

# Advertising gets "socially responsive"

Issued by [Wetpaint Advertising](#)

14 Feb 2013

We've all heard of socially responsible advertising, and some of us may have heard of responsive web design. But these days, we are witnessing the rise of what this author terms "Socially Responsive Advertising" - i.e., the act of brands using social media platforms, not only to create and direct brand-centric conversations for existing fans, but to engage in fan-generated conversations and stories, and leverage on the potential of those stories as powerful advertising opportunities.

UK-based brand Bodyform received a pleasant surprise from one of their male Facebook fans, when he posted a humorous, tongue-in-cheek rant on their wall, sarcastically accusing the corporation of "false advertising" for portraying women in their ads as being happy, sporty, active and fun during "that time of the month". Bodyform's page administrator could have brushed off the comment as a silly prank, had it not received a staggering total of 88,000 likes (the Bodyform Facebook Fan Page only had 7,547 fans and counting:

<http://www.facebook.com/Bodyform?ref=ts&fref=ts>). Rather than simply respond with an equally witty comment, Bodyform saw this incident for what it was: the perfect advertising opportunity. They "responded" with a YouTube commercial, wherein the "CEO" "apologises" for decades of misinformation - a backhanded condescension of the fan's plea for honesty, as it seems that men really don't want to know the "ugly truth" concerning this particularly sensitive topic. The video achieved instant viral cult status, having garnered over 3,6 million likes (watch the video here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bpy75q2DDow&feature=player\\_detailpage](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bpy75q2DDow&feature=player_detailpage); read the famous comment that sparked it all here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?annotation\\_id=annotation\\_903195&feature=iv&src\\_vid=Bpy75q2DDow&v=1GRi59CfJqI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?annotation_id=annotation_903195&feature=iv&src_vid=Bpy75q2DDow&v=1GRi59CfJqI)). It even received news coverage and publicity in the UK's Daily Telegraph (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/9614419/Bodyforms-response-to-Facebook-rant-a-viral-hit.html>). If a consumer had previously never heard of Bodyform, she sure has now.



According to a 2012 survey by Mass Relevance, the increase in internet and social media access via mobile technologies has led to the rise of the always-on audience, and it has been found that this audience spends the majority of its online time engaging with their favourite brands on social media platforms. The survey found that:

- 59% of users trust brands more when they are integrated with social media
- 75% of social media users are actively talking about their favourite brands
- 62% are more likely to engage with brands that have "gone social"
- 64% have already made purchases as a direct result of social media content

It's not enough for brands to merely "sit up and listen" to their consumers anymore - they need to actively engage in their stories, and integrate consumer stories with brand stories in order to maintain relevance and top-of-mind awareness. In other words, in the age of social media, brands and media strategies need to become more "socially responsive".

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