



Social Media Strategy

A white paper on Social Media Strategy by Sally Falkowl

Social Media¹ Overview



Over the last ten years, there has been a fundamental shift in how people access information and news. Companies traditionally used the media to get their messages out to their audiences via marketing, advertising, or public relations. Marketing and advertising push a message out to the masses. Companies use public relations to supply news to the media and expert sources to provide stories about their industry. The goal is to get media mentions of their company, products, or services.

These methods are a one-way communication, where a company delivers a message through the media, but individuals have no real way of responding. Today, this one-to-many mass media model has given way to the social web and a new way of communicating *with* people has emerged.

Since people have tired of receiving one-way communications, they are looking more and more for news and information in places other than the media. This trend is likely to accelerate — Forrester Research predicts that by 2012, half of all US newspapers will have ceased production.



People no longer rely on the media. New tools enable them to network, read blogs, post comments and reviews, actively gather news and information, and share this with others.

People are engaging in conversations. Conversation is the new marketing.



Tapping into these conversations shows where your audience is spending time online, and what subjects and issues are of interest to them. As of 2010, over 80% of US companies have started using some form of social media marketing, and their biggest barrier to success in this new medium is a **lack of knowledge**.

To reach your publics successfully, you need to move your marketing activity from the traditional “push” method, where you broadcast your messages to thousands via the media, to a “pull” strategy, where you make it easy for people to find your information, whenever and wherever they want it.

Start telling your stories directly, and do it in a way that sparks conversations.

The value proposition of Social Media (Web 2.0) or online PR is:

- **Participating in online conversations that shape perceptions about your brand**
- **Building relationships with influencers in your field**
- **Creating a community of supporters**

The Need for Strategy

For the past 100 years, companies have had the luxury of deciding what they will produce and sell, what their brand message will be, and how they will deliver it to their audience.

The Internet has changed that.

We're in the age of social media marketing. Strategy in this new business environment is just as vital as it has ever been.

Don't get distracted from the importance of strategy by the slew of new social media tools. Don't get lured into spending money on resources just because "everyone is doing it".

Social media offers you the opportunity of doing in-depth research at virtually no cost. It is possible to set goals and get ROI², but you have to know where you're going and what you want to achieve.



There are 10 steps to this:

1. Map the brand's social graph
2. Listen to the conversations – who is talking about you and what are they saying?
3. Analyze the content. Share of Voice, sentiment, gaps, trends, opportunities
4. Set Goals and define metrics and benchmarks.
5. Identify influencers in each node of the social graph
6. Develop a content strategy based on what you have found.
7. Create a tactical plan for implementation and choose the right social media tools.
8. Create and publish content.

9. Engage in the conversations and facilitate conversations about your brand and your industry.
10. Monitor and measure results.

Step One — Mapping the Social Graph



No brand exists in a vacuum. PR practitioners have long known that it is important to map the environment in which the company operates and to know who the stakeholders are. Now social media has expanded that need. We have to know where they are online and who they are connected to.

You have to figure out which stakeholders are most important to you – customers, competitors, employees, the media and now a new group – bloggers.

There are tools you can use, like Rapportive, to find these people and figure where they are online so you can begin to evaluate who your most important stakeholders are.

Step Two - Listen to the Online Conversation



Market research has always been fundamental to marketing success.

The social web makes it much easier to find out what people are saying about you, who you should be talking to, what they are interested in, and what you should be talking to them about.

Tap into the online conversations to find out:

- Who is talking about you – find your “tribe”
- What they are saying about you, your competitors, and your industry in general
- Is it positive or negative
- Where are the conversations taking place
- What communities talk about you
- What are your competitors doing in social media

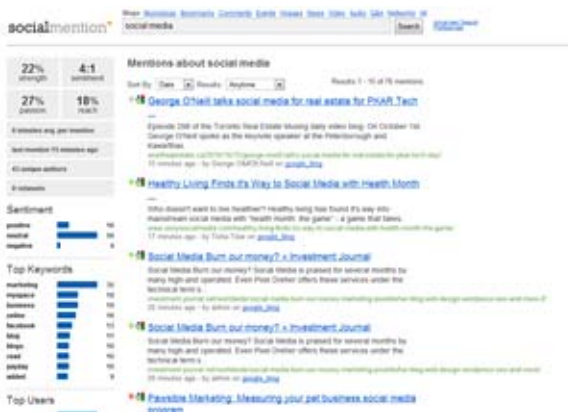
- What’s the buzz about them
- What content resonates with your audience
- Are there subjects of interest you could provide content for
- What social sites have the most conversation
- Who are the “fire-starters³” you need to connect with
- Who are the influencers in these blogs or communities
- Where are the opportunities and threats

Once you have this information, you can allocate your resources wisely. You’ll know where to start, and what social sites you should be concentrating on. When you know the lay of the land, it’s much easier to plot a path to your destination. A social media marketing strategy is your roadmap.

