

# SOCIAL AFTER DARK

A guide to helping you decide whether your brand should be active on social after dark

cerebra

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# INTRODUCTION

Social media never sleeps. Regardless of where you are in the world or what time of the day or night it is, if you log into a social network there will be people posting, liking and commenting. Barring the odd network crash, there is no off time.

This always on, always connected society that's developing all around us is presenting some interesting challenges for the brands that are trying to make a place for themselves on the world's favourite networks.

Businesses are not traditionally always on; they have office hours, employees who deserve some home time and age-old processes that operate on the assumption that at some point the lights will be switched off. It was their world, so they could set the rules - like bank managers who locked up at 3pm leaving voicemails stating: "you have phoned outside of offices hours", implying that you're the one who's in the wrong.

The shifting customer expectations created by the always-on world of online are putting strain on traditional businesses, even ones that have made the move to social. As long as 'social' is seen as a function that must serve the business, it will fall under the same rules as the rest of the business, the biggest of which is the concept of office hours.

The aim of this eBook is to take a closer look at the opportunities and threats facing brands that decide to keep their social accounts running after dark, to learn about the changes in the after-hours audience behaviour and detail the real business changes that will be required in order to thrive as a social brand after dark.

# THE AFTER DARK ENVIRONMENT

In order to evaluate whether your brand should be active in social media after dark, you first need to get a sense for what makes social after dark different. The specific dynamics will change based on the culture of the network in different regions around the world, but, holistically speaking, the below observations will help to guide you.

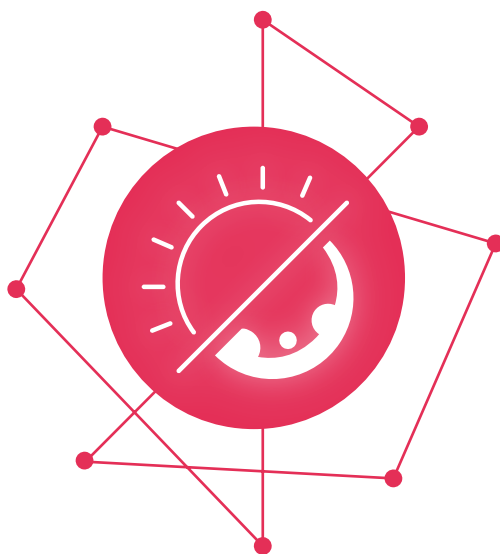
The major social platforms should be able to provide you with more specific demographic information as per your country. Based on the years Cerebra has spent managing brand platforms after hours, we can make the following key observations:

## CHANGING AUDIENCE

Your social media audiences are highly dynamic. You may have a single numerical measure for how many people are within your reach, but the kind of people you are speaking to changes based on the time of day.

To get a sense of the changes, you can speak to a national radio station. Radio producers have long known how to change their content to suit the audiences that are listening at different times of the day. Social media is no different - different groups of people are more active at different times of the day.

Like radio, social media activity is dominated by a younger demographic after dark. This is not to say that other groups aren't present, but the youth are far more active as it gets later. This youthful audience informs the other differences in social after dark.



## CHANGING TOPICS

Regardless of demographic, social after dark is highly geared around television content during the prime TV watching hours. Shows such as X Factor and Idols dominate online conversation.

Many brands have been smart enough to tie in sponsorships to the prime time television shows in order to establish relevance, but the opportunity is available to other brands to engage in these conversations as well.



## FLIRTATIOUS AND SEXY TONE

As it gets later and the television-linked conversation fades, an element of flirtatiousness starts to emerge. The late hour and cover of darkness definitely brings out the more risqué side of the social world.

Brands online at this time are not exempt. Many people in your community will openly flirt with brands, regardless of the topic, aiming to solicit an equally flirtatious response. As brands strive to be more 'human' on social, it isn't surprising that people will want to flirt.

The flirtatious nature of the late night engagements presents an interesting opportunity - and threat - for brands and the social media managers running the accounts at that time. Flirtation, by its very nature, is aimed at soliciting a response and the brand's response needs to be in line with your personality. Community members will flirt, tease and jibe to get a response, and brands who are prepared can thrive in this environment.

## TIME IS ON THEIR SIDE

Another key aspect of social after dark is that people have a lot more time on their hands to spend on their favourite social platforms at this time, making it an incredible opportunity for brands to engage deeply with their community.

Many people actively seek out longer, more detailed engagements with brands that are online at night. You can ask and answer questions, play games, tease, joke and flow through a variety of topics.

Managed and mined correctly, these lengthy conversations can contain incredible intelligence for a brand, and you can drive massive engagement if you get your content and conversation right.

