS are fickle, connected, and very vocal if you cross their shifting lines of propriety. The word “fan” is, after all, short for “fanatic.” And remember this—the consumer said they “like” your brand. Nobody said anything about LOVE. Reading too much into a FAN’s “like” is the online equivalent of talking about marriage on the first date.

I tend to pursue information on Facebook but I don’t particularly like to have it pushed to me via Facebook. I use Facebook to get an overall idea of what a given company is doing – what their message is, what they do, and what is going on. —Megan, 21, Las Vegas, NV

BREAKING UP IS, *LIKE*, HARD TO DO

So what happens when a consumer decides they no longer “like” a brand? How—and why—does the break-up occur? More than half of consumers (55%) have “liked” a brand, only to decide later that they no longer want to see posts from that brand. Of that group, only 57% bother to formally “unlike” the company. The rest either ignore unwanted posts or delete the posts from their newsfeed. So more than half the time, the company receives no direct feedback about the consumer’s desire to stop seeing their posts. Kind of like a long-distance relationship where your beloved forgets to tell you they’ve moved on. When a consumer “likes” a company and later changes their mind, what causes them to lose interest? (Multiple responses were allowed to this survey question.)

FANS’ TYPICAL ACTION WHEN THEY NO LONGER WANT TO SEE POSTS FROM A COMPANY ON FACEBOOK



Nothing, just ignore their posts

Click the “X” in my news feed to remove them from my wall

Go to the company’s fan page and “unlike” them

“You’re smothering me.”

Frequency is a key factor in consumers’ decisions to end brand relationships through Facebook. In total, 63% of consumers have “unliked” a company due to excessive postings—either the individual brand’s postings (44%) or in an attempt to cut down on overall marketing clutter (43%).

“I just got bored.”

As with email, marketers need to focus on keeping the Facebook relationship fresh. 38% of consumers say they’ve “unliked” a company because content became boring or repetitive. At the same time, marketers need to avoid posting too much “fluff”—17% of consumers have “unliked” a brand because postings were too chit-chatty.

“Let’s be honest—I was only after one thing.”

26% of consumers say they have “liked” a company because they were interested in a one-time offer, and then “unliked” the brand after getting what they wanted. Marketers should consider their goals when offering promotions through Facebook—are you looking for a long-term relationship, or just a one-night stand?

“I’m not sure what I want right now.”

The “Facebook dichotomy” is evident in that 24% of consumers have “unliked” because the company didn’t offer enough deals, while another 24% have “unliked” because posts were too promotional. Consumer expectations are clearly divided, so it’s important to strike a balance that satisfies both groups, while not coming on too strong either way.

“I ‘like’ a lot of different brands, and if they’re all constantly posting then it’s overwhelming.” —Aaron, 23, Houston, TX

