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Facebook and Twitter 101

Develop a plan to get the most out of social media for your company

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Using social media tools to build business communities is the next step in social media.” So said Lee Thurnburn, president of NetOffer.

Now wallflowers, nerds and social misfits can interact with jocks and homecoming queens on a level playing field and people who were otherwise excluded from the conversation now have a place at the table. Like it or not, social media can and will profoundly affect how businesses connect with the community. How do you win the game? One play at a time.

- Create a plan that aligns your organization’s objectives, expectations and actions with your social media efforts.
- Map these activities to attainable metrics: You must measure results to make informed assessments of what worked and what didn’t so that you can incorporate this into your next attempt.

Doug List, an adviser to several local CEOs notes, “People often find their current ‘herd’ unsatisfying. Groups give us an identity — something we can relate to. Arguably, a force behind social media is herd-seeking.”

Most Web sites have sharp interest during a social media campaign, after which traffic drops drastically. Ideally, Web traffic should steadily climb.

“Many companies put the cart in front of the horse and jump into social media initiatives without clearly defining their objectives, execution plan and measurement,” says Mike Brevoort, enterprise Web presence practice manager at [Avalon Consulting](#).

In other words, what are they trying to accomplish, how to get there and how they will know if they did it or are even headed in the right direction? Identifying social media business objectives from a business point of view is critical.

Develop rich content

Brevoort continues, “Developing strong consistent messages that stretch across all marketing media is the goal of social media. You don’t necessarily have to bring the conversation to your Web site; in fact, for most small businesses this is unrealistic. You may need to ‘fish where the fish are.’ ”

By monitoring, you can discover where your target audience is participating and meet it there. Offer insights, present yourself as an expert and encourage them to follow links back to relevant content on your Web site.

In addition to your standard, static marketing materials, blogs are an excellent strategy for demonstrating leadership and expertise around your brand. Use social networks as channels for your content. If you publish content that’s interesting to your social connections, they will relay your message further by retweeting or “liking” on Facebook. You should also provide a way for readers on your site to share in these social networks.

“Discipline is huge,” says John South of Razor Driven Marketing. “There are hundreds of social media sites. You must think of social media as one huge cocktail party that goes 24/7. There’s a careful balance that must be respected. You have to know your limits.”

Five key areas

1. Listening and monitoring: Your responses must be genuine. Think customer service 101. Listen and then respond. By listening for mentions of your company, brand or certain keywords, you can assess the level of activity or sentiment with respect to these topics. But don’t stop there — listen to what others are saying about competitors as well. Engage with them and offer support.

2. Response and engagement strategy: Positive interaction promotes your brand and increases your sphere of influence.

3. Worst-case scenario: Disgusting people will always exist. Pre-establish a strategy that will allow your company to rally if the conversation gets out of hand. For example, Domino's Pizza was engaged in a conversation when horrible pictures were posted on a Web site. Domino's rallied the troops quickly and relied on the loyalty and affection of satisfied consumers to set the story straight. The errant guests were thrown out of the party by the social media community that surrounded Domino's.

4. Structured sponsored platform: a blog that links back to the company Web site. A great book that explains how and why you use a blog is The Digital Handshake, www.TheDigitalHandshake.com.

5. Content: You are what you put out there. Whether you are a small business or a large corporation, work in the mail room or run a *Fortune* 500 company, you now have an invitation to the party. You matter to the greater world. It would seem the personal challenge would be resisting falling in love with your own voice.

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