For the community member, the engagement could be a means of passing the time, avoiding loneliness or simply enjoying having more time to get better quality information from your business.

## CHANGE IN LANGUAGE

Another observation about social after dark that is linked to the younger audience is a change in language. The Queen's English is the furthest thing from a priority, and local and social vernacular take over.

This can be a risk for brands. You might not understand the subtleties of something someone says; you could feel that your brand personality is completely out of place, or you could try too hard to fit in and have your conversation backfire.

Not all brands have to fit in with the style of late night conversation but it will help if your defined brand personality has the flexibility to adapt, even slightly, to this change.

## LESS BRAND NOISE

One of the most obvious observations is that most brands pack up shop for the night at 5pm and only show their faces again in the morning. This has two noticeable effects: first, the brands that do stay online after dark get a much bigger share of voice and have a bigger impact than during office hours, and second, the communities that are active at night tend to respond more actively and more positively to brands that are willing to 'hang out'.



# OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

Many brands have a real fear of social media after dark, and for good reason, but it has little to do with social media and lots to do with the brand. While social after dark is a different beast to that of during the day, it definitely isn't something to be scared of. In fact, it presents a number of key opportunities for brands that are willing to overcome the threats.

## SALES AND REVENUE

Your customer's willingness to purchase is not limited to office hours. Being available after dark to promote and assist customers with spending money is a key opportunity for brands.

Again, the business systems will need to be online to support the transaction, but more often than not your customer will be using their evening time to research and discover more info to inform their purchasing decision. If you aren't around when this is happening, then you're less likely to be a purchase consideration.

If you are the only brand that is actually available to answer questions and provide more info, you are very likely to win that business on the spot. The relative 'quietness' of your brands after hours and the greater availability of time means you have the time and space to truly convert social audiences into customers.

## MORE TIME TO SERVE

As simple as it sounds, being available online for longer gives your business more time to be available to your customers and provide them with services. The vast majority of your customers are at their busiest during office hours, which means it's more convenient for them to ask questions, resolve issues and provide feedback after hours when they have more time.

It's often only after hours that your customers have the time and opportunity to engage with you. Logging your brand off at 5pm means you're cutting yourself off from being able to serve your customers at a time that suits them best.

Customer problems don't keep office hours so your support teams shouldn't either. While social after dark is an opportunity to be more available to your customers, more than just your social team needs to be working. Being available to engage on social after hours is a good first step, but it's also necessary to actually be able to serve the customer. This means the business systems also need to be online.

## ISSUE RESOLUTION AND CONTROL

A lot can happen in a short time on social media and with social after dark being a high usage time for many people, things can get out of control very quickly. Few customers care about your office hours and an issue could be raised just after you've sent your social team home for the night.

Un-checked and un-managed issues can quickly escalate out of control and by the time you get to work in the morning an incredible amount of damage could have been done overnight.

Being available and online enables you to quickly pick up on any issues and handle them before they spiral out of control.

If you choose to offer service and issue resolution via social after dark then the business systems also need to be online, otherwise there is a risk that your social team are simply paying lip service to problems instead of actually resolving them.



## DEEPER BRAND PERSONALITY

Social after dark is a different beast to that of during the day (see Key Observations). This change in environment, audience and behaviour creates an opportunity for brands to broaden their personality and create a deeper connection with their communities.

Social after dark is very much an opportunity to loosen the tie, pour yourself a drink and spread your brand wings. You have the audience, time and space to add facets to your brand personality around a range of things not strictly related to the delivery of business.

You must ask deeper questions of your brand personality: what type of humour do we have? Are we flirtatious? What do we care about beyond ourselves?

Being online after dark means you'll need to know these things because your communities will draw you out. They'll want you to be more; to be better with the work tie loosened. Just don't lose the tie completely.





Make sure you have senior community managers who are well trained and well versed in managing the personality and not going too far. The risk of 'going too far' is always present.

## BROADER BRAND RELEVANCE

Brands invest a significant amount of time trying to be more relevant to their target customers, and the after-hours topics present an opportunity for smart brands to get involved in new and interesting conversations, broadening the relevance of the brand in the social space.

The conversations and areas of interest at night are quite different from those of office hours. If your brand wants to participate, you will need to not only have broadened the brand's personality but also its scope of knowledge.

Brands not willing to broaden their scope of interest and knowledge risk being ostracised. What works during the day doesn't always work at night, so brands need to accept that they'll have to start slowly and learn as they go to find out what works and where they may have relevance for an after dark audience.