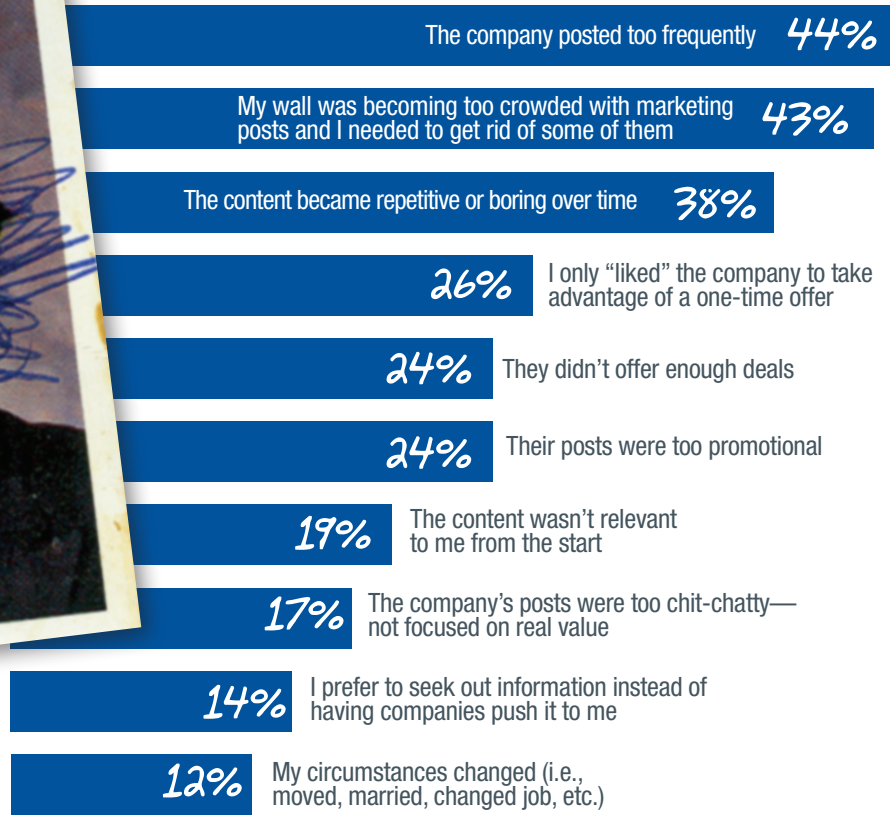
MAYBE WE CAN STILL BE FRIENDS?

A consumer's decision to "unlike" a company has surprisingly little impact on the perceived likelihood that they will buy from that company in the future. In total, 63% of consumers said they were as likely or more likely to purchase something from a company after ending their Facebook relationship. Another 18% said they only "unlike" a company if they never bought anything in the first place.

It seems the correlation between "unliking" a company and continuing to do business with that company is tenuous at best. So while Facebook remains a viable channel for interactive marketing, companies probably shouldn't place undue emphasis on how many times they are "liked." Rather, the emphasis should be on fostering an engaged community of FANS who like you enough to amplify your brand within their circle of Facebook friends.



REASONS PEOPLE "UNLIKE" BRANDS ON FACEBOOK



DATING PROFILE: FOLLOWERS



PERSONAL STATS

17% of U.S. online consumers have created a Twitter account

9% of U.S. online consumers are currently active on Twitter

5% of U.S. online consumers are FOLLOWERS (use Twitter and have “followed” at least one company)

TURN-ONS

56% of active Twitter users are FOLLOWERS

64% of active Twitter users check Twitter at least once per day

48% check Twitter several times per day

71% of FOLLOWERS expect to receive marketing messages from companies through Twitter

TURN-OFFS

41% of Twitter users have “followed” a company on Twitter and then stopped following them later

47% of those who created a Twitter account are no longer active on Twitter

TWITTER: WE JUST “GET” EACH OTHER

In our latest round of research, we explored consumer motivations for following brands through Twitter. Responses echoed the three broad themes that were discussed in **SUBSCRIBERS, FANS, & FOLLOWERS #4: Twitter X-Factors**:

- 1 BREVITY:** The “short and sweet” nature of tweets facilitates quick and concise communication
- 2 ACCESSIBILITY:** Twitter provides unprecedented access to individuals and brands
- 3 INTERACTION:** Brands are available for real-time communication and timely responses

Despite these varied motivations, Twitter users as a whole seem quite comfortable using Twitter as a platform for interacting with brands. In fact, Twitter is more frequently viewed as a two-way communication tool than either email or Facebook.

Twitter has a strong polarizing effect that is unlike any other social media channel. Its users either become extremely active on Twitter, or they stop using the platform altogether. In fact, nearly half of consumers who have created a Twitter account have stopped using the service.

But those who remain active on Twitter are among the most active and connected of all U.S. online consumers. They have a high tendency to check Twitter, Facebook, and Email at least daily, and actively use their mobile phones to stay connected.

“It’s not that the companies I was following on Twitter did anything wrong. I didn’t stop following them, per se, I just stopped using Twitter.” —Cara, 29, Portland, ME

ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING TO ME???

