

THE BOT SYNDROME

5 SIGNS YOUR EMPLOYEE FEELS LIKE A BOT

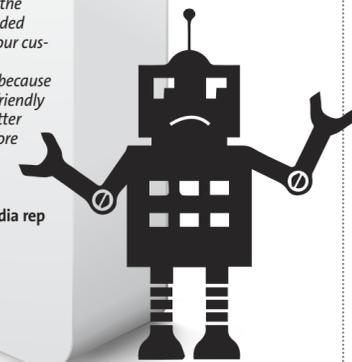


The other day, a customer tweeted at me, "Are you a bot?" At first I was really offended and wanted to tweet back "I am NOT a bot!" But when I thought about it some more, I got kind of sad.

I realised that by following the scripts and all the rules, I sounded very robotic. That's not what our customers want or need.

They come to social media because they want some upbeat and friendly interaction. I could provide better service if they gave us a bit more freedom to do what we know is right.

— Customer service social media rep



By **KARIN HURT**
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IT'S not just social media reps who feel that way. It happens across industries at all levels.

I've met vice-presidents whose fear has caused a dangerous bot-like trance. Bots leading bots is no way to change the game.

Sadly, it starts with good intentions: an effort to get everyone on the same page; a public relations team who wants to ensure all employees share the same story; or efficiency studies that show the "right way" to do things to save much more time.

Once had a boss tell me, "Karin, the truth is in that role, I want to take all the thinking out of it, make it as simple as possible so they can just execute efficiently."

Sometimes your employees will tell you. But often, they just subtly lose their passion for your work and find meaning elsewhere.

Here are five "bot" symptoms your employees may be feeling:

1. They stop asking important questions.
The "why?", "what's next?" and "what if?" questions disappear.

2. But... they don't make a move without asking obvious questions.
They need approval for everything, even if it means keeping a customer waiting. Most of your answers are "of course".

3. They "follow the rules" even when they don't make sense.
Of course they should have made an exception for the customer whose

son just died. But the guidebook didn't say, so they stuck by the rules.

It's impossible to predict and script every scenario. If an employee can't function outside the playbook, check for bot-building policies.

4. Meetings are lifeless.
Your meetings look like a scene from an old zombie movie. It's like pulling teeth to get everyone to talk. You feel like a cheerleader in an empty stadium.

5. Even well-thought-out recognition, compensation, and employee engagement programmes don't make a dent.
If employees could double their hourly wage if they just "embraced the programme", you first need a shift from bot gear, before any incentive overlay will work.

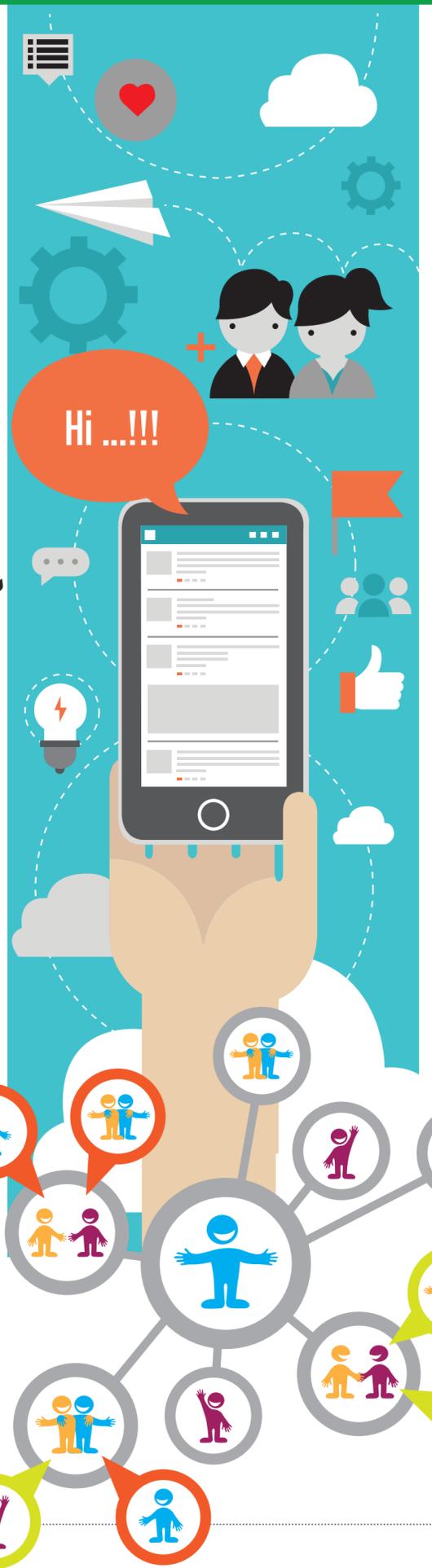
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The guy I worked for was wrong. Because I'm not a bot, I ignored that advice, and results improved.

