

Bots Gone Awry: What Businesses Can Learn

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Understandable attention has been given to the weaponization of social media and its impact on political, commercial and personal realms. Less attention has been spent on the effect of such automation on companies' internet marketing strategies. Businesses are tempted to see social media automation tools as a set of Easy Buttons and are increasingly frustrated when they don't work. The bad guys don't use these tools that way, nor should businesses. I recently sat down with Josh Riddle, one of the partners of Black Label Agency, to explore the dark side of social media in an effort to understand why the bad guys are better at social media than their commercial counterparts.

The Doppelganger Effect. Automation tools that drive social media noise, whether to shape political or commercial perception, are in everyone's hands. Yet in the commercial realm of Josh and his team at Black Label, there is an increasing recognition "that it's even more important to target the customer you're trying to reach." It's an approach they describe as "organically social", moving beyond simply blasting out content, "to finding influencers and meaningfully interacting with them." For businesses, this means moving past the "like" button. In the way that the weaponized side of social media identifies, manipulates and magnifies like minds, so too should companies "test biases, messages and market" to the right group of prospects. It's depressing to think that the dark side has done a better job of figuring out how to drive content that is valuable to those who share their biases. The commercial side of social media should take note.

Message with a Purpose. "Writing and publishing meaningful content is not the result of farming it out to a content farm," explains Josh. "All tech and all automation isn't important," continued Josh, "the most important thing is to put human thought into it." It's about making a connection that matters. "Technology has simply normalized how everyone approaches marketing." For Josh and the Black Label team, the process of shaping purposeful messages is about "testing what doesn't work as much as it is about figuring out what does."

Lesson from the Dark Side. It's ironic that the bad guys have figured out how to make their messaging resonate for like minds and terrify the consciences of those who differ. One of Josh's last comments to me resonated. "Companies need to resist the temptation that automation will drive insight." Social media should be all about discovering those for whom your message resonates and separating them from those where it doesn't. For their commercial customers, Black Label calls this process "discovering opportunity." In some ways it makes the digital world feel a lot more like the atom based one – trying to make resonant connections in a sea of automated froth.

Read the earlier article in this series, [Afterlife for the Entrepreneur: The ReSET](#).

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National Law Review, Volume VII, Number 46

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