



Succeed with Social Media

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Developing a Social Media Plan

Are you thinking about getting your business involved with social media? It can be a very strategic business initiative, but only if executed well. It's important to construct a plan before diving in, or you could just end up wasting time on social networking sites.

Objectives, strategies and tactics

When developing a social media plan, start by thinking about business objectives. For instance, you may want to increase sales, improve retention, strengthen your reputation, learn more about your industry and competitors—perhaps all of the above. Then think about the strategies and tactics you can develop to meet those objectives.

- A social media strategy is a plan of action, designed to achieve a specific objective. Strategies can be very complex and include many components. Your business objectives will dictate your strategy, and you may have more than one strategy to meet all the business objectives you associate with social media.
- Tactics are the approaches you use to carry out your strategy. You will likely have multiple tactics associated with each strategy.

For example, if your **business objective** is to learn more about your client base to help influence your product development and marketing decisions, a **strategy** might be to reach out to customers and prospects through social media to open meaningful conversations. One **tactic** in that strategy might be offering a 20 per cent discount to all individuals who complete a survey through Facebook® or Twitter™.

Questions to consider

Consider the following questions when crafting your social media plan:

- Why are you interested in social media? What are your primary business objectives? You may want to recruit more talent, gain insight into customers, become a thought leader in your industry or niche, attract more customers, connect to other industry people, etc.
- Who is your target audience?
- What does each site/platform offer, and how can you benefit from those resources? Decide which sites to take on, based on what makes the most sense for your business.
- Who will manage your social media initiatives? Will it be a current employee or team, or a new hire?

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Base your social media plan on business objectives.

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- Who will have access to your company social media profiles—all employees, or a select few? Consider the implications of who will have log in information; it is often best to limit that to a smaller group of individuals.
- Do you already have someone who handles speeches or other press needs? Consider including that person in your social media initiative to retain the same “voice” and personality of the company.
- What makes your company unique or different from competitors? What elements make up your brand? What is your competitive advantage? Discuss how to integrate your brand into your social media efforts so that your online presence is differentiated.
- As you’re developing your plan, include concrete goals and guidelines, such as what type of content is and isn’t acceptable, how often you want to post on each platform, etc.

Dos

As you think more about your social media venture, consider these ideas and suggestions for success:

- Remember to be genuine, personal and human—not a generic robot or a pushy salesperson.
- Instead of focusing on your products, focus on being an expert in your field or a resource for your client base. Once you develop a reputation in your industry, you’ll earn new business without having to beg for it.
- Think of social media not only as a place to share insights and communicate, but also to listen to your client base, employees, competitors and others in the industry. You can learn a lot about what your clients want, what your employees think, what your competitors offer, trends in the industry and more through listening and observation.
- Ask questions—customers love to have their voice heard and know their opinion is valued. Ask about specific products or services, suggestions for improvement, or how they are handling industry issues or challenges. When someone responds, dig deeper! Look for opportunities to start meaningful conversations.
- Use contests, polls and questions to engage your audience, showcase your personality and share value.
- Put a system in place at your company to pass suggestions and feedback to appropriate decision-makers. And make sure to monitor all your social media accounts frequently so that interactions, questions and comments don’t slip through the cracks. Otherwise, customers who provide feedback will feel ignored.
- Integrate your social media presence with your website. Include links to your Facebook page, Twitter page, blog, and other channels, so that clients can easily find you. Be sure to also link back to your company website within your social media profiles to drive traffic to your site.

Don’ts

Avoid these social media miscues.

- Don’t focus too much on promoting your own company. Social media should not be about selling your products—it’s about engaging your followers, becoming a voice in your industry, providing value, starting conversations and building your brand. As you put together your plan, think about your social media approach, beyond your products or services.
- Don’t start social media without direction and focus.

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- Don't get too personal. Though you want to have a unique personality and voice, sharing personal details about your family (for instance) isn't appropriate for a company social media account.
- Don't start off strong with social media only to neglect it after a few weeks or months. Engaging in social media is only valuable if you are willing and able to commit time and effort, consistently.

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