Perhaps because of their fondness for connection, Twitter users are actually less likely to stop following a brand than Facebook or email users (41% for Twitter, versus 55% for Facebook and 91% for email). They also seem to have much different expectations around frequency of brand communications through Twitter than Facebook or email users.

Of course, Twitter break-ups still happen. And when they do, it's usually about content, not frequency.

"I'm not getting anything out of this relationship."

On Twitter, the focus is much more about keeping Tweets interesting than limiting frequency. Content that becomes repetitive or boring is the most common reason people disengage with brands on Twitter (52%). Marketers should also keep their Tweets focused on delivering value, as 20% of Twitter users have stopped following a company because Tweets were too chit-chatty.

"I need to focus on other things right now."

The main frequency-related complaint from Twitter users is that their Twitter feed is simply too crowded with marketing messages. So the problem in this case may be that the consumer is following too many brands, not that any particular brand is Tweeting too frequently.

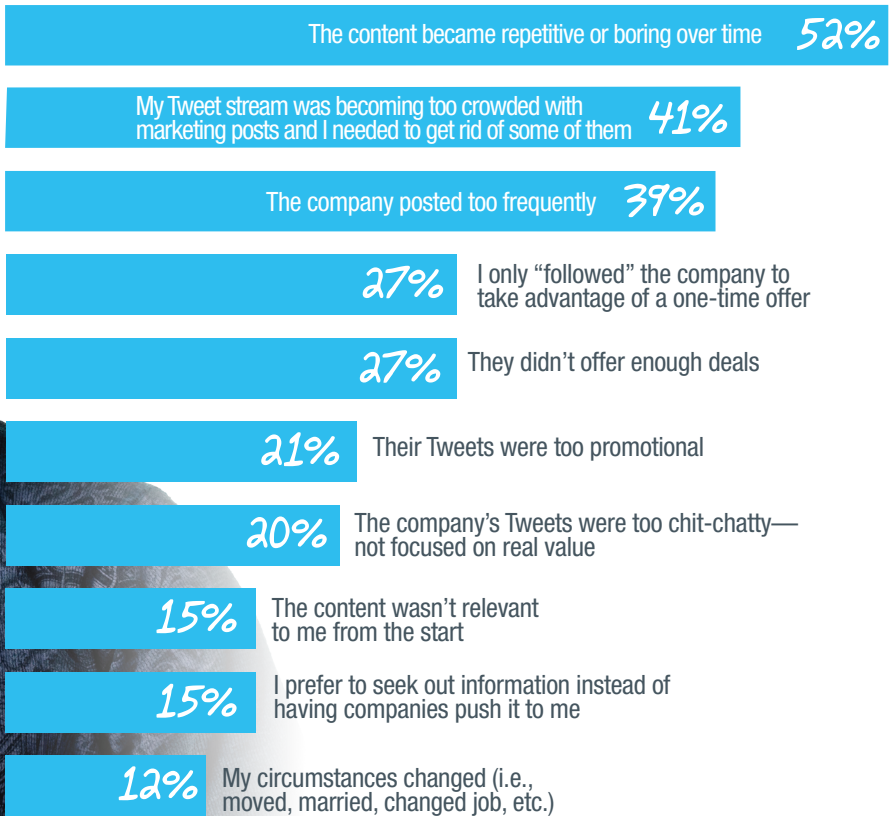


"Brands that Tweet only once per week or less quickly become obsolete—they're not providing value in that medium." —Jason, 28, Buffalo, NY

“I’ve never had any problems with brands over-Tweeting. I usually see 4-5 status updates a day per brand, which doesn’t bother me at all. It’s not like they’re repeating the same post over and over.” —Dave, 38, Charleston, SC



REASONS PEOPLE STOP FOLLOWING BRANDS ON TWITTER





A COMMITMENT PROBLEM?

