

**CONFIDENCE  
IN THE MEDIA**  
IN TODAY'S  
DIVISIVE CLIMATE

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People are currently living in the age of fake news and social media outrage. All this has led to general trust issues among consumers. Which posts on social media are trustworthy and which are not? The lack of trust has begun to extend beyond just the walls of Facebook or Twitter as well.



Mainstream media companies are facing accusations of fake news and viewers are questioning if what they are watching is true, false, or a mixture of the two.

These trust issues are also extending to brands that utilize media for their marketing efforts. In fact, a [recent study](#) shows that only 48% of people actually trust businesses. This is a sharp decline from only a decade earlier.

Today, more than ever, businesses must earn the trust of consumers in order to be successful. Brands that measure trust and incorporate trust-building activities into their marketing efforts will see better results both long-term and short-term.

In the following chapters, you will learn how brands are building trust in the era of fake news to buck the trend of declining consumer confidence. Most importantly, you will understand how to apply these methods to your own marketing in order to grow the confidence of your own customers.

# HOW DOES TAKING A STAND AFFECT BRAND PERCEPTION?

There are a number of brands or businesses that take a “don’t rock the boat” approach to their marketing. Political or social stances are avoided like the plague because of the backlash that may occur from certain groups. With people able to organize boycotts or protests easily on social media, it may be scary for businesses to consider taking any sort of stand that could ruffle feathers.

However, some brands have not shied away from taking a stand and potentially stirring up controversy. These companies have not been scared from attaching their logo, their company, and their personalities with hot button issues that, inevitably, create a lot of discussion.

One of the most prominent examples of a brand taking a stand as an integral part of the company’s marketing is Nike’s campaign that features Colin Kaepernick. Even prior to this campaign, simply mentioning Colin Kaepernick’s name was sure to stir up heated discussion. By starting the kneeling movement in the NFL, Kaepernick earned the ire of a number of groups and people in the United States including the current President himself.

As a result of the kneeling movement, people boycotted the NFL. In response, the NFL created rules against kneeling during the national anthem which were then scrapped prior to the start of the season.

The debate raged on as to whether kneeling was a respectful way to bring attention to racial issues in America or a complete disrespect of the sacrifice veterans and police officers have made in the line of duty.

Needless to say, the response to Nike’s campaign was divided. People applauded Nike for refusing to play it safe and making a statement with their new campaign. Others burned their Nike gear, cut the logos off of their Nike socks, and vowed never to buy another Nike product again.

Initially, it looked as though the people boycotting Nike were right. [Share prices dropped sharply](#) immediately after the release of the campaign. However, prices quickly rebounded and began trading at an all-time-high. Nike reported a spike in sales and fewer discounts on their products when compared with the previous year's data. It appeared that, after the initial boycotting, sock cutting, and shoe burning; people had actually responded very strongly and very positively to Nike's campaign.

Of course, Nike isn't the only brand to make a statement with their marketing. Audi used their [Super Bowl spot in 2017](#) to promote women's rights, equal pay, and equal opportunity. More importantly, they backed up their feel-good Super Bowl commercial with investments in female artists and equal enrollment requirements for the Audi internship program.

Always, Dove and Levis are just a few of the other major brands that are trying to make social statements with their advertising. While none of these campaigns court the type of controversy Nike took on headfirst, they are far from playing it safe.

Brands are often hesitant to do this because the fear they may lose groups of consumers that do not share the same beliefs. However, as Nike has shown, even if people are burning your shoes, you can still align yourself with a strong belief and make money at the same time.

It would appear, at least based on the Nike example, that a slightly smaller but dedicated fan base is more valuable than a larger, indifferent fan base. With people using social media to share their love for Nike's new campaign, the advertisement and now iconic image of Colin Kaepernick spread like wildfire. Nike's [sales increased 31%](#) compared to the same period last year, and it is estimated that the value of the exposure from the "Dream Crazy" commercial [amounted to \\$43 million](#).

# DO BRANDS KNOW WHERE THEIR DIGITAL ADS ARE BEING PLACED?

A lot of work goes into a marketing plan. Target demographics are determined, images are chosen, copy is written, budgets are set, and then the ads are placed in online publications and on social media. It is at this point where many brands lose control of the process.

In most cases, no harm is done. However, there have been situations where brands were embarrassed as their ad showed up somewhere where it did not belong.

