

10 steps to a successful social media marketing strategy

By Jeff Bullas

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To easily create a social media marketing strategy for your business, follow these key steps:

Step 1: Establish a clear and focused vision.

If your business doesn't have a vision statement, it's time to retire to the boardroom and give the whiteboard a workout. A vision statement is an inspirational sentence or two that will keep the company focused in uncertain or difficult times.

Nike isn't one of the top sports apparel brands in the world because it has fuzzy thinking. Nike's vision is short and inspirational:

To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world. If you have a body, you are an athlete.

Focus, motivation and momentum come when you are clear about where you are going.

Step 2: Get support from management.

The CEO and management team need to believe in the social media marketing strategy. It's harder to achieve success when the right people aren't on board.

Here's how to get the necessary people on your side:

1. Start with the profits and losses. Convince senior executives that social media will drive more inquiries, leads and sales. In other words, provide evidence that resonates with "show us the money!"

2. Have customers participate in a pilot. It can be as simple as a customer review, blog comment, or content that increases customer engagement. Up to 80 percent of customers look for a review when they visit a website, so customer reviews can potentially bring in new customers.

3. Encourage employees to participate. How do you encourage people to trust you as you change the company to a social business? Involve and engage them. One way to do this is to apply what is known as the IKEA Effect: "Labor undertaken in association with a project—similar to assembly of Ikea furniture—increases people's affection for the result of that labor."

4. Tell stories. This final step gives your employees a pulpit and voice to share how they're transforming the company into a social business.

Step 3: Perform research.

Research your industry to identify opportunities to position your company. This research could include:

- What are the trends in your industry?
- What are your competitors doing?
- What are the key segments in your target market, and which do you want to pursue?

- What could you do better than your competitors? (This will help you determine what makes your company unique.)

Step 4: Define your goals.

It is important to know what you want to achieve.

Do you want to improve brand recognition, increase sales, or drive more traffic to your website? Which goals are the most important?

Step 5: Design tactics to achieve your goals.

Once you determine your goals, create the tactics you need to achieve them. These are a few possibilities:

- Drive traffic to a landing page that captures email addresses and basic customer information.
- Increase Facebook likes. Put your brand and content in front of more people through Facebook's news feed and ticker.
- Publish content on your blog and promote through Facebook, Twitter and SlideShare to position your brand as the expert.

There are many different tactics out there. The tactics you choose depend on your resources and budget.

Step 6: Determine the cost.

This is when you determine where you will spend your money and which tactics you can actually use. Some tactics will be expensive, and others will be free and easy to accomplish. Give each goal a priority and tackle it in terms of its importance.

Step 7: Gather your resources.

You need the right resources to put your tactics into action. Necessary resources could include:

- Money. This doesn't require much of an explanation.
- People. It can be a challenge to find skilled workers, but if someone doesn't have all the skills you're looking for, hire him for his passion and attitude. He can be full-time, part-time or a contractor.
- Tools. This includes tools that are both free and paid. A WordPress template can be about \$45. If you require an in-depth social media analytics tool such as Radian 6, you may pay about \$500 a month.

Step 8: Plan and create content.

Your content should communicate and engage with your audience. If you aim to become a resource for your industry, in-depth articles, videos and eBooks are a must. Blog articles, Facebook updates, polls, surveys and competitions are other good forms of content.

Remember that in our multimedia world, content needs to be in a variety of formats—not just text. Consider posting videos, images, PowerPoint presentations or podcasts.

Step 9: Promote your content.

Creating content is just the start. You must continuously and consistently market it.

Make it a priority to build your Twitter and Facebook following so you have a ready-made audience when you launch your blog.

If you are a B2B company, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn are good places to start promoting. If you target the consumer market, consider Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Organic social media marketing can take time, so it can be a good idea to use paid social media marketing on Facebook or LinkedIn to accelerate your marketing campaign. This may include Google Adwords to help your online visibility until your organic search engine optimization efforts start to produce results.

It's also important to optimize your blog and social media content for search and sharing.

In terms of search, write articles with keywords and phrases that customers use when they Google you. Also, if you publish images on Flickr, videos on YouTube, or presentations on SlideShare, make sure to write headlines, include descriptions, and enter tags (keywords).

And, be sure to have social media sharing buttons wherever you have content. You want people to share your content. Don't make it hard for them!

Step 10: Measure and monitor results.

You won't get your marketing right every time, so you need to measure and monitor your results. You can use tools such as Google Analytics and Facebook Insights to measure and make sure you are moving towards your goals.

Make changes to what is not working and keep doing the activities that produce results.

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