

The Ten Commandments of New Social Media

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A lot of people new to social media wonder if there are any rules, and if so, what are they? You'll be glad to know that yes, this frontier isn't quite as wild as it looks. Even in these relatively early days, there's a healthy set of conventions, laws and norms. Just like the original ten, these won't keep you out of every kind of trouble, but they cover the big stuff pretty well.

Commandment #1: Thou Shalt Participate in the Conversation

The conversation is going to take place with you or without you. The 21st century has no patience with cowards. Opting out is not an option, so get in there and participate.

Commandment #2: Thou Shalt Not Lie

Nothing will sink you faster in the wired world than lying and all its variants. It's too easy to compare stories, and too easy for your attempted coverups to get leaked. Don't tell two conflicting stories in two different media. Don't say you're one thing when you know that your actions tell an entirely different story. Don't tell lies of omission. And . . .

Commandment #3: Thou Shalt Not Astroturf

See Commandment #2. Don't try to engineer conversation or use fake characters to advocate for you. I guarantee you will get caught, and your credibility will take a beating you may never get over. Creating a space for conversation is good. Creating sock puppets is bad.

Commandment # 4: Thou Shalt Talk Like a Human Being

Corporations don't hold conversations. Enterprises don't hold conversations. Entities don't hold conversations. Conversations take place among people. Be a person.

Commandment #5: Remember Thy Community and Keep It Holy

It's not an audience of passive recipients of your message. It's a community made up of a complicated mix of personalities. The community has its own needs and its own imperatives. Take care of your community.

Commandment #6: Thou Shalt Not Be a Wimp

Bullies have been a factor in every social group that has ever existed. The anonymity of the Internet gives bullies an extra measure of courage. You must face bullies down every time you encounter them, clearly and forcefully.

Don't let bully-wrangling turn you into an aggressive butthead yourself. And don't be a hall monitor, wagging your finger and quoting rules. (Or commandments!) Instead, see #5: be a citizen who values civility and defends it on behalf of your community.

Commandment #7: Thou Shalt Not Snivel

You're going to get beat up every once in awhile. Never, ever whine about it.

Commandment #8: Thou Shalt Write What Is Worth Reading

Typos aren't necessarily a big problem, although you notice you never see one on [Copyblogger](#), [Probblogger](#) or [Seth's Blog](#). Vague, weak, insipid or meaningless writing *are* a big problem. Write clearly and with vigor. Cut out every line of corporate doublespeak. If you don't know how to do that, subscribe to Copyblogger, read it faithfully, and put their advice into practice daily.

Commandment #9: Thou Shalt Not Pontificate About Things Thou Knowest Nothing About

You will get caught and mocked and that's just embarrassing.

Commandment #10: Thou Shalt Have a Sense of Humor

It's just people, and people are pretty much the funniest thing ever. Nothing will serve you online as well as a sense of humor, especially about yourself.