

# The ABCs (and Ds) of Social Media Marketing

## *Building blocks for a successful social media plan*

---

As the popularity of social media has grown over the past few years, so has the prevalence of social marketing efforts. But because social media has emerged and evolved so quickly, many organizations are unsure how to fully leverage the tool to improve marketing and communications efforts.

For many, getting started is the most challenging issue. If you're currently taking a wait-and-see approach, you're not alone. The marketing departments that have taken the plunge into social media are also facing daunting tasks. They're wondering about measurement, integration, and best practices.<sup>1</sup>

While unanswered questions haven't necessarily stopped organizations from jumping on social media outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and blogs, uncertainty about effective strategy remains. A recent study indicated that a majority of organizations surveyed had little confidence in their social media strategies.<sup>2</sup>

### **WHY SOCIAL MEDIA IS A GOOD IDEA**

Organizations are engaging in social media marketing for numerous reasons. Whether it's used for branding, public relations, lead generation, or actual sales, social media can be an effective tool.

Social media's overarching benefit lies within its ability to interactively engage audiences on a scale that previously did not exist. The unique marketer-customer relationships fostered via these conversations, as well as the ensuing customer-to-customer conversations, is what many believe to be the ultimate benefit of social media.

The bottom line: People are talking about your organization whether you are participating in social media or not. If you want to join the conversation, you need to get on board.

*"The question is no longer should we be doing social media, it's are we doing it right?"<sup>3</sup>*

**The four building blocks to developing your social media strategy are:**

**A = Assess**

**B = Be Strategic**

**C = Commence**

**D = Determine Success**

## DOING SOCIAL MEDIA RIGHT

As with traditional marketing, there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to social media marketing. However, the same strategy that creates a strong foundation for traditional marketing will help guide your organization to social media success as well.

### **A = Assess**

The first step is to conduct assessments of your organization and your audience.

#### *Assessing your organization*

Begin by taking a close look at your organization. Depending on your given situation, this may include asking the following questions of yourself, your boss, and/or the ultimate decision makers:

*Am I (Is my organization) willing to . . .*

*Give up some control?*

*Invest the time/human capital?*

*Respond swiftly?*

*Stick to it?*

*Not hard-sell?*

*Be genuine?*

*Be transparent?*

*Address negativity?*

If the answer to any of these questions is no, you may be limiting your potential success (best case) or risking the alienation of your audience (worst case). The primary reason: Social media is about relationships. Being transparent and genuine are not only key elements of successful human interaction, but they reflect inherent expectations in the social media world. To be otherwise may lead to backlash that could be very difficult to overcome.

A good way to approach social conversations is the same way you would interact with someone in person. But being real (honest and human) may be even more important in social media because feedback—both positive and negative—travels much quicker and to more people than it does via word of mouth.

#### *Assessing your audience*

The next step in the organizational assessment is to establish your focus. Begin by examining your relevance. (In other words, why should your audience care about what you have to say?) To do so, you'll want to consider "What's in it for me?" from the audience's perspective. This will allow you to effectively develop conversations and relationships in social media forums.

## Ways to Hear the Conversation

You can find out what's being said about your company or brand through numerous free or low-cost social media tools such as:

**Google Alerts**

[google.com/alerts](http://google.com/alerts)

**Google Reader**

[google.com/reader](http://google.com/reader)

**Socialmention**

[socialmention.com](http://socialmention.com)

**Twazzup**

[twazzup.com](http://twazzup.com)

**Yacktrack**

[yacktrack.com](http://yacktrack.com)

Before you determine what you're going to say and where you're going to say it, you'll want to listen to your audience. It's important to not only listen to *what* is being said but also *how* and *where*. This will help you identify both the content and the tone of your conversations.

Online publications such as Mashable and Social Media Examiner offer great insights on the latest tools to help you listen to, filter through, and manage content. After listening and observing, you can better define your audience in terms of who they are, what's important to them, and how they interact with social media.

### B = Be Strategic

The next step to developing a social marketing plan is to define goals, establish roles, allocate time, and select the proper venues and tactics.

#### Defining goals

To evaluate success, make your goals tangible and simple. Also, having finite versus infinite goals helps you measure your success and determine future time investment.

Examples of measurable goals include:

- Gaining 50 Facebook likes in the first 2 weeks.
- Increasing traffic to blog by 20 percent within 3 months.
- Securing 10 new attendees for a specific event via a LinkedIn posting.
- Obtaining 10 Twitter followers within 2 weeks of launch.

#### Establishing roles

If you're reading this, you're likely the person who will be doing most of the work. However, involving other employees in the process can enhance the effectiveness of your social media efforts. Some organizations have a social media committee to help determine content, assist with writing posts, and administer the project. The key is to share the strategy with your team and establish a hierarchy of approval for content.

The topic of employee participation may reveal issues with your organization's social media policy—or lack thereof. Many organizations struggle with creating a policy, which can delay or even eliminate all plans for social media marketing efforts. Before diving into the world of social media, you'll want to take some time to consider updating or creating your organization's policy. The following sources can help:

- "Social Media Policy," 123 Social Media<sup>4</sup>
- "Social Media Employee Policy Examples From Over 100 Organizations," Social Media Today<sup>5</sup>
- "10 Must-Haves for Your Social Media Policy," Mashable<sup>6</sup>

### *Allocating time*

While social media may not require a lot of financial resources, it can be time-consuming. Most marketing directors are already wearing a lot of hats, so it's important to specify how much time you can and should dedicate to social media. By being consistent with your time, you'll ultimately be able to assess your return on investment in terms of human capital.