Nearly half of all consumers who created a Twitter account no longer use Twitter. They aren't just breaking up with brands—some are leaving Twitter altogether. However, those that remain on Twitter are some of the most influential on the Web, meaning the channel can't be ignored

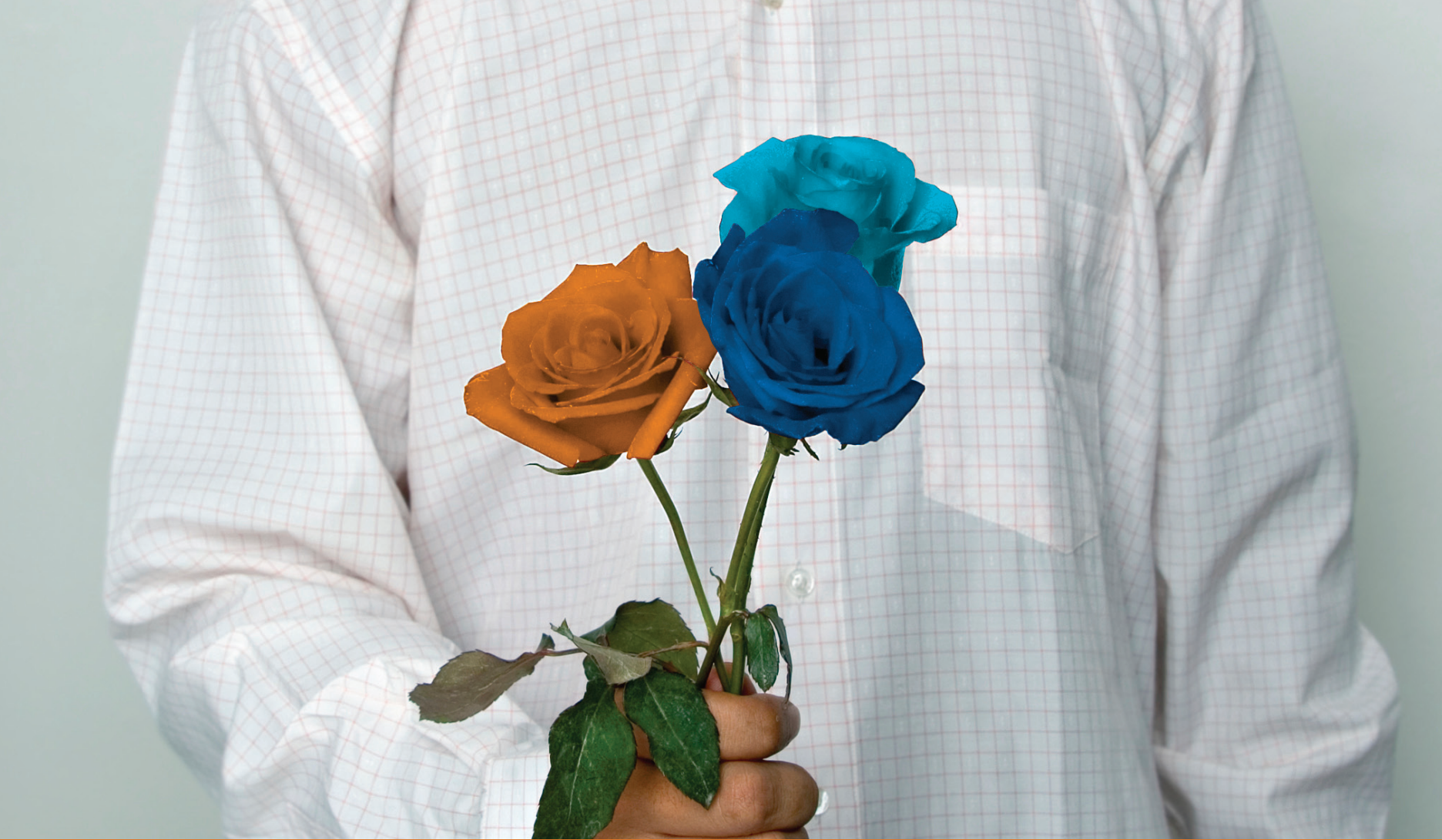
The top three reasons people quit using Twitter?

