



# A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO A SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL MEDIA PROGRAM

Everything you need to know about establishing your strategy, policy, and



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### INTRODUCTION

Social media is no longer optional for companies that wish to remain competitive and keep their reputations intact. At the very least, they must monitor and respond to the brand conversations that may be already taking place online, with or without their involvement.

For those who participate more broadly, social media offers a revolutionary means for connecting with customers, sales prospects, media, partners, coworkers and recruits; managing brand reputation and influencing public perceptions; competing with the "big guns" and establishing thought leadership; augmenting traditional marketing campaigns; and improving SEO.

But you already knew all that. Problem is, you also hear about companies who say they spend tons of time on social media marketing and aren't seeing anything in return. And who can afford to be one of those, right?

We hear you, and we're here to help. In this 14-step guide, you'll learn best-practices for garnering buy-in, determining strategy, developing a corporate policy, preparing your workforce, creating a strong presence for your brand, keeping fans and followers engaged, and handling any bumps along the way.

### STEP 1: LISTEN AND LEARN

Begin by understanding what's already going on in social media, including what's being said about your company.

Also look at how your competitors are participating in these spaces, and where and how your target audience engages online.

#### What's being posted about your company?

Search online for your company, brand, product, and executive names and use the listening tools listed in the toolbox on the right to hone in on what people are saying and where they're saying it.

Note the following:

- Where are these questions and comments being posted?
- Are they are positive, negative, or neutral?
- Who's posting them (e.g., customers, partners, media, general public, trolls)?
- Are posts by customers more experience-related (e.g., reviews, complaints) or support-related?
- Which topics and sentiments repeatedly pop up?
- How are others responding to these comments?
- Is this information being shared by others? And, if so, by whom, how, where, and with whom?
- What's the general sentiment toward your company, brand, and products?
- Any impact on your business?

## The tool box

Try these listening and analysis tools, in addition to searching the Web and surveying customers:

- Google Alerts emails you when a chosen keyword (e.g., company or product name, CEO name, campaign tagline, industry term) is mentioned in any form of online content.
- Google Blog Search scans the blogosphere for any keyword or phrase you input.
- <u>Twitter Search</u> scans publicly posted tweets for your selected keyword or phrase.
- <u>Monitter</u> searches Twitter in real time for designated keywords.
- <u>SocialMention</u> enables you to search keywords and phrases by specific channel category (blogs, images, news, video, etc.), or as a whole, and to receive email alerts when a new mention is posted.
- <u>Beevolve</u> offers a comprehensive monitoring and insights platform.
- Addict-o-matic offers a customizable keywordtracking interface.
- Technorati is a blog-focused search engine.
- <u>Complaints Board</u> maintains a directory of user-submitted complaints against brands.
- <u>Collective Intellect</u> analyzes consumer conversations in real time.
- Radian6 offers a comprehensive listening, analysis, and reporting platform.

### What are your competitors up to?

Perform similar searches on competitors to see how their brands, products, and executives are discussed and perceived online.

#### STEP 1: LISTEN AND LEARN

Also pay a visit to competitors' blogs and social media profiles and study their usage and approach. Note the following:

- How they present themselves: How do their profiles look? What types of company information do they offer? What tone, wording, and imagery do they use?
- Who their fans and followers are: Are they customers, employees, partners, or the general public? Are these the same users you are hoping to engage?
- How they interact with those users: How often do they post new content and updates? Which topics do they cover? Which formats do they use? Do they initiate and participate in conversations with their audiences? Do they run contests or polls? Do they integrate video or other interactive media? What calls to action do they use?
- How their users respond: How many comments or other interactions have been posted and shared by their fans? What are the comments about? To what extent is their fan base growing?

## How does your target audience engage with social media?

Segment your target audience as appropriate and answer the following questions about each group:

- Where do they hang out and participate online?
- Which activities do they commonly engage in on those sites?
- What topics and issues do they commonly discuss and share online?
- What terminology and tone do they use?
- What types of content do they prefer?

- What are their favorite blogs?
- Which brand profiles do they follow and "Like"?
- With which types of branded information, content, and activities do they most often engage?
- What are their expectations and preferences in terms of engaging with brands in social media?
- Who influences them in social media? And whom do they influence?
- Which technologies do they use to access and engage on social media? (Consider mobile vs. desktop devices, apps vs. direct platform usage, etc.)

### STEP 2: PERFORM A SWOT ANALYSIS

Before deciding how you will approach social media, figure out what you have going for you, what you stand to gain and lose, and what needs to be added or improved if your company is to put its best foot forward.

Meet with company stakeholders (including members of senior management, Marketing, Public Relations, IT, Human Resources, and Legal, as well as any social media enthusiasts within the organization) to gather input and understand the key priorities and concerns of the entire organization.

Together, discuss your findings from Step 1, and assess and answer the following four questions.

