

4 Steps to Developing a Successful Social Media Program



Develop a Social Media Program in 4 Steps
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Introduction

Building a social media program is an exciting opportunity. It's an opportunity to dramatically change the way you connect with customers and other constituents - a chance to tap into conversations, learn more about how your brand is perceived, promote your product or service in new ways, and ultimately grow your business. Often the things you learn in your social media program can inform your more traditional marketing efforts as well, as you engage directly with your audience and learn more about what makes them tick.

But there's a lot of work that needs to be done before jumping into a full-scale social media program. These steps are often overlooked by companies beginning these programs, but they are key to the success of your efforts.

Properly preparing as social media strategy that includes goals and measurement will ensure you get the most out of your program.

"Executives need to understand that social media isn't a trivial plaything to be used on a whim. They need strategy as well as tactics, and the tools and sophisticated business processes to control them."

- Erik Sherman, CBS Business

In short, building a social media program should not be taken lightly! Social media – while trendy – is also a fully mainstream communications tool, and its power it shouldn't be ignored.

Taking a simple four-step process to prepare for the launch of a successful social media program can ensure that you're set up to interact in social media venues before you get started. This process includes:

- Identifying your goals
- Finding your audience
- Setting your key performance indicators
- Scheduling and resource management

This step-by-step exercise in program-building gives you a chance to focus your efforts. The social media world is changing rapidly, so this helps narrow the scope of how you plan to interact and build your program.

It will also set up your criteria for success in advance by creating a set of metrics before you jump into the fray. This will take a lot of the uncertainty out of your social media program, and will also allow you to know when you are doing things right, and when adjustments need to be made.

Step 1: Identifying your goals

At first glance it might seem unnecessary to set goals for a social media program specifically – there’s a tendency to think that the goals for social media are the same as the overall marketing program. But because of the many different ways social media can be used, it is important to identify specific goals for these efforts.

Here are some examples:

- To reach new customers
- To interact with existing customers to build brand loyalty and encourage them to recommend your product/service
- To provide customer service
- To capture leads
- To increase sales
- To establish yourself as a thought-leader in your industry
- To recruit new employees



Each of your goals will help you to choose which social media platforms and audiences are the best fit for your efforts, and will allow you to set realistic and measurable metrics for the program.

Be sure to also be realistic in terms of how much time and staff you’ll be able to commit to your social media program. Far too often, companies try to do everything at the start and are quickly overwhelmed with how much time is required to keep up the effort. If your company is trying a social media program for the first time and you have limited resources, starting with one or two key goals, measuring the effectiveness of your efforts, and then increasing your commitment once the initial program is established will be a more measured and ultimately more successful approach.

Step 2: Finding your audience

Finding your audience is key to a social media program. Each social channel has different types of audiences, and each one is used in different ways for different purposes.

For example, if you’re looking to build a group of brand supporters, Facebook could be the best choice. If you’re looking to reach potential customers who have never heard of you, or to become a thought leader in a particular industry, Twitter might be the better option. If you’re hoping to use social media for something like recruiting, a combination of Twitter and LinkedIn could be your best bet.

You’ll have to do some research upfront. There are some great ways to begin looking into where your key audiences are interacting and how.



“If you don’t naturally know where people are hanging out, don’t panic. It just means you’ll need to do some research to start. Head to Twitter and search for your brand name, your competitors’ names, your keywords, industry, etc. Decide if there’s enough conversation to warrant engagement. Head to Facebook and see if there are any Fan pages dedicated to your company or industry. If there aren’t, are there a lot of people who list it as an interest and who may be interested in joining a community on that topic? Go to Yahoo Answers and see if people are asking or answering questions. If your community is Internet-literate, they’re talking somewhere. You don’t have to invent the neighborhood, you just have to track it down and move in.” – Lisa Barone, Outspoken Media

Once you’ve set your goals, you can start researching and determining the best social channels, tools and services to meet the needs of your program.

Step 3: Setting your KPI's

Once you've set the goals for your social channels and established your key audiences and the platforms they interact on, you can start setting the metrics and benchmarks.

