How to Integrate Social Media Into Your Marketing Communications Strategy

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Richard Fouts guides digital marketers on best practices for evaluating and deploying emerging digital marketing techniques to ensure they make fully informed decisions about their marketing investments. With extensive experience in brand management and marketing communications, he understands the digital techniques that marketers are using to communicate, differentiate brands and improve digital customer experiences.

Top 5 Issues That I Help Clients Address:

• How should marketers evaluate the business potential of a new digital trend or technique?
• How are marketers implementing emerging digital trends and techniques for business advantage?
• What are the digital trends and techniques on the horizon that might change or disrupt current marketing practices?
• How is technology changing the art of the story, particularly digital storytelling?
• How does digital marketing impact the way companies acquire and retain customers?

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Many marketers make the mistake of treating social as a separate communications strategy. We provide six steps for integrating social media into your marketing plan to avoid creating yet another marketing silo.

Analysis

As marketers, you know conversations are happening in social media, whether you’re listening or not. Those conversations can help your brand or damage it. You have little choice but to figure out how you’re going to give social media permanent residence in the communications mix. These six steps will help you integrate social media into the larger communications strategy:

- Set some goals
- Establish a social media policy
- Assign an owner
- Establish a listening post
- Join the conversation
- Measure

Step 1: Set Some Goals

As with any initiative, establish leadership. Leading CMOs, for example, are assembling cross-functional, multidiscipline teams of social-media-savvy people (from marketing, public relations, product development and customer service) to help formulate strategy and goals, for example to:

- Demonstrate and boost your thought leadership
- Increase brand awareness by participating in conversations where your industry is actively discussed
- Generate demand
- Showcase innovation

Step 2: Establish a Social Media Policy

Every marketing organization needs a social media policy; it need not be long, and it should not be written in legalese. It should articulate company values and principles, and provide employees with guidelines for participation in social media. Examples of social media policies:

- The policies page at socialmediagovernance.com
- "Toolkit: Establishing Policy for Social Software Applications"
- "Answer Seven Critical Questions Before You Write Your Social Media Policy"

Step 3: Assign an Owner

Assign a point person, often the existing manager or director of online marketing. Like any role in marketing, this person crafts a framework and sets boundaries on how a marketing activity will be conducted. He or she should be a leader — not an autocrat — who can listen to and earn the respect of members from the team. In the case of social media, this person should establish the categories of social media networks, tools and forums in which the company will participate.

Step 4: Establish a Listening Post

Fortunately, a new wave of solutions is emerging to help you gather and analyze conversations that mention them. An in-depth review of these solutions is beyond the scope of this research, but we do identify a few categories of providers that help you (see Table 1) listen for relevant conversations. These solutions offer everything from customized services that are managed for you, to tools you can buy. Many are free.
Table 1. Social Media Monitoring and Analytics Services and Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Metrics Services</td>
<td>Provide interactive reports and dashboards that present near and real-time sentiment analysis per user-defined key words and concepts (with various channels, such as blogs, forums, review and often mainstream media)</td>
<td>SocialEye (from Overdrive Interactive), Radian6, Nielsen BuzzMetrics, TNS Media Intelligence, Visible, Umbria, Viralheat and RightNow Technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Reports and Advisory Services</td>
<td>Customer search and analysis tools used in concert with human analysts to provide tailored reports with customer-specific analysis and strategic advisory services</td>
<td>BrandIntel, Dow Jones Factiva, Kaava Consulting, MotiveQuest, Waggener Edstrom Worldwide, Social Media Group, General Sentiment, BuzzNumbers, RumbaFish Technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Configurable Software-as-a-Service Platforms</td>
<td>Platforms that support search and analysis within an engagement workflow tool for enterprise-scale interaction management</td>
<td>Overdrive Interactive, Collective Intellect, Visible Technologies (TruCast 2.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Premises Software</td>
<td>Installable, on-premises software from major providers that integrates social media services with their other tools (for example, CRM or contact center solutions)</td>
<td>IBM SPSS Modeler data mining and text analytics workbench Cisco SocialMiner (delivers communications from social media sites directly to customer-service agents)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gartner (August 2012)

Step 5: Join the Conversation

Communications, like other types of traffic, moves along spokes to a central hub. The model, commonly referred to as hub-and-spoke, is used in industries to model business activities that manage the flow of information, data or even physical assets (such as vehicles). The good news: Most marketers already have a communications hub-and-spoke model in place.

