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Building and Executing an Effective Social Media Strategy

Executing and having a good social media strategy can be difficult due to the time required to cultivate it. Like everything else, you get what you put into it. But how can you devise a plan that can be effective? First, you have to figure out what you want to get out of it. Then, establish your objectives and goals so you can react when your campaigns are not meeting expectations.



Will your social pages be an informative vehicle for your company or a way to build brand awareness? Do you want to drive traffic to your site, increase sales, create a dialogue or build customer loyalty? These goals aren't mutually exclusive, but you should focus on a couple of them. If you spread yourself too thin, you're not going to be effective. Your execution always needs to be resourceful and well planned.

UNDERSTAND YOUR GOALS

There are [2.31 billion](#) social media users delivering 31% global penetration. According to [Nielsen's Harris Poll Online](#) "82% of Americans say they seek recommendations from a friend or family member before they purchase". This demonstrates how important your social media plan can be. Create personas to help you formulate a plan. If you have more than one ideal customer, create a persona for each. Identify their attitudes, interests and behaviors etc. Remember that every social media site has different types of people on it, so you may want to modify your campaigns slightly. Over time you will gain more information organically that shift your strategies based on your follower's engagement.

Audit

Assess your current social media presence and look at how it's working for you. Review each site and create mission statements for each network. Example "We will use Snapchat to connect to a younger demographic".

TEAM

Develop a cross-functional team to help conceive and operate the strategy. Every business has different structures but if you look carefully you can find support somewhere. Not everyone has a dedicated person or agency support. I have had success utilizing sales, customer service and interns. Ask around you might be surprised who is willing to help your team. There must be clear guidelines for monitoring so staff does not dilute your brand.

COMPETITION

Marketing 101 is to review your competition and see what they are doing. There is no difference here. I would start off by following them. The big question here is do you share your competitor's content? If it is very good content, sharing it will show your followers you are only concerned about providing good content. Your credibility would never be in question. I would be selective what content to share related to your competitors' products or service. I would focus instead on content that looks at industry issues or news. Mentioning your competition in posts is ok too. Most people do not want to sling mud with negative campaigns like they do in politics but you can say your product or service is superior and provide reasons. The [Pepsi Challenge](#) was simply about taste. According to Pepsi, when given a blind taste, more people preferred Pepsi. This is an acceptable strategy and has been an ongoing campaign for Pepsi since 1975.

CHOOSE YOUR CHANNELS

Not all social-media networks are the same. You need to choose the right ones for the products or services you're selling. For example, if you sell products to the culinary world and deal with chefs and restaurants you would not use Tumblr or Flickr because the majority of the industry uses Instagram and Facebook. Do not overlook any relevant channels. Publishing the same content across numerous networks is acceptable but you need to be aware of your audience and tailor it. Follow the best practices for each network. For example, your 140-character tweet with hashtags would not work for LinkedIn where hashtags are not used. Read this article on network usage, "[125+ Essential Social Media Statistics Every Marketer Should Know in 2016](#)".

COMMUNICATIONS

Most business approaches to social media are processed as a destination rather than a vehicle to get somewhere. Try writing your posts in a monologue form like a TV or print ad instead of writing in dialogue form. Phrase your posts so they stimulate conversation. Engagement isn't easy so you have to be creative. Writing in question form can help as well as fun contests, surveys, and specific questions to followers on what they want your organization to be. Invite them to share anecdotes or photos related to your brand. Let your followers know they have value and that their opinion matters. This feedback can be very valuable.

Style

The style of your posts should be informal vs. formal. Most businesses or institutions write professional (formal) and are direct but in the social media world you can alienate your followers and become an entity instead of their neighbor. As in life you want to be approachable and inviting. This is a community you want to build and the mom and pop feel is what people seek.

Be Human

You should humanize your posts and blogs with photos or simple initials of the people making these posts. Do not always make it about your company there are other things in this world you can talk about. For example discussing industry topics can be successful when done right.