You can't grow a bot. You can't motivate a bot. Bots will never deliver a "best in class" customer experience.

Your turn. What are other symptoms that show your employees feel like "bots"?

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THE most buzzing trend in the corporate world these days is entrepreneurship. With so many success stories of the young and old, we haven't seen a period in time when everything seems possible (and can be monetised!).

Start-ups, which allow you to book the nearest taxi, or invite the person nearest to you for a date, now pop up like mushrooms. Many food and clothing stores, which were previously limited to brick-and-mortar buildings are now flourishing thanks to e-commerce. Selling is not only easier – advertising and promotions have become more convenient and cheaper too.

Entrepreneurs, who will usually find themselves scavenging for money for next month's payroll, celebrate this with the widest smile. Promoting your product or service through Facebook or Twitter is practically free, but the catch is to use it strategically.

If you're a budding entrepreneur who has only discovered the wonders of social media for your business recently, here are five useful tips:

1. CREATE THE BASICS, AND COMMIT TO A CONTENT PLAN

For starters, create Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts. Ensure you use the same company or brand name (this may sound simple, but many miss out on this), the same logo (please always use high resolution), and same company description for consistency and easy recall of customers.

Once you're done, connect to the low hanging fruit – your own personal network (friends, relatives, loved ones, including that neighbour of yours whom you've been ignoring on Facebook but now is your potential customer).

Require or ask them (you may have to do this several times!) to share, retweet, and repost about your site to the universe you will never have access to: their own personal networks. This is where you start growing your network.

Keeping your social media accounts alive and active may be tedious but it's all about content planning. Your product and the industry you belong to should give you an idea of what kind of posts you should be focusing on.

Content usually comes in three types:

- A promotion (Example: Retweet this message and get a chance to win free tickets to a concert!)
- A shareable third-party information piece (Example: If you're a travel agency, repost an article shared by Trip Advisor about the Top 10 countries to visit in 2015.)
- Your own, organic information (Example: If you're a reseller of concert tickets, remind your customers about other means of contacting you: "Got queries or suggestions? We're also on Twitter @ ticketplanet!")

AN ENTREPRENEUR'S GUIDE TO SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

BUILDING A NEW BUSINESS BUT HAVE LITTLE OR ZERO BUDGET TO MARKET YOUR PRODUCT?



Stay committed to a content plan like you are married to someone. Trust me, it may be exciting to post for the first few weeks, but it can get draggy after a while.

Create a calendar if you must, and follow it religiously. This is not a diet plan, so please don't cheat.

2. POST SMART, NOT HARD

It's not the volume, but the quality of posts that will keep your customers engaged. Posting 10 times on Facebook or Instagram may turn away your followers as you'll be as irritating as other advertisements. So keep it to a maximum of two or three.

Be smart with your timing. Post during the most strategic times when customers are checking online. Based on studies, we check our social media accounts in the morning before work (8–10am), after work (5–7pm) and before we sleep (9–11pm).

Posting during non-peak times will only bury your post at the bottom of the stack!

Some users schedule a dedicated category of posts on specific days. For example, try executing a "Monday Madness Sale" that offers discount vouchers only on Mondays (and are redeemable on the same night or within the week).

This will effectively make your customers look forward to discounts every Monday announced via Facebook or Twitter – and yes, it might just make your customers spend more on a Tuesday or Wednesday which are usually the off-peak periods.

