The Marketer’s Guide to Social Media Content
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**AT A GLANCE**

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To many marketers, social media is becoming less and less... social. Industry reports declare that social media usage continues to grow, and yet the content marketers post often is not greeted with comments or likes or even notes of disdain, but with something more representative of, well, crickets—that deafening silence that reminds us this isn’t working.

Source: The Content Marketing Paradox

Except that it is working—not for all, but certainly for some, and we’re here to tell you that the difference doesn’t come down to luck. It’s the result of a grounded, strategic approach, which you’ll learn about in this guide. So, if you’re tired of low response rates on social media, then settle in and keep reading because we’re going to show you how to do it right.
Are you posting content your audience is interested in, or are you posting content you want your audience to be interested in? And how do you know for sure? In this chapter, we walk through the research and planning steps that will set the stage for the ongoing development of highly relevant branded content that consistently interests and engages your audience.
STEP 1: PLAN AROUND YOUR AUDIENCE

Understand Audience Preferences

Getting your social media fans and followers to care about what you post starts with understanding who they are, why they’re there, what their expectations are on each platform, and what they like to engage with on those sites. Here’s where to start:

- **Review industry findings.** Primary research will yield the most useful insights, but secondary research conducted by third parties can assist in building a base understanding to facilitate your own research. Here’s a quick overview of some of the latest findings on today’s top social networks to help you get started:

  - **Facebook** remains the social giant with more than 1.44 billion monthly active users from all over the globe and all walks of life—more than half of whom access the network through mobile devices, according to VentureBeat.

  Source: Pew Research Center’s Social Media Update 2016

  It’s also the most frequented social network on a daily basis.

  Source: “The Demographics of Social Media Users”
STEP 1: PLAN AROUND YOUR AUDIENCE

Of course, what’s popular today could easily fall off the charts tomorrow, and the next big thing could already be in the works. Subscribing to industry mailing lists and Google Alerts for related keywords can help you stay abreast of the latest social trends and offerings.

- **Explore the social landscape.** Next, look more closely at how the social web is engaging with respect to your particular niche, product type, and brand, as well as with your competitors’ offerings and marketing campaigns. Scour the web to figure out if conversations are already taking place on these topics and what types of comments and opinions are being shared, which questions are repeatedly asked, what the major concerns are, where the excitement lies, and how these things vary by platform or audience. Pay attention, too, to what’s trending both in your industry and the world at large.

To learn more about social listening, watch Jason Falls provide a quick but thorough overview of the practice in this tutorial: *Hack the Conversation: Discover Insights Through Social Data*

Twitter can be good for social listening, since all user posts are publicly available and can be mined through Twitter’s search functionality or third-party tools such as Social Bearing, but other networks can prove just as valuable. Facebook, for example, updated its search function (Search FYI) to display anything posted publicly to the network that is relevant to the query at hand.

In addition, the Instagram platform allows you to search by location, people, and tags to see which hashtags are trending.

And depending on the audience you’re targeting, you might also try tools such as Reddit metrics to gain insight into hot topics or PinGroupie to see which Pinterest board topics attract the most followers.

Browsing the threads posted in LinkedIn Groups can also reveal a treasure trove of information, particularly regarding common challenges and concerns (i.e., great how-to fodder!), and especially pertaining to B2B brands. Similarly, Q&A platforms such as Quora that are searchable by topic can also serve you well in this regard.

In addition, third-party solutions such as Feedly and Mention can be very useful for understanding opinions and trends across platforms. Another, called Wayin, even helps you organize results by such variables as location, time period, and gender.

You can find many more tools for almost every platform available, so take the time to seek out those that provide meaningful intelligence for your particular brand, product, customers, needs, and goals. Then, as you make your way through each search with your selected tools, be sure to not only note what people are saying or asking but also gauge the sentiment, context, and others’ reactions to those comments and conversations so that you gather a true sense of each interaction.

- **Observe your base.** Now fine-tune your investigation even further to explore the preferences and needs of your existing fans and followers on the various networks where you’ve already established a presence.
A global study by Ogilvy says that consumers follow brands to receive product offers or news (34%), for the entertainment (19%), or to give direct feedback (16%), but what about your fans? What motivates them to follow your brand? Who are they, and which topics or types of information interest them most? To which of your content have they responded well, and which posts generated a less-than-positive response, or no response at all? Also, which topics or formats garner likes versus comments versus clicks versus hide/block activity?

Several social networks provide general analytics on fan/follower demographics and post interactions:

- **Facebook Insights** covers fan demographics, when they’re actively engaging online, how your posts are performing, and more:

For select partners, Facebook also offers **Topic Data**, which may be available more broadly in the future.
Establish Your Content Strategy and Goals Accordingly

Now use the audience insights you’ve gathered to determine how each target platform can be used to best effect, then create a strategy that marries your audience’s preferences and needs with your business goals. For example...

- If you find that they’re connecting with your brand to gain access to exclusive savings, you might aim to build your email subscriber list through those promotions, in addition to driving fans and followers to your site to make a purchase.

- If they’re always on the lookout for helpful information, you might post links to problem-solving posts on your blog in order to boost visitor traffic, or send them to a lead-generation form for downloading in-depth studies and reports. Or, you might concentrate on building your thought leadership by posting unique insights they can’t access elsewhere.