Some brands and consumers have been shocked to find advertisements [running alongside ISIS videos](#) that show graphic content and promote hate speech. Clearly, this relationship was not intended but, needless to say, it was a blemish for the brand to appear next to such content.

In other cases, consumers have worked to call out brands for placing advertisements on websites with questionable content or content they disagreed with. One example is the Twitter account, [Sleeping](#)

[Giants](#), which encouraged followers to [screenshot examples of advertisements](#) next to content they found ludicrous or hateful such as “Birth Control Makes Women Unattractive and Crazy.” Users would then question advertisers on their support of websites running the questionable content, with many advertisers pulling their ads as a result of pressure from engaged consumers.

Since so many websites survive on advertising revenue, removing this stream of revenue was meant to severely limit the operations of websites these activists deemed to be against their values. Advertisers, in a sense, were forced to take a stand – either pull their advertisements and risk upsetting some, or keep the ads active and risk upsetting a different group of people.

Of course, advertisers were not actively targeting websites promoting questionable content with their marketing efforts. Instead, the advertisements were placed programmatically. What this means is that an algorithm determined the visitors of the website fit the demographics set by the advertiser and the ads were placed accordingly with little to no consideration about the content of the website.

This created somewhat of a stir among advertisers and media buying agencies. Who is responsible for where an advertisement appears?

Until recently, programmatic placement was widely used without much of a second thought. If the visitors fit the demographics then they saw the ads. In this age where people are taking stands on a wide range of issues, brands must at least consider the consequences of programmatic advertising.

Businesses were quickly made aware of the potential damage that could be done to their brand simply by where their advertisements appear.

The advertisements themselves were not the issue. The company and its directors had avoided scandal. It was the content of an unrelated third party that was causing the uproar and the advertisements were seen as implicit support of the content by many.

This created an interesting debate regarding who should be responsible for managing programmatic placement. Should media buyers be responsible to

ensure that advertisements do not appear next to objectionable content? The internet is so large and the tastes of viewers can vary so widely. Perhaps companies should be responsible by notifying their media agencies about the types of content they do not want to appear next to. This is similar to brands asking their media buying agencies to [avoid spoofed domains](#) such as fake CNN websites that attempt to earn advertising dollars. Brands and agencies have already had to grapple with some of the challenges posed by programmatic advertising.

In either case, reputation management online has become one of the [main concerns for marketers](#). Simply having an ad placed on the wrong website could turn into a major headache for marketers who do not want to appear to support content their customers may find objectionable.

There is still a lot of value in programmatic placement but the placement needs to be defined in such a way that brands and media buyers can feel confident that the content will reflect the values of the brand and their customers.



# THE IMPACT OF FAKE NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

“Fake news” was a term that began to see frequent usage in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election. Defining fake news has been challenging with different people and groups using the term in different ways.

For example, the President often refers to mainstream media outlets that report negative stories about him as “fake news.” Others point to clearly fake stories disguised as legitimate news stories, which are reportedly spread by online trolls as “fake news.”

The point of this is not to define fake news or lay blame on who does or does not proliferate fake news. However, fake news does play a role in marketing for brands of all sizes across all industries. While brands may not be directly involved in any form of fake news, they are victims of general eroding of trust in online information sources.

In fact, more than half of the people getting their news from social media do not trust the information to be accurate.

For brands that are trying to market products, services, or simply increase customer awareness, overcoming this lack of trust is an uphill battle. If people do not trust the information they receive on social media then they are using social media with their guard up. Everything is examined from a point of skepticism.

Facebook has attempted to combat this lack of trust with new safeguards to help protect users against fake news. Moderators have been hired to weed through reported content, users have been given additional options for reporting content, and Facebook will even go as far as to indicate which posts may potentially be fake news.



These are positive steps, but it remains to be seen if any difference will be made in regards to the level of trust people have in the content they see on social media.

First of all, people have to trust that Facebook has their best interests in mind and will use these new tools in the way they were intended. With the data breaches and privacy issues Facebook seems to constantly be battling, it's fair to question whether or not Facebook can actually rebuild trust with new tools.

Secondly, it is also difficult to know how people will respond to these tools being implemented. Fake news tends to target political or social issues that people identify with very strongly. Having a social network tell you that a story is fake news may only illicit a defensive response and doubling down rather than actual introspection.

