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**One of the true phenomena of the last ten years has been the rise and rise of social media. You need to have been on Mars for the last decade to not know what Facebook is and even footballers have worked out how to tweet but what is truly staggering is the amount of social media out there. The list is endless and covers work, rest and play in all its forms!**

In February LinkedIn topped 150 million users and, after launching in 2006, Twitter has over 300 million users generating over 300 million tweets and handling over 1.6 billion search queries per day.

So clearly we are interfacing with each other through social media all day, every day on our work PCs, our laptops, our tablets and our smartphones. Walk into any fast food outlet in the country and have a look at what most people are doing whilst they are waiting to be served. The chances are they have their smartphone in hand and are sending / receiving updates on status!

It is no surprise that business is increasingly keen to get in on the act and utilise such an instantaneous and pliable technology. Investment in social media strategy is rising exponentially with barely a single brand not wanting you to “like them on Facebook” and “watch them on YouTube”. Service sector based businesses are starting to look at Twitter as a means of providing technical or account support to customers.

It is instant, trendy, allows them to gather information and provide promotional messages wherever and whenever.

What needs to be considered is what impact this will have on customer satisfaction and ergo customer loyalty? Do we want business and brands muscling in on our social media? Should there be a real distinction between the two? Is your favourite sports star’s latest tweet about their new car an honest comment to be shared with the world or a discreet commercial endorsement broadcast to loyal followers? I have heard more than one person comment negatively on someone who has a Facebook type photo on their LinkedIn profile so do they want their bank feeding into their Twitter account?

The Leadership Factor recently conducted an online panel survey of Twitter users on behalf of a leading high street bank about Twitter’s usability as a support tool. The results showed that currently 9% used Twitter to contact organisations they did

business with compared to nearly 60% who used it mainly for celebrity news, the majority having genuine concerns about Twitter’s suitability as a business tool due to issues such as privacy and the limited number of characters per tweet. But for the 9% it’s an important channel and banks can’t ignore that.

One interesting aspect to consider is the effectiveness of these social media sites as they carry more and more traffic. What is the risk of missing something important in all the chatter? Path is a relatively new kid on the social media block but is based on the anthropological principle Dunbar’s number, which states that we can’t manage a network of more than 150 connections so that is what you are restricted to.

So by all means keep on engaging with the social (media) revolution. The more we do, the better we will become. Just make sure it is enabling your organisation to do best what matters most to your customers and not just because it is something new! 