Hub-and-spoke works well for social media because it drives traffic to your modern hub: your website and/or your corporate blog. The other good news: Your website already has a basic infrastructure to measure, segment and analyze traffic. Increased revenue, leads and brand awareness, for example, are almost always accompanied (or preceded) by increased traffic to your website. Once you get prospects and customers to your site, then you can do all sorts of things to move them along the buying cycle (such as upselling, cross-selling or presenting other offers, such as free white papers or opportunities to participate in contests or games).

Set up governance: Two things to keep in mind:

- Ensure that your governance effort delivers purpose-specific documentation:
  - HR often owns the broader guidelines for all employees.
  - Your marketing department should own the guidelines for the marketing staff (for example, people in demand-generation roles who use social media to stimulate everything from awareness and thought leadership to hard sales leads).
  - People in customer service might need yet another set of guidance and advice.

And, of course, be sure to educate. Policy is not enough. Educate employees, whether they come from marketing or nonmarketing functions, about how to join the conversation (the markets in which you participate, as well as how you present yourself to customers and prospects).

Step 6: Measure

Many marketers believe it’s not possible to quantify the ROI impact of human interactions and conversations. Or, they believe that social media’s radical departure from what we have today means that old techniques don’t apply. All this is false. Marketing executives are indeed tracking the impact of social media marketing with the same level of accuracy and accountability they provide in their other activities.

Earlier, we advised integrating social media into your existing hub-and-spoke marketing communications model. We have similar advice here — make use of what you already have:

Start with what you know (for example, Web traffic): “Impact on Web traffic” is the most fundamental metric that marketers use to assess social media’s influence, probably because it’s a measurement facility that’s already in place (through their standard Web metrics package). One of the quickest assessments of payback is to spin off data from website traffic originating from social media channels (see Table 2).

Table 2. Isolate Web Traffic Data From Social Media Channels and Measure Their Contribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Category</th>
<th>Examples of Referencing URLs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Network Sites</td>
<td>Facebook, LinkedIn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microblogging</td>
<td>Twitter, Tumblr, Jaiku, BubbleTweet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video and Photo Sharing</td>
<td>YouTube, Flickr, Zoomr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Bookmarking</td>
<td>Delicious, StumbleUpon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forums</td>
<td>Yelp, Amazon, Epinions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gartner (August 2012)

Leads: Above, we talked about how to get a greater understanding of the type of social networks that are increasing your Web traffic. The same advice applies to leads. For example, you can
compute the completion of lead generation forms (provided on the landing pages generated by marketing campaigns) that originated from social networks (based on the referring URL). This information can also be entered into your prospect database through your existing lead nurturing solutions.

**Calculate media equivalent value:** Scores of marketing executives are discovering social media’s ability to offset, or even avoid, the cost of traditional media buys, particularly when they are used to support new product launches.

For example, when a telecommunications company announced support for a new mobile device, it reached out to the blogosphere to generate impressions and conversations that the company normally would have paid an advertising or PR firm to conduct. The company calculated it got about $2 million worth of impressions, engagements, clicks, page views, actions and other outcomes from blogger activity (based on its historical cost per mille). But the real surprise was that many stories that began in the blogosphere moved into mainstream media, creating even more positive ROI. Videos were also shot at a launch event, garnering more than 11,000 views on YouTube.

**Track contribution to pipeline and revenue:** Things like forecast reports, lead reports and pipeline reports (that are generated manually or from systems such as salesforce.com, Eloqua or a homegrown marketing automation system) can also be used to identify the source of interest. Some marketers report they are pulling data from their CRM systems into their marketing dashboards, broken out by referral source, including social media sites and search engines.

**Analyze sentiment and intent:** Sentiment analysis solutions employ algorithms that scan keywords to categorize statements as positive or negative. Other sentiment analysis solutions help you understand the intent behind the purchase. These solutions track social messages related to a topic or area of interest, interpret them using natural language algorithms, then aggregate the conversations.

**Recommended Reading**

- “Marketing Essentials: How to Govern Social Media While Encouraging Its Creative Use”
- “Case Study: Virtusa Updates Its Social Media Plan Based on Experience”
- “Social-Media Monitoring for Branding and Marketing”

**Evidence**

This research is based on interviews with several marketing executives in high-tech and telecom companies, as well as secondary research. We also used insight from other social media research at Gartner.
Gartner helps companies improve their business results through the use of technology. Our independent research and advice is trusted by business and technology leaders in 13,000 organizations around the world.

Our experienced research analysts talk to marketers every day — from those just entering the digital realm to the innovation trailblazers. These interactions capture real challenges, best practices and what is critical for success.

Gartner provides marketers with the research, data, tools and expert advice to rapidly deploy, optimize and measure digital technologies and coordinate diverse marketing programs into a strategy that drives results.

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