Simply put, brands cannot rely on Facebook to rebuild trust in social media. Instead, businesses must actively get ahead of the issues and build trust for their own brand. Social media users may struggle determining which news is legitimate but that does not mean it is impossible to earn their trust. For brands, this means marketing with a focus on authenticity, not cutting corners, and respecting the ability of social media users to recognize when something just doesn't add up.



# WITH FAKE FOLLOWERS, WILL DECLINING TRUST IN INFLUENCERS BE THE END OF INFLUENCER MARKETING?

Another growing issue on social media, right alongside fake news, is the issue of fake followers being bought and used by influencers. Influencers are defined as social media users with a large following who are often paid by brands to post sponsored content. Those brands hope to reach and capitalize on the influencer's large and dedicated following. Brands will align with influencers that speak to their niche in order to generate content, build brand awareness, and increase likeability.

Influencer marketing fraud has become a major issue recently as brands embrace the use of influencers as part of their marketing strategy. The size of the influencer marketing industry is expected to grow to \$10 billion by 2020. This is clearly a valuable piece of the marketing budget pie and influencers are looking to solidify their share of the marketing spend from brands and agencies. Unfortunately, where there are opportunities for financial gain, there are people looking for creative ways to game the system.

Just as Twitter bots have been used to proliferate fake news, bought follower bots have been used to beef up the social media follower counts of aspiring influencers. Brands see impressive follower numbers, lots of likes, active engagement in the comments of each post, and assume that the influencer has legitimately captured a large audience within their niche. However, some of these followers may not be real people. This is influencer marketing fraud boiled down to its most simple state.



Keith Weed, Chief Marketing Officer of Unilever, said that urgent action must be taken regarding fake followers in influencer marketing. The comments flooded in as marketers around the world grappled with how to move ahead with influencer marketing knowing that [up to 15%](#) of social media accounts on sites like Twitter may be fake. Marketers are leery about giving a piece of their budget to influencers who may have used tactics like buying fake followers to falsely boost their online profile.

Despite these challenges, many brands still include influencers as part of their marketing plan with nearly half saying they plan on increasing their marketing spend on influencer marketing in the future. It seems brands have determined that the potential payoff outweighs the risks of doing business with less-than-honest influencers.

In addition, new tools have been created to help marketers weed out the dishonest influencers and focus on the people that are actually influential within their niche. [Machine learning algorithms](#) are being utilized to identify suspect behavior on influencer social media accounts. This is a very new industry and, as with most industries, there are some growing pains that must be sorted out.

Where influencer marketing goes from here is anyone's guess. However, it is clear that brands see value in working with influencers. The value they are able to provide in terms of connecting brands with niche audiences is unparalleled. Influencers give brands a more authentic, trustworthy face, and a direct connection to a dedicated audience full of followers that cannot be targeted in the same way by other marketing methods. Influencer marketing is here to stay, but it is far from its final form.

# BUILDING TRUST WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS

You have learned in the previous chapters that people have a general distrust of what they see on social media. Whether it is Twitter bots spreading fake news or fake followers beefing up the accounts of aspiring internet celebrities, gaining trust on social media is an uphill battle. It also happens to be the most important battle brands will fight in the coming years.

Everything that has been mentioned boils down to this: brands must build trust with customers. That seems like an obvious statement, right? Even before social media, brands had to build trust with their customers. The difficulty for businesses today is that trust is built where interactions occur. Interactions occur online, and fewer people trust what they see online. See the challenge?

So, how do you build an online presence as a part of your marketing plan and build trust in a space that is not conducive to building trust? That's the real question.

Ultimately, it all boils down to engagement with customers. The internet has given us more opportunity to connect with each other than ever before. Simply being online is not enough. Having a social

media page is not enough. People want to engage with brands beyond the store sales counter. In other words, a Facebook page is not just a place to post information about upcoming sales. Consumers want to be able to connect with businesses through social media and get an honest response quickly. Simply by being ready and willing to engage, businesses are already ahead of the competition and starting to build trust among consumers.

Customers also want to see transparency. No brand is perfect and no one expects companies to be perfect. Samsung is one of the largest phone manufacturers and it wasn't that long ago that their phones were [exploding in people's pockets](#). With social media, word can spread in minutes. Trying to hide behind perfectly crafted PR releases is not an effective way to communicate in today's

world. Instead, brands need to embrace transparency. This will help earn the trust of consumers who have access to the world's information at their fingertips.