To give you an idea of how goals, audience, and social channels all work together and can be used to set your metrics, take a look at the following example:

You've decided to launch a social media program focused on building your reputation as a thought leader in a particular industry.

You've chosen to focus on an audience of C-level and management-level decision makers in your industry.

You've determined that running a regular blogging program alongside a Twitter campaign and a LinkedIn network-building program will be the best way to reach this goal.

"It depends what you're trying to do. If you're looking for more donors, then I don't think 1 million views of a video translates well into donors. If you're looking for more exposure for some product, then maybe it doesn't matter how many leads you get, if you're hoping just to get seen. So, don't consider this all law. Just consider it another way to view thoughts on metrics and which ones work and don't for you."

- Chris Brogan, chrisbrogan.com

To set metrics under this circumstance, start by looking at some of the things that can be measured on each platform:

- Blog traffic
- Twitter followers
- Retweets of your content
- Interactions on Twitter
- LinkedIn group members
- Blog comments
- Independent shares of your content
- Trackbacks to your blog

Now we can set some goals. These will depend on your organization. If you're a more established brand, you'll likely gain a quick following. If your company is new or relatively niche, it might take longer to build your base.

While there are a lot of metrics that can be measured, remember that this is a benchmark. You'll need to customize your goals and measurement tools depending on what you want to get out of your social media program.

Step 4: Scheduling and resource management

Let's get started! This stage is about setting timelines and determining how you're going to staff and support your ongoing social media program.

There are some important things to think about when formulating a plan. Not all of these are relevant to every organization, but these are some of the core things to consider when formulating your plan:

Time

- Writing (blogging, Twitter updates, Facebook updates, interacting in user-groups)
- Research (finding topics to write about, links to share, people to follow or invite to your group, or new tools to use)
- Maintenance (responding to comments, reaching out to people who are talking about your brand or industry, monitoring your communities on a daily basis, etc.)



Staff

- Dedicated staff member vs. group effort
- Will staff be doing this on top of existing responsibilities
- Training
- Ongoing professional development to keep up with trends
- Who is going to be the voice behind your social media effort, how will you ensure that it's an authentic voice, and who makes the decisions on how to handle any negative comments or major opportunities that arise

Timeline

- Planned monthly tasks
- Quantity of content creation and updates per week or month
- Phased rollout of new social media presences
- All based on the time/staff decisions made above

These options will naturally lead to other questions to consider that will address any specific challenges or opportunities your organization may see when implementing its social media program. In the end, this planning process will prepare you to embark on the next phase: tactical implementation. We'll address this part of the process and what's involved in actually getting started on your social media program in our next e-book, so stay tuned. For now, get started on the planning process, and check out our other content to help you get on your way.

The Awareness Social Marketing Hub

The Awareness Social Marketing Hub helps marketers publish, manage, and measure their marketing across key social media channels, and helps marketers engage with users around that content. The Hub has support for the most important social marketing channels in use by enterprises today, including Foursquare, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and branded online communities.

The Awareness Social Marketing Hub offers some groundbreaking benefits to enterprises that are looking to get serious about social media marketing. Benefits include:

- Control your social media publishing with enterprise-grade permissioning, workflow, and audit controls
- Centralize your social media strategy and execution to coordinate product, business unit and corporate messages
- Use social media to engage throughout the entire customer life-cycle
- Engage and interact directly with the people who are talking about your social marketing campaigns
- Measure success across social media channels

For more information see <http://www.awarenessnetworks.com/why-the-hub>



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About Awareness

Awareness builds social marketing management software for marketers leveraging multiple social channels to engage with customers, build their brand, and increase revenues. Built upon Awareness' deep expertise powering the social media strategies of over 200 brands including Sony, British Telecom, Comcast Sports Group, Fairmont Hotels CurrentTV, Kodak and AIRMiles, the Awareness Social Marketing Hub helps marketers publish, manage, and measure their marketing activities across key social media channels, and engage with users around that content. The Hub has support for the most important social marketing channels in use by marketers today, including foursquare, WordPress, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and branded online communities. For more information and to request a demo, please visit: <http://www.awarenessnetworks.com>