Be careful not to raise free-riders though, you don't want customers who just love you purely for discounts!

Now, let's say you've successfully made a Facebook fan page for your cupcake business. If you want your customers to see your posts more often, you need to make them "like" or "comment" on your posts often too.

Here's why: Facebook's newsfeed intelligence works on a basic rule: higher interaction = higher visibility. Popularity begets more popularity and a trend begets a stronger trend.

The more popular your post is (more "likes", more "comments"), the more likely it will be displayed again and again on your followers' newsfeeds.

Conversely, a customer will likely see a post from your fan page if he keeps on engaging with it (she comments on your posts, she "likes" your posts, or even chats with you on Facebook Messenger for customer concerns).

If you're wondering why you're rarely seeing the posts of a friend, this is one of those reasons – you're likely not interacting on Facebook. Keep your customers engaged on Facebook and they will surely see you on their newsfeeds.

3. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ONLINE INFLUENCERS

You will never build a massive base of followers on social media alone. No matter how much you tweet or post, you can still end up with 10 followers for months.

You need the "powers" of the online 'gods and goddesses' to rub off on you. Try getting popular bloggers, online gurus, and YouTube celebrities to endorse your brand.

My best friend Gie owns House of Sunnies (HOS), a start-up company with two people (herself and an assistant) which sells high-end sunglasses.

As she needed more publicity, she approached Lolita Perez, a famous fashion Instagrammer to post photos of herself (with HOS sunnies).

Gie gave Lolita a free pair of Gucci in exchange. Lolita also posted a link to HOS's Instagram account. In three days, HOS acquired 300 new followers and a dozen of inquiries.

Bartering is the name of the game for most online influencers. In exchange for a tweet or a post, offer them your product or service: food, clothing, fashion accessories, skin or dental services, transportation, and maybe even anti-termite services!

And how do you contact them? You don't need to go to their manager (most of these guys manage themselves!) – a simple tweet, e-mail or direct message won't hurt. If they like what you offer, they will surely negotiate next!

Online influencers aren't just people – they can be brands too. Partner up with established companies and convince them to do a Twitter or Facebook promotion with your product as a prize (ask for your logo to be largely visible on the Facebook post... and ask that your Facebook page be also linked).

They will likely do this to refresh and engage their followers (people will always bite on anything that's free).

Are you that start-up company selling luxury organic baby lotion? Pitch it to baby product companies that aren't your competitors but speak to the same audience – diaper companies, baby food companies and milk companies.

Be clear that you are proposing and offering something (if you give this to

them, then say that you expect this in return) before you invite the brand managers for a meeting. Give them samples of your product too.

4. KEEP YOUR ENEMIES CLOSER

Everyone is on social media, including your competitors. This is good news for you as you get free "spying" service.

How many Instagram followers does your competitor have? Does your competitor get a lot of customer complaints on Twitter? Then it's time that you highlight you have better customer service on social media.

Did Larry's Laundromat down the block just announce that they will close next week due to store renovations? Then maybe next week is the right time for you to offer customers free trial service (and attract Larry's clients).

From time to time, check Facebook or Twitter accounts of your competitor (better yet, follow their accounts) and

get notifications on what they're doing – everyday.

5. UNDERSTAND YOUR CUSTOMERS BETTER

In my opinion, the most beautiful thing about online channels is that they are measurable. You can measure your visitors' age, gender, location, and time of visits instantly!

In contrast, you can't measure your customers easily if you're selling clothes and accessories in a mall. Take advantage of this feature because it can lead you to where more money is.

If you've managed a Facebook fan page before, you will notice that the site gives you a breakdown of how many people "liked" or commented on a post. This gives you an idea about which information is more popular.

For example, digital natives prefer seeing photos and videos to text. If you have a text post, accompany that text with an image and you'll see a dramatic difference.

Don't write a novel in your posts; keep it short and sweet – something that we can finish reading while doing other tasks (like cooking or washing).

Remember, you're just one of the hundreds or thousands of people they're seeing everyday on Facebook and Twitter, so work hard to get through that clutter! You need to stand out!