If others are involved in the process, be sure to allocate a specific amount of time for them as well. This will not only help you manage the process, but it will help them justify their social media use on company time.

### *Selecting tactics and venues*

Once you've listened to and observed your audience and you understand their use of social media, you can select the best tactics and venues to engage them. Blogs, RSS feeds, podcasts, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube are among the most popular, but there may be local or niche venues to consider as well. Ultimately, it's about being where your audience is.

Rather than flooding the spectrum of options, it's best to start with one or two tactics that you can later build upon after assessing feedback and results. Remember, the cost of entry may be minimal, but there are still only 24 hours in a day. Be selective with your tactics, take the time to do them well, and grow from there.

## **C = Commence**

Next, you should put your plan into action. The three steps include creation of content, evaluation, and management of your process.

### *Creating content*

Social media content can vary in many ways. It can be a poll, a blog, a Facebook post, a tweet, a video, and so forth. In addition, content doesn't always have to be initiated by you—it can take the form of a comment or question, a retweet, or a liking of someone else's post. With every contribution you make, whether it be original content or not, you become more deeply entrenched in the conversation.

When it comes to developing content, what you say and how you say it can shape the conversation—and ultimately relationships. So remember to always remain relevant to your audience.

### *Evaluating*

As noted earlier, if you apply the basic communication principles that you would in face-to-face conversations, you'll be on the right track. But remember, it's easy—if not natural—to slip into sales mode or get defensive in a given conversation. So be sure to regularly evaluate your content.

## **Developing Social Media Content**

### **DO**

- *Listen first*
- *Be genuine and authentic*
- *Be helpful and relevant*
- *Be human*

### **DON'T**

- *Oversell your brand or product*
- *Spam your audience*
- *Take on too much at once*
- *Forget that it's a two-way conversation*

A helpful way to assess your content is to continually ask yourself the following:

*Am I being relevant?*

*Am I being real?*

*Am I sharing rather than selling?*

*Am I being inviting rather than invading?*

*Am I listening rather than lecturing?*

You should periodically pause and assess your content. It may seem like an unnecessary step after a while, but doing so can help enhance your customer relationships—something that is well worth the effort.

### *Managing*

Doing social media well means committing to an ongoing, constantly evolving dialogue that's in constant need of nurturing. You certainly can't ignore it.

In the past, marketers could place an ad, a billboard, or a radio spot, and customers would either buy or not buy. But today's consumers are continuously plugged in to your brand. They expect immediate feedback, and unsolicited comments are the norm. If you're not there to respond, then you have either missed an opportunity to enhance the relationship or have potentially weakened your position.

This makes managing your process essential. Begin by dedicating a specific amount of time to social media, making sure to include time to create content and respond to feedback. Over time, you'll find the right tools and get in a groove with a process that works best for you.

### **D = Determine Success**

Even though you will be continually assessing your content, you should take a step back and evaluate your overall success once in a while. If you have identified tangible goals that have a finite time period, measuring results will be much easier.

During your evaluations, ask yourself these questions:

*Did we accomplish our goals?*

*What did I learn?*

*What would I do differently?*

*What was our ROI? (human capital vs. results obtained)*

Answers to these questions will help guide you in the next phase of your project. Of course, this is a fluid process and the dialogues you have already initiated may still be evolving. So consider the feedback you've received up to this point and where the conversations currently are as you move forward.

## **Social Media Management Tools**

The following online tools can help you stay on top of your social media marketing:

**iGoogle**

[google.com/ig](http://google.com/ig)

**My Yahoo!**

[my.yahoo.com](http://my.yahoo.com)

**Netvibes**

[netvibes.com](http://netvibes.com)

**Hootsuite**

[hootsuite.com](http://hootsuite.com)

There are several online tools available to help with this process, including media outlets that offer analytics and tools available such as Omniture and Google Analytics. The depth of information available is vast, so you should be able to find tools that work best for your specific needs.

## CONCLUSION

Innovation and increased participation is changing the landscape of social media on a daily basis. But by establishing a strategy based on a solid foundation of core elements—assessing your organization and audience, setting strategic goals and tactics, producing relevant content, and evaluating your results—you'll have a road map for success.

### Additional Resources

To learn more about social media, please refer to the following online resources:

[blog.hubspot.com](http://blog.hubspot.com)

[mashable.com/how-to](http://mashable.com/how-to)

[facebook.com/marketing](http://facebook.com/marketing)

[business.twitter.com](http://business.twitter.com)

[blogger.com/start](http://blogger.com/start)

[learn.linkedin.com](http://learn.linkedin.com)

[linkedintelligence.com](http://linkedintelligence.com)

To find out how Snitily Carr can help with your social media strategy, contact us at 402.489.2121 or [info@snitilycarr.com](mailto:info@snitilycarr.com).

1. Michael A. Stelzner, "Social Media Marketing Report: How Marketers Are Using Social Media to Grow Their Business," Social Media Examiner, April 2011, <<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/social-media-marketing-industry-report-2011>>.
2. *The State of Social Media for Business*, SmartBrief Inc. and Summus Limited, 2010.
3. Erik Qualman, *Socialnomics: How Social Media Transforms the Way We Live and Do Business*, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, 2009.
4. "Social Media Policy," 123 Social Media, <<http://123socialmedia.com/social-media-policy>>.
5. "Social Media Employee Policy Examples From Over 100 Organizations," Social Media Today, <<http://socialmediatoday.com/ralphaglia/141903/social-media-employee-policy-examples-over-100-companies-and-organizations>>.
6. "10 Must-Haves for Your Social Media Policy," Mashable, <<http://mashable.com/2009/06/02/social-media-policy-musts>>.