

Social Media 101 – Five Steps to Revolutionize Your Organization’s Interactions Using Facebook and Twitter

“Social media is a form of communication that relies on its audience to create, modify and distribute content.”

It’s a common misconception that social media is an innovative new trend. Social media has been around for hundreds of years—any type of social interaction is social media. What is a new trend is the ability to measure and monetize online social media platforms. We now have proof of the power of our social connections. Facebook, today’s largest social network, and Twitter, the short messaging phenomenon, are the juggernauts of this social technology revolution. Over 10 billion minutes each month are spent on Facebook alone, and the number is growing so rapidly that even as you read this sentence that statistic is most likely out of date. Social media has evolved into a valuable tool that organizations like yours can, and should, leverage to reach new participants and better connect with current members. Plus, they are free. You have no excuse not to try them.

If you’re not sure where or how to start, you’re not alone. Here are the five pieces you need to solve the social media puzzle:



1. DEVELOP A STRATEGY

If you don’t develop a strategy, you’ll be throwing darts at a board blindfolded. As with anything in business, you need a solid plan of attack to maximize time and opportunity:

Determine your needs. What do you want social media to do for you? Who would you like to reach? Determine what you want to accomplish and create a mission statement that aligns with your goals. This advice may seem “elementary, my dear Watson,” but it’s important to think through your goals and mission so you can refer back to them when conflicting priorities vie for your attention. As part of this exercise, identify metrics and set quantifiable benchmarks—for example, percentage of distribution growth, number of clicks or visits from social sites, number of posts made per week and so on. With specific numbers to aim for, you will be able to measure your success.

Dedicate time and resources. Incorporating social media into your organization should not be something you lump onto the plate of interns, telling them to post an update when they have time. Think of social media as a separate division, such as sales or marketing, with its own goals and KPI’s (key performance indicators). Regardless of how big or small your organization may be, ensuring the success of your social media efforts requires daily attention from dedicated, cohesive resources. There is no “set it and forget it” approach when it comes to social networking—it is an active responsibility that should be owned by someone within your organization who is responsible for measuring and achieving goals. The more effort you put in, the more you will get out.

2. BUILD YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

Instead of the traditional marketing approach of blasting email inboxes or delivering envelopes, with social media **users control the initial contact**. Remember that to receive any of your messaging, people must agree to become a fan or follower. You need to attract users to build a receptive audience. People will form their first impressions of you based on your social media web pages, so make them good. Your social media web pages need to be:

Recognizable. Model your pages after the look and feel of your organization’s website. Include your logo, match the colors used on your website, and use similar images. You are establishing your brand! Your pages should be an accurate reflection of who you are and create an imprint of your organization on the brain of your audience.

Informational. There is nothing more frustrating than toggling around a web page looking for something without finding it. Avoid giving users a meltdown by posting information in visible, easy-to-find locations. Keep your language simple and to the point so it can be easily understood.

Interesting. Add features to make the pages fun and engaging. The goal is to get people to interact. Learn more about this in our Create Buzz section below...

Advanced tip: Optimize your social media channels for search engine visibility, incorporating keywords whenever possible to encourage Google to return your social media pages at the top of any search findings.

3. GROW YOUR NETWORKS

Now that you have built your presence and set up your social media pages, it’s time to light the match that will start a wildfire. Once you earn the attention and trust of users, they will share your content with their networks, who will share it with their networks, and so on. This is called “going viral” and illustrates how important it is to have a large number of fans or followers. In the blink of an eye, the number of people who have viewed your message has exponentially increased, way beyond anything you had access to individually. The key to increasing your fans or followers is to make it easy to share content. Here are a few simple ways to grow your network and expand that viral footprint:

- ▶ Include social media links or logos in all emails and communications to participants, members or prospects.
“Follow us on...”
- ▶ Use the Facebook Fan Box on your website. Users can become your Fan with a single click of the mouse, without ever leaving your website.
- ▶ Run Facebook and Twitter banner advertisements on your current homepage.
- ▶ Hold contests to drive users to your social media channels.



4. DRIVE INTERACTION & CREATE BUZZ

You have the presence and you have the network—next you need to create the buzz. Stir up a whirlpool of interest and encourage interaction around your organization and programs by pushing out content that is timely, relevant and authentic. This can be anything from articles to event information to quizzes. The topic doesn’t matter but the value of the piece does. It must be something your fans or followers can’t find anywhere else and grabs their attention. This is also your chance to show some personality. Throw in some humor or a personal interest story to create strong connections with your network and let them know that there is a wizard behind the curtain.

There are certainly different “voices” you should use for the different social media. Think of your Facebook voice as something you would use at a cocktail party or reunion. You have a familiar relationship with your friends or fans and can tailor your posts for two-way, personal conversations. Twitter is more of a tradeshow or convention. Short, concise messages can be shouted through a bullhorn to followers you most likely do not have a personal connection with.

Words to the wise: Don’t be afraid of negativity. Take a look at the quote at the beginning of this article—social media “relies on its audience.” Social media is a platform for the public voice and you cannot completely control the message. So roll with it and embrace the interactions, good and bad.

5. MEASURE RESULTS WITH ANALYTICS

You must measure your results to know what is successful. Because social media technology is in its infancy and rapidly changing, there are very few experts on the subject. No one has been able to study it thoroughly enough to establish guidelines to live by. This means you are your own expert and responsible for your own success. Track everything you do and compare results month-to-month. Try something, test, report. Try something else—test, report, test, report. Know what works and be able to prove it. You will not only gain more investment from decision makers, but you will discover the fine line between efficiency and annoyance with your posts to users (which is different for everyone).

You won't have to dust off the abacus to get some solid reporting. Facebook and Twitter have built-in analytics and you can also contract 3rd party reporting services. Consolidated reporting can be challenging and you will put in some time patching together the various reports you receive, but the insight you gain is worth the effort. Watch as your channels grow month over month and project future growth by applying conversion rates. You'll discover what works and your organization will grow apace with your popularity. Test, report, test, report!

CONCLUSION

The bottom line is that social media can reach more people, more frequently than any other form of communication. Use the five steps above to get started and use the networks to increase participation, deepen community reach, and boost revenues. Social media is a free, powerful resource that is too influential to ignore.