52% *found Twitter to be pointless*

38% *said it got boring*

23% *think Twitter is too chaotic*

Whether retention will be a significant issue for Twitter remains to be seen. As detailed in **SUBSCRIBERS, FANS, & FOLLOWERS #4: Twitter X-Factors**, Twitter has a stronghold on the “Megaphone” audience. With so many influencers among their ranks, Twitter's audience may not need to reach Facebook-like proportions. However, our research indicates that more consumers may be willing to stick with Twitter if they understood its value more immediately during the post-registration honeymoon period.



“I think each channel should be customized for that group of people, so that each group feels important. That way, a consumer can follow on Twitter, Facebook, and by email and not be overloaded with the same information.” —Amanda, 31, Louisville, KY

CONCLUSION

Most romances come to an end at some point, and—whether conducted through Email, Facebook, or Twitter—online consumer-brand romances are no exception. Regardless of channel, our research shows that one thing consistently drives consumers away; communications that, in some way, demonstrate that the company doesn't care.

Marketers have been focused on relevancy since the dawn of email marketing, but the idea of showing you “care” may be a new one. We sometimes hear marketers talk about “authenticity” as a key component to engaging consumers. However, the consumers we spoke to didn't talk about authenticity. They talked about caring, and caring goes much deeper. **Caring conveys the sentiment that brands place the best interests of their customers ahead of their own balance sheets.**

So how do you let consumers know your company cares? Or, more to the point, is it possible that your Email, Facebook, and Twitter communications are inadvertently telling consumers you don't care? Take a long, hard look in the mirror and make sure you're not making any of these classic mistakes:

FAILURE TO ENGAGE. Lack of follow-through sends a clear message that you don't care. With email—encouraging registration, but not delivering emails in a timely manner. On Facebook—creating a profile page, but never updating it. On Twitter—creating a Twitter handle, but never Tweeting. If you don't care enough to keep up with the basics, why should consumers bother to interact with your brand?

BEING TOO SELF-PROMOTIONAL. Consumers expect and want brands to promote their products and services, but these messages must be balanced with information that benefits the consumer. Hard sell tactics can work in person, but they fail online because you lack the personal interaction to counter the hard-sell message. No matter how personal they are, Email, Facebook, and Twitter don't allow you to replicate a face-to-face conversation.

UNCLEAR MESSAGE. Consumers want to learn as much as possible about a product or service before they buy it. If product information is unclear, incomplete, or difficult to find, the brand may be seen as careless, irresponsible, or untrustworthy.

BREACHES OF SOCIAL ETIQUETTE. Every channel has its own rules, and consumers expect companies to know the rules and follow them. Failure to respect the social etiquette in each channel is a clear signal that your brand doesn't care.

Email: Consumers want brands to send them relevant content that is tailored to their personal interests. They expect marketers to honor permissions, and show restraint when it comes to email frequency. They measure your emails not against the best in your industry, but against the best senders in their inbox.

Facebook: Consumers view Facebook as a great way to engage with brands they already know and trust. They expect marketers to keep their Facebook pages fresh and interesting, and to limit their posts to avoid drowning out social interactions.

Twitter: Consumers who actively use Twitter expect frequent, focused Tweets from brands, but they don't want to be overwhelmed. They expect to receive prompt answers when they ask questions via Twitter.

One thing is certain—the consumer-brand relationship will continue to grow and develop in the years to come. It's your job to make that relationship work!



KEEP THE ROMANCE ALIVE!

In order to maintain relationships through Email + Facebook + Twitter, you need to understand what consumers are saying about your brand—right now, in real time.

That's why you need the ExactTarget Interactive Marketing Hub™.

You'll get a single view of what's happening across Email, Mobile, Social, and Sites. From planning and tracking campaigns to engaging in real-time conversations on Twitter and Facebook, the Interactive Marketing Hub will forever change the way you communicate with your customers.

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