# PREPARING FOR SOCIAL AFTER DARK

Simply having an active social media presence after dark is not enough. Taking advantage of the opportunities and protecting against the inherent threats require a large amount of preparation within the social media team and within the business at large.

## DEFINE THE STRATEGY

You first need to accurately define the reason, or reasons, for opening your brand up to social media after dark. The preparation and risks are both great enough to require a thorough definition of your strategy, objectives and means of measurement.

Once you know why you should be online after dark, what you're aiming to achieve and how you're going to measure your success, you can start to align the business to the strategy.

## PLAN THE EVOLUTION

It is important to not try and become a successful after-hours brand in a single step. A lot of work and practice needs to go into evolving the brand personality to be an extension of the current personality and something detached from what you are during the day.

You will also need to spend time listening and observing to get a feel for your specific community so that you can understand your role within that community. You will need to get a sense for the style of language and how your brand will manage more in-depth conversations and flirtatious communities.



## PREPARE THE BUSINESS

Of critical importance to avoiding the risks of social after dark is to extend the business services that will be required after dark. If your customers crave technical support after hours, then your technical support teams will also need to be working after dark.

This will be partly defined within your strategy, partly defined by how your community takes to you being online after hours, and partly dependent on the ROI of keeping these resources online after hours. What you must be careful of is pretending to be available by having your social accounts active when your business is still actually closed. If customers can't get product information delivered, queries resolved or sales completed after dark, then your presence will be seen as a masquerade and could back fire.

Your social strategy will need to define escalation plans for after-hours queries and issues to ensure they're as effective as they would be during regular office hours.

## BUILD THE RESOURCES

The next step is to develop the resources required for social after dark. You will need community managers who are able to manage a brand after dark, content producers who are able to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves, customer support staff to resolve queries and a crisis communication channel that can operate at any time.



# BRANDS GETTING IT RIGHT

## UBER

The cab service Uber has a specific Twitter account for each city in which it operates, and, given that the cabs run 24 hours a day, so do the social profiles. Uber actively uses social as a customer service channel, making it critical for them to be available to answer user questions and resolve issues at any time of day.

Uber also intrinsically understands that different times of the day and night represent different reasons for needing to use the cab service, and they adapt their proactive social content to reflect this. Night time cab rides tend to be users going to restaurants and bars and the Uber content matches this.

## VODACOM

A client of Cerebra, Vodacom has been operating social after dark with much success. The first successful facet is related to Vodacom's sponsorship of 'after hours' events such as sports sponsorships and evening television shows. Extending the social platforms into the evenings and weekends opened Vodacom up to new audiences and allowed the brand to engage with customers on topics of shared interest.

Another element that Vodacom gets right is understanding how the audience changes after dark. The brand deliberately adapts the tone, personality and topics of conversation to be more relaxed, playful and youth oriented, with great success. Understanding that the audience changes after dark allows Vodacom to adapt and be relevant to the audiences that are active. This change in approach is still underpinned by the professional customer service channels, which remain open until late at night.

# CONCLUSION

Social never sleeps, but it does change depending on the time of day or night. Radio and television broadcasters realised a long time ago that you need to change your content, presenters and DJs to suit the audience that is active at different times. You can't hope to be relevant if you stay the same while everyone else is changing. As they say in the movies: you have to roll with it.

Our key pieces of advice for brands looking to become active on social after dark are to start by understanding how their audience changes and how they themselves also need to adapt their content, their personality, tone and style. While we always advocate being strategy-led, it's worth noting that it's unlikely you'll be able to nail your personality and tone in a strategy meeting. It will require you opening your channels after hours without much fanfare, having very limited expectations, and being widely open to listening and learning.

As you start getting a sense for how your brand should behave after hours, you'll also be able to start experimenting with content. The hardest part will be getting your business in line to practically meet the objectives you set; from customer service to sales, the process will need to be as seamless as during office hours.

Finally, keep in touch with us to let us know how it goes and what you learn about your business and your audiences. We would love to hear from you.

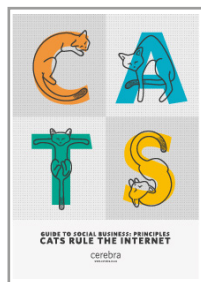
# ABOUT CEREBRA

Cerebra was founded in 2006 as a communication agency helping corporate brands enter the social media space. Since then, Cerebra has grown into Africa's social business authority with a team of incredibly talented, hard-working personalities who share a passion for helping businesses transition from industrial age thinking to information age delivery.

The Cerebra business comprises four key components: Agency, Academy, Insights and Advisory, offering services covering social media marketing, training, research and strategic direction.

For more visit [www.cerebra.co.za](http://www.cerebra.co.za)

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