

Succeed with Social Media

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Developing a Social Media Plan

Are you thinking about creating a social media presence for your business? Social media can do wonders for building your brand and consumer loyalty; however, if not executed properly, social media efforts can end up wasting valuable time and resources for your company. Therefore, before diving in and starting to post on social media, it is important to develop a well-thought-out social media plan that will help further your business's goals and mission.

Objectives, Strategies and Tactics

When developing a social media plan, start by thinking about business objectives. Ask yourself why are you interested in social media? What are your primary business objectives? For instance, do you want to recruit more talent, gain insight into customers' needs, become a thought leader in your industry, attract more customers, connect to others in industry—or perhaps all of the above?

After selecting your business objectives, you should think about the strategies and tactics that you can develop to achieve these goals.

- A social media strategy is a plan of action, designed to accomplish a specific objective. Your business goals will dictate your strategy, and you may need more than one strategy to meet all of your social media business objectives.
- Tactics are the approaches you use to carry out your social media 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, one **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% discount to all individuals who complete a survey through Facebook or Twitter.

Questions to Consider

To help develop your social media plan, consider the following questions:

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- Who is your target audience?
- What does each social media platform offer, and what are the benefits? Decide which sites to use based on what makes the most sense for your business needs.
- Who will manage your social media initiatives? Will it be a current employee, a team or a new hire?
- 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 this information to a small group of individuals.
- Do you already have someone who handles marketing 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 your 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 stands out.
- As you’re developing your social media plan, establish clear guidelines, such as outlining what type of content is and isn’t acceptable, how often you want to post on each platform, etc.

Do’s of Social Media

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

- 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 more easily.
- Think of social media not only as a place to share insights and to 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 by listening and observing.
- Remember to be genuine, personal and human—not a generic robot or a pushy salesperson.
- Ask questions—customers love to have their voices heard and to know that their opinions are valued. Ask about specific products or services, suggestions for improvement, or how they are handling industry issues or challenges. When someone responds, dig deeper and look for ways 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 may feel ignored.
- Integrate your social media presence with your company’s website. Include links to your Facebook page, Twitter account, blog, etc. on your company’s website so clients can easily find them. Also, link back to your business’s website within your social media profiles to drive traffic to your site.

Don’ts of Social Media

Fine-tune your social media strategy by avoiding these common slip-ups:

- Don’t focus too much on promoting your own company. Social media should not only be about selling your products—it’s about engaging your followers, becoming a voice in your industry, starting conversations and building your brand. As you put together your plan, think about your social media approach beyond solely advertising your products or services.
- Don’t start a social media account without a 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. Avoid talking about politics, religion or other controversial news topics.
- Don't neglect your social media accounts after a few weeks or months. Engaging in social media is only valuable if you are willing and able to consistently commit time and effort to building your brand.

In Summary

Use the do's and don'ts above to help harness the power of social media. By creating a well-crafted social media plan, you can develop a voice that is unique to your business and share valuable content with your consumers that can ultimately help improve your bottom line.