



In October, [Hootsuite announced the launch of its social media skills academy](#). This will provide online training programmes and formal qualifications, recognised and supported by academic institutions. This builds on research last year that suggested that 20% of marketers in the Asia-Pacific region, and 15% worldwide, were “not very confident” in their digital skills.

The emergence of the social media skills gap

You may be wondering how anyone can possibly need training in social media skills. Surely we're all digital natives now? Most of us use at least one social media platform every day, and some far more.

Well, yes, we may well be in that position. But that doesn't mean that we are a) familiar with every social media platform, or b) able to use social media effectively for work. In the last few years, the way that businesses use social media has changed. Instead of the social media message being controlled by a social media team, it is now a fundamental part of everyone's job to interact with customers via social media. Employee advocacy is huge. And of course, any mistakes are hideously magnified in the social media bubble, raising the stakes for all those involved. It has become clear that there is very definitely [a social media skills gap](#), even among millennials.

Our own research reflects this trend. Skills-building has been a growing priority in our survey for some time, but this is the first year that it has risen to the top. In total, 41% of social strategists chose 'Providing social education and training to build new skills' as their top priority for this year, above developing actionable insights (37%) and developing a content strategy (36%).

Identifying suitable skills

The real question is what training to provide to support social media skills development. You might suggest training on particular platforms, but it is important to ensure that you keep up with the latest developments on each one, including changes in the audience as well as capabilities. That means two things: that your training needs to keep up, and also that you and your employees need to commit to staying abreast of changes.

You might also want to think about writing skills. This is important because many social media platforms require succinct communication, and engagement is improved by effective headlines. Strong written communication skills may not be easy to develop, but are enormously valuable.



We think, however, that [what you say is as important as how and where you say it](#). This is why we coach and support thought leadership development. We believe that getting the content and message right will help you to develop more effective conversations with your customers. It will also, as a side benefit, avoid some potential mistakes and gaffes: if everything that you write is filtered through a thought leadership lens, you are likely to avoid saying anything too 'wrong'.

It's not just the skills

But before launching into buying social media training courses, it may be worth pausing for a moment. Never mind the skills, are you actually using social media effectively in your business?

Social media is a great way to have conversations with your customers, and build relationships directly. But it also a hugely valuable resource for every aspect of your marketing work, from market research and gaining [competitive intelligence](#) through [lead management](#) to [content marketing](#). And internally, social media is also a very good way to increase [employee engagement and therefore develop employee advocacy](#).

An integral part of doing business

In other words, [social media is not an add-on](#). It is, or it should be, an integral part of how you work and engage with others. This should be the case across all aspects of your business, both internally and externally. Which, of course, takes us full circle: back to the social media skills gap, and why it has opened up in so many businesses, despite the millennials, the digital natives, now joining the workforce.

Addressing the social media skills gap therefore, in our opinion, strikes at the heart of how we do business. You cannot reduce that gap without an understanding of the skills you need. And you cannot develop that understanding without fundamentally rethinking what you expect from your employees in terms of how they use social media, and what you, as a business, hope to get out of it.

It is a challenge, but only those businesses that pick up that gauntlet, and see it as an opportunity, not a threat, are likely to survive in the longer term.

Image credit: [Kristopher Roller](#)