You will also see which type of people visit your site the most.

Did you notice that you're getting a lot of comments and posts from City X? Maybe you should sell more in that city.

Confused why there are more males than females commenting on your posts? Maybe that woman perfume you're selling is becoming a bestseller gift among males – you should talk to them more.

Always keep score. Check the numbers, smell where the money is coming from, and follow where it goes. You will start realising that marketing is also a science, not just an art.

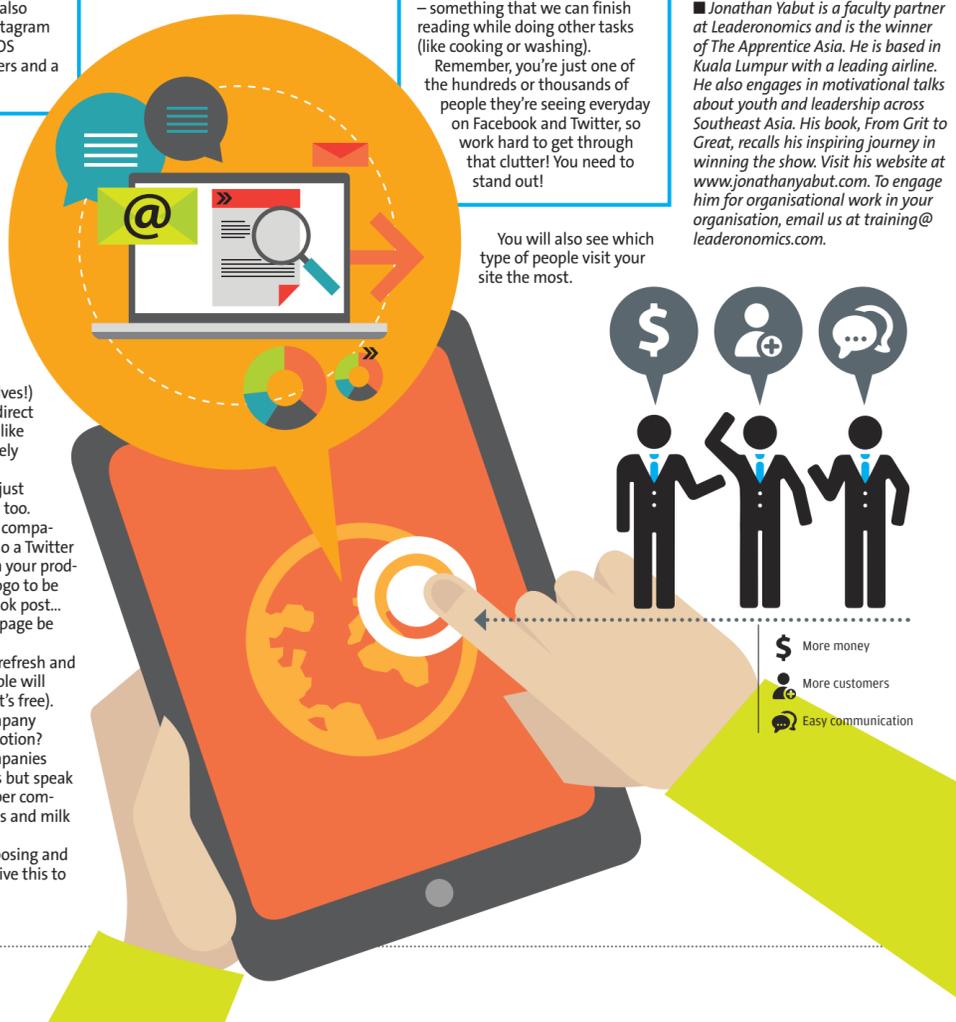
PARTING THOUGHTS

These are just the basics and we are barely scratching the surface. There are so many things to learn (and take advantage of) with social media. Repeat what works, and avoid what doesn't.

Strategically utilise the best practices from other people, and customise them for your business. Commitment will be taxing, but it is surely worth the effort.

Good luck and may you be the next entrepreneur to make it big!

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- More money
- More customers
- Easy communication