Brand

Communicating your brand is a daily requirement but integrating news and current events into your brand can be rewarding. When the opportunity arises use it to your advantage. Do you recall the Ashley Madison website hack. It was a site for connecting cheating spouses. Everyone believed that 1800-flowers posted on their site a special Ashley Madison quote. It went viral because of how funny it was. Sadly, because I think it was great in the end, it was a hoax by pranksters and not [1800-flowers](#). Don't be afraid to give an opinion either. It can help define your brand.

How to deal with bad comments

Try and respond as soon as possible to any comment from a follower, especially the negative ones. Stay polite and calm. You can easily change a negative comment into a positive one if you handle it correctly. Using humor can always help. When dealing with the serious problems speak to them personally. Read this article "[How to Handle Negative Comments on Social Media Like a Pro](#)" for more details.

CREATE A SCHEDULE

How often will you post each day or week? What will you post? The details of your plan will determine this. Create a posting calendar and start filling it out. Here are some basic posting ideas:

- Invest in Visuals
 - Photos are a driving force for all of the social media networks.
 - Info graphics can give you some traffic. If you are not creative try simple statistic graphs.
 - Short videos are very popular method as well.
- Curate everyday and share content. Follow the top influencers.
- Highlight a product or service.
- Good news. Any time something good happens in your company let everyone know.
- Company current events
- Blog articles
- Educational content
- Industry news
- Quotes on industry topics. [Storyzy](#) scans the web daily on whatever news topics you are interested in. [Feedly](#) is a [news aggregator](#) application for web browsers.

Try and link back to your website as much as possible. Review your stats and see what things are more popular and do more of it. This article will help you fill in your calendar. "[120 Social Media Post and Content Ideas](#)"

Posting

- Consider using [Bitly](#) to shorten URL's. It is needed for twitter and it comes with it's own set of statistics you will find helpful.
- Hashtags are important for searches.
- Scheduling posts – There are several apps that can help you. I tend to lean towards [Hootsuite](#).
- Duplicating posts – I would agree certain content is worth duplicating to gain a wider audience but it should be selective. You do not want to be labeled as a spammer. It's common to repost tweets for the early bird and night owl people or spreading it over a course of a couple of months.

INFLUENCERS

If you want a bigger reach, you should identify influencers in your industry that can reach your target audience. Reaching out to good bloggers can increase your chances of gaining traffic. I wouldn't just "cold" email them or "like" their posts. Build a relationship slowly by responding to their blogs and intelligently commenting on them because they read comments. After a while they will know your name. Use [LinkedIn](#), [Klout](#), [Tomoson](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Bloggeries](#), [Klear](#) to find out who are the influencers in your industry. After a while you will gain a better reach and create a buzz around your brand after every post.

STATS

The number of followers, likes, retweets are all great metrics but you should go beyond and judge by advanced metrics such as, leads generated, web referrals, and conversion rate. "[7 Social Media metrics that really Matter and how to Measure them](#)". Break down your stats and let them work for you. Here are the key performance indicators (KPI) to track:

Engagement

- Likes
- Shares
- Comments
- Clicks/Views

Reach

- Followers
- Impressions - How many times your post shows up on someone's newsfeed or timeline. This does not mean someone has looked at your post but that they had the opportunity to see it. It seems vague but the higher the number the likelihood someone will see it.

Loyalty

- Brand mentions

Leads

- Traffic – Inbound traffic to your website.
- Bounce rate – visitor only went to one page on site. This is important because you want to entice your customers to explore. If they are not exploring, you may be missing the mark. It could be your content, target audience, product or service, design of your site.

Conversions

- Sales – This is the prime objective and you need to be honest with yourself. How many of you're followers are buying what you're selling? Drawing traffic to your website with a Call-to-Action (CTA) will allow you to track sales.

These markers are what I would consider the main ones. Once you look at all your analytics, you will see that there are far more statistics that you can watch. What is important to you will evolve.

The best way to tackle your plan is to compartmentalize it and get your team involved. Define your voice, be consistent and stick to your schedule. Cross promote your social media pages so they do not have to look hard to find them. Those of you without a



CRM system it can be more challenging to see what your ROI (Return On Investment) is but there are many free services to extrapolate this data. It just will not be all in one program. See my article on ["Free Marketing Tools to Maximize Your Strategies"](#). Not to be forgotten but supplementing your strategy with paid ads can help round out your plan.

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