



Engaging Your Community

The First Five Responses You Should Master

You know about listening. You understand that hearing what your audience and community are talking about is important, and you're paying attention. You're keeping track of the conversation and now, you're ready to jump in and participate.

But then comes question that inevitably follows: What do I say?

So here, our list of the first five response types you might consider when engaging the conversations you'd like to be part of. The dialogues don't have to be about your brand necessarily - they can be about your industry or relevant trends or just stories of interest. But engaging is a big part of the social media equation, and getting off on the right foot is an important start.

Thank you.

You really can't use this one enough. Thanks for thinking of us! Thanks for mentioning us or recommending us. Thanks for that great bit of information you shared. Thanks for pointing out the typo on our website. Thank you for sharing your viewpoint (even if I disagree). Graciousness matters, and the simple art of thanking someone can indicate very subtly that you've been listening.

I'm sorry.

Screw ups happen, and saying you're sorry isn't about taking blame. It's about genuinely apologizing for someone's frustration, inconvenience, or loss. We're sorry your stuff didn't arrive on time. We're sorry our site was down when you needed it. We're sorry we dropped the ball and didn't respond to your email.

Sometimes it's taking responsibility for something, other times it's enough to acknowledge that something didn't work the way it was supposed to. In any case, a simple apology can go a long way toward making a frustrated person more open to hearing what else you might have to say.

Here's how I can help.

Information is currency. When someone is expressing a need you can fill, taking action works wonders, and being helpful - without expectation of reciprocation or favors in return - establishes trust and rapport. Looking for the price for that? Here you go. Soliciting ideas for





a book on a topic? I've got some recommendations. Having trouble with your blog? Let me point you to an expert I know.

Being generous with what you know and sharing your knowledge and information is priceless on the web. The answer doesn't always have to be your thing/product/service. It's about being a good citizen of the communities in which you participate, and offering up information you have that can be useful to others.

How can I help?

A question instead of a statement, this is one of the most fruitful responses you can offer (just ask Frank Eliason from Comcast). It acknowledges your interest in helping, your availability to assist, and asks the other person to help you by understanding more about their needs. After all, half of talking is about the desire to be heard. And sometimes it can help you get to the bottom of an issue quickly and simply without kicking up a lot of dust.

Yes (or No) and here's why I think so.

Please don't be afraid to have an opinion on the web. Opinions aren't permanent. You can change your mind. But much of the value in participating in online discussions, from Twitter to blogs, is about the ongoing dialogue. If we all band together and deliver one word answers, or follow the flocks in order to not stir the water, we're going to have one dull internet on our hands.

Even if you represent a company, you can have a viewpoint that you share. Share it with respect and courtesy, but it's okay to share your thoughts on a topic. Yes, that means you're open to the feedback and opinions (even dissenting) of others. But humans want, well, humanity in our conversations. Talk to us like people, and let us talk back to you in the same way. We like you when you have ideas and thoughts to share.