- If they’re mostly in the research stage or represent companies with complex decision-making processes, you might plan out a long series of posts designed to foster understanding, connection, and trust in your product and brand.

- If they simply prefer to be entertained, your goal might focus on generating increased awareness through amusing posts and blatant requests to share that content.

- Similarly, if they connected with your brand as a means of personal expression, you might design your posts to empower your audience when shared so that they’ll be more prone to do so.

Whether you’re looking to raise awareness or obtain email addresses from petition signers, each piece of Facebook content should work toward a specific outcome. Make sure that desired outcomes are also tailored to your audience. Ask: “Is this an action I would take if I were an audience member?”

—Drew Bernard, “Seven Habits of Highly Engaging Facebook Content Creators”

As you build your strategy and cement your goals, focus first on those platforms where your audience is most active and engaged. Perfect your approach on each of those networks before expanding into new or less frequented venues.

The Most Common Social Marketing Goals

Brand awareness tops the list of social marketers’ goals, according to the 2015 Social Marketing Trends Report by TrustRadius:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are the top 3 goals of your social program?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Brand awareness: 71%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drive traffic: 69%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase awareness: 68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boost customer satisfaction: 31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive conversions/conversions: 28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generate leads: 26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase customer loyalty: 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boost satisfaction: 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve competitive positioning: 16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitor market research: 10%</td>
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trustradius
Brands are posting more content to social networks than ever, and that’s on top of the flurry of posts already streaming from family and friends, friends’ friends and families, and so-called acquaintances. With so much content vying for everyone’s attention, it’s essential that your content captures your audience’s hearts as much as their eyes and sticks out in their minds as much as on the page.
For more examples and lots of useful storytelling tips and advice, download “Once Upon a Marketing Message: How to Craft Stories That Sell.”

Gauge Your Emotional Appeal

Use Advanced Marketing Institute’s Headline Analyzer, Atomic Reach’s AtomicAI, and CoSchedule’s Headline Analyzer tools to assess your post’s emotional value in relation to your audience.

To learn about telling customer-centric stories, watch this seminar in which Bobby Lehew explores multiple methods marketers can use to craft a compelling narrative:

From Storytelling to Story-Selling: How to Tell Customer-Centric Stories

- Offer insider access. Because people are curious by nature, because they like to be in the know and privy to insider information, because they want to feel good about the organizations with which they do business, because they crave validation and long to be recognized and rewarded simply for being such loyal customers and followers... let them in behind the scenes. Familiarity breeds connection, so enable them to meet the real people behind the brand and give them a peek into the various things you’re all involved in outside regular work. Allow them to experience your company culture, your real
Social Media Cheat Sheet
Check out the full infographic—and see specs for Pinterest and YouTube: "Social Media Cheat Sheet for Image Sizes"
Now that you’re taking good care of your audience, it’s time to take care of business. Let’s look at how to champion your goals, stimulate action, and optimize your results.
Champion Your Goals

Of course you’re going to want to know whether all this is doing any good, so before you start posting all the wonderful new content you’re developing, take a moment to ensure that your progress toward the goals you established in Step 1 can be effectively measured. This involves the following tasks:

- **Select key metrics.** Figure out which data points will tangibly define success. Leads and sales are self-explanatory, but for other goals, you may need to get more creative. For example, if you’re interested in generating awareness, you might look at impressions/reach, shares, audience engagement, media mentions, or online buzz. If you’re growing your thought leadership, you might instead track requests for interviews and speaking engagements, or numbers of new followers.

- **Establish the baseline.** Note where you currently stand with respect to these figures before initiating your new social media campaigns so that you can easily compare future results and garner a true measure of progress.

- **Drive metric-related results.** Design your posts to deliver on the appropriate metrics and capture the right data. For example, if you want people to share, make that your explicit call to action, and if you want to drive off-platform results, such as website traffic or sales, include a custom link (e.g., using UTM codes or Bitly, etc.) or unique coupon code in each post so that you can tell which messages best support that goal. Here’s another tip: use annotations in your YouTube videos, which are clickable and great for sending—and tracking—traffic to your site.

- **Prep the next step.** Ensure everything connected to the action you’re asking the audience to take is in good order. For example, optimize related landing pages so they effectively greet your audience and motivate them to continue in support of your goal, and at the same time optimize your back-end system to follow those visitors’ activities on your site so that results are properly attributed.

How Effective Is Your Ad Content?

Add a simple customized pixel to your website code to track conversions from Facebook ads. Watch from minutes 11:30 to 14:10 as Andy Crestodina goes through the step-by-step process to add the Facebook pixel:

**Advanced Google Analytics: Tricks for Goals, Events, and Tracking Codes**

Likes and clicks are feel-good metrics that we certainly are pleased to see, but they can deceive us into thinking we’re making more progress than we actually are. By following these steps and making the proper preparations in advance, you’ll know exactly how far you’ve come and which of your moves have been the most advantageous for your organization.

Always Include a CTA

Connect every post to the bigger picture, and equip it to pull its weight by incorporating a clear call to action (CTA).
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