Another great way to build trust among customers is to offer additional value. Is your business simply trying to complete transactions or are you trying to build a relationship with your customers? People can tell the difference.

In addition to offering an honest, responsive presence online, brands also need to provide additional value through their online content. Instructional blog posts about how customers can get more out of your product or service are a great way to easily add value. When customers see this on social media, they can see you have taken an extra step to make their purchase even more worthwhile. People are intelligent enough to know that all businesses must earn money. However, which businesses can earn money while also offering the best value to consumers even long after the money has changed hands?

Building trust is only going to become more and more important. Millennials, in fact, cite brand trust as the [second most important influencer](#) of purchase decisions. As millennials earn more income and become an even more important part of the consumer base, brands will rely on the trust they have earned more strongly.



# SHOULD TRUST BE A MEASURE OF SUCCESS IN YOUR MARKETING?

You now know what is causing the erosion of trust online, how to rebuild trust, and the importance of trust. So, how seriously should you take trust building in future marketing campaigns? Should it become a measure of success or is it a simple “nice-to-have?”

This will be the question that marketers must grapple with over the coming years.

It would be very easy to make the argument that trust should be a measure of success. After all, you just spent several chapters learning about the importance of trust. In fact, trust is already one of the most important factors people consider when making a buying decision. If building trust is important, why wouldn't measuring trust be equally as important? How can you know that trust is being built?

Of course, measuring trust is easier said than done. How do you measure a feeling like trust? How do you track that feeling to judge your progress? Measuring trust, at first, may seem like trying to catch wind in a bottle. Most importantly, how can you accurately measure trust as a part of a

marketing campaign when media is one of the most [distrusted organizations](#) in the world?

One great way of measuring trust is to analyze the content of posts online to get a better idea of what people are thinking. Over time, you can see the progress, or lack thereof, being made. Searching blogs and social media profiles for thoughts from consumers is a great way of analyzing content in order to measure trust. Are comments trending negative, positive, or staying neutral? There are services that can aggregate public social media posts for examination. This is a manual task that can be very time-consuming but, at the same time, very valuable when measuring trust.



When measuring trust, you must have metrics for doing so. Will posts be given a rating that indicates the trust that the user has for the brand? Will you track how long it takes for a consumer to click on a marketing message and then buy a product? Most importantly, to what are you comparing these results? Previous results, competitive company results, or some other data point? All this needs to be determined when measuring trust as part of a marketing campaign.

Measuring interactions is another way to gauge trust. For example, likes are nice but comments and retweets are better. Perhaps you may wish to track the percentage increase of comments from campaign to campaign or look at the ratio of comments to likes? These measurements may help indicate whether someone simply likes your brand or whether they trust it enough to leave a comment or share the post with their own circle of friends.

No single method is going to give a complete picture of trust. In addition, trust measurement will change and develop over time to better reflect the most effective methods used. While trust measurement may not be an exact science today, there are metrics that can be employed and analyzed over time to give a better idea of how trust in your company or brand is changing.

In any case, failing to measure trust as a part of marketing success may prove to be the downfall of some brands. As trust becomes more and more important, the brands that fail to track and build trust will fall behind their competitors.

# TRUST IS NOT JUST A BUZZWORD

Trust in media is eroding and, yet, marketers must still get their message out to the world and earn the business of their customers. People want to do business with companies they can trust which means building, measuring, and maintaining trust is one of the most important goals of any marketing campaign moving forward.

Building trust is not something that is done overnight. It takes hard work, exceptional planning, and unmatched expertise. This is why so many brands are turning to agencies that understand the importance of trust. Simply having a presence online, making a clever post, or creating an eye-catching advertisement is not enough anymore.

At E29 Marketing, we understand the important role trust plays today and how trust will grow to become even more important for consumers in the future. We are leading the charge for brands that want to build real trust with their consumers and stand out among their competitors. Major brands like Nike and Audi have seen there is more to marketing than just cool visuals and big name spokespeople.

**Do you want to build trust among your potential customers? Let's talk.** E29 Marketing would love to show you how we earn the trust of our clients, and more importantly, we'd love to earn your trust and partner with you to grow and succeed.

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