## 1. What are the biggest opportunities for your organization?

Consider how social media can effectively assist key business goals and objectives, including the following:

- Building competitive advantage
- Generating broader awareness
- Optimizing customer service and support
- Improving public relations, consumer sentiment, and customer relationships
- Spurring advocacy, referrals, and word-of-mouth
- Engaging industry influencers
- Establishing the company as a thought leader
- Bolstering brand reputation and crisis management
- Increasing website traffic
- Boosting natural search engine rankings
- Reducing costs associated with customer service, internal collaboration, marketing, and company communications
- Creating interest around products and services
- Cultivating leads and sales
- · Enhancing research and development
- · Stimulating employee morale
- · Attracting new talent

## Survey says...

Business executives surveyed by FedEx say social media is most effective for the following:

- Building awareness for products/services
- Gathering feedback from customers
- Providing customer service
- Engaging customers on a deeper level
- Enhancing brand reputation and affinity
- Strengthening relationships with the general public, customers, and partners and suppliers
- · Helping employees be more effective

Source: The 2012 FedEx/Ketchum Social Media
Benchmarking Study

## 2. What are the major threats and concerns, and how might those be alleviated?

Lay out all the risks of both participating and not participating in social media channels, then determine whether certain measures can be taken to mitigate those issues. For example, take a look at these common concerns:

- Jeopardizing the company's reputation—which
  can be curbed internally via social media policy and
  training. Note that the best way to externally manage and preserve the company's online reputation is
  to get involved in social media, respond directly to
  negative comments in the public eye, and establish
  trust via profiles, content, and conversations that
  humanize the company, demonstrate your expertise,
  and emphasize your commitment to customer care.
- Company confidentiality—which may be maintained by implementing a clear social media policy, educating staff on proper procedure, and instituting an approval process for blog and social media posts.

#### STEP 2: PERFORM A SWOT ANALYSIS

- Security risks such as viruses and malware—which
  may be controlled using firewalls and updated
  antivirus software.
- Impact on employee productivity—which may be managed via policy implementation, managerial oversight, or restricted access to certain sites (via Web-filtering, etc.) Note, however, that separate studies conducted by Amplitude Research, McKinsey Global Institute, and The University of Melbourne each found that social media can increase staff productivity.

## Want more advice?

Check out <u>7 Steps to Take Your Brand Social</u> ... and Still Be in Control

### 3. Where do your strengths lie?

Take inventory of the assets, skills, and strengths that reside within your walls and ranks, and think about how those may be used to best effect. Consider whether certain social activities or platforms are better aligned with your competencies, systems, and goals.

#### 4. Any weaknesses that need to be addressed?

Assess how prepared your organization is to enter and consistently maintain a strong presence on social media channels. For example, consider the following:

- How much support do you have for this program? Is there a need to build consensus internally?
- Does your company employ the right talents and resources to launch into social media and remain active over time? What needs to be brought in, added to, or improved?

- How comfortable are executives and staff members in publicly participating?
- Are there quality or reputation issues that should be remedied first?

Abandoning your social media efforts midstream puts the company's reputation at risk; so, if you plan to do more than simply respond to brand mentions, make sure you have what it takes to effectively manage, fund, support, and improve your program over the long haul.

# What?! Social media marketing isn't free!?

Social media itself is cheap, but don't forget supporting costs, including these:

- Dedication of staff time and other company resources to establish and maintain your social media program
- Time and resources related to policy-making and employee education and training
- Promotional expenses for establishing your social media presence, attracting a following, and keeping fans engaged

Compare those to what the company stands to gain by incorporating social media into everyday tasks. For example, social media can help lower the costs of the following:

- Marketing and promotion
- Customer service and support
- Market research
- Customer retention and loyalty programs
- Employee communications and team interaction
- Recruitment

### STEP 3: SECURE INTERNAL BUY-IN

Use your SWOT analysis to demonstrate to any naysayers that at least some social media involvement is necessary—that real opportunity exists and the risks are manageable.

Key arguments you can use may include the following:

Social media has already put the company's reputation at risk, and social media involvement—supported by a good strategy, a strong policy, staff training, and crisis-management planning—is the best way to respond to and hedge against those dangers.

**Tip:** Share what's already being said about your company online and draw on examples of brands the reputations of which have been marred by a failure to quickly and appropriately respond to public complaints.

 Social media is mainstream, and customers and prospects expect companies to make themselves available via social media channels.

**Tip:** Use your research to illustrate how ingrained social media is in your customers', prospects', partners', and competitors' day-to-day lives.

## Want more advice?

Check out these MarketingProfs seminars:

- Selling Social to the C-Suite
- A Seven-Step Scientific Method for Selling Social Media to Skeptics

## Survey says...

 Social networks and blogs dominate Americans' time spent online.

Source: Nielsen

• Consumers expect social media engagement from the companies with which they deal.

Source: The 13th quarterly Allstate-National Journal Heartland Monitor Poll (PDF)

• Close to 90% of US companies will market via social media in 2012.

Source: eMarketer

59% of senior marketers believe that companies that do not fully embrace social media will not survive; 71% say companies can gain competitive advantage using social media; and 60% believe social media enables businesses to be more successful.

Source: Forrester Consulting and Facebook (PDF)

Social media can deliver real returns.

**Tip:** Dive into the opportunities you've outlined, and use industry reports and case studies (particularly those about competitors or like businesses) to substantiate your claims. Also explain how social media can be measured in support of key business goals (more about this in Step 4).

Be sure to use terms that your audience understands and examples to which they can relate.



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—PRO member Christine Whittemore

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### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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