Free Tools

Dashboards⁴

Social Mention



iGoogle page – make a “Listening Post”



NetVibes



Paid Tools

Now that you know just how much there is to be tracked, here are some of the paid tools that can do a lot of the heavy lifting for you:



- Radian6
- Sysomos
- Nielsen BuzzMetrics
- Visible Technologies
- Trackur
- BuzzLogic
- Alterian SM2
- Scout Labs
- Jive Software
- eCairn Conversation

A comparison of several tools – http://www.pr2020.com/files/PR_SM-Monitoring-Comparison.pdf

Sources to Find the Information

Blogs

- Google Blog Search
- IceRocket
- BlogPulse
- Backtype – for blog comments

Trends

- Google Trends
- Google Insights for Search

Message Boards and Forums

- BoardTracker
- BoardReader

Multimedia

- YouTube
- Truveo
- MetaCafe
- Viral Video Chart
- Flickr
- PhotoBucket

Twitter

- Search.Twitter.com
- Twilert
- Twazzup

Step Three — Analyzing

Gaps, Trends, Opportunities

There are millions of online conversations daily. Once you have collected the data, you can analyze the mentions of your brand, find out what your share of voice is in a particular conversation, get the ratio of positive to negative mentions, discover who talks about you and on what platform, find fans and detractors, and identify threats and opportunities.

“Share of Voice” is defined as the percentage of the mentions that are about your brand / company / organization in the particular niche or market you’re active in. Do people use a generic description of what you do, or do they talk about your products or services specifically?

Example

Do women talk about dry skin treatment and natural skin care products, or do they mention specific brands and products? Do they mention your products? What percentage of the total conversation about “dry skin” mentions your products?

Are the comments positive or negative? What is the ratio of positive-to-negative? Are your key messages appearing in these conversations? If not, what content is trending? How are your competitors faring in these conversations?

The context of your content in a competitive setting shows how your brand stacks up against your competitors online.

Share of voice leads to market share. Establishing and tracking share of voice used to be an advertising metric, but since the most trusted form of advertising is now conversations, it’s become an important one for social media. A gain in share of voice is an important measurement for social media programs.

Every day, another blog, social network, or social media site seems to pop up. There are now literally

thousands of places online where conversations are taking place. Here's a sample:

How can you effectively divide your time and resources so that you participate in the places that make the most sense for your business? Part of your research – listening to what's being said online – includes **who** is talking about you and **where** the conversations are taking place.

Examples

A skin care company discovered that there is conversation about “dry skin” in gardening forums, where moms talk about skin care on blogs, while crafters and medical professionals talk about it in their niche social networks. There is content posted about “dry skin” on Delicious, StumbleUpon, and Kirtsy. There is also a lot of chatter about skin care on Twitter.



A natural soda company found that there are people on Twitter talking about their brand, their competitors' products, and ginger ale, ginger brew, and ginger beer in general. Beverage and cocktail bloggers mention the brand. Mom bloggers are not talking about the brand that much.

Once you know where the majority of the conversations take place, and which groups you need to concentrate on, you can sensibly allocate your resources for best ROI.

According to *eMarketer*, the number of influencers is growing as more and more people publish content online. It's no longer about how many people did we reach, it's have we reached the right people who want to engage and communicate with us?

This means that large networks are not always the best place to concentrate on. There are many small social networks built around a group that is passionate about a subject. Find the ones that are relevant to your company or organization.

Step Four — Setting Measurable Goals

Define Metrics & Statistics

Now that you have listened to the conversation of your stakeholders and analyzed that content, you should know what your goals will be. The insights you get from the listening phase should show you where your opportunities lie and what you should be addressing.

Remember when you set a goal to make it measurable. If you can't measure it, you can't manage it.

Work out what metrics will enable you to measure your goals. Do not make vague goals such as “we want to have more brand awareness

More than what? How much and in what time period?

In order to measure your progress towards your goals, you have to have a starting place. This is your baseline. You need to take a snapshot of where you are now with regard to the goals you have set so that you can track your progress over time.

Step-by-Step Example

1. Through **listening**, a skin care company starting on a social media strategy might discover that one of the groups that talks about dry skin is medical workers. They listen to these conversations for two weeks, initially.
2. Through **analyzing** these conversations, they establish that their leading competitor has a 38% share of voice in this conversation, while they have a 5% share.
3. Through **brainstorming**, they come up with an idea that will improve this scene.
4. They set their competition's share of voice as their **benchmark** and **set a goal**: “To increase our share of voice to 20% in 12 months.”
5. The **metric** for share of voice is “brand mentions in a desired conversation” (in this case, “medical workers talking about dry skin”). They record this using the statistic “share of voice”,

which plots the metric over time. They measure this weekly and track their progress.

Examples of Statistics

- # of positive brand mentions per week
- # of comments on blog posts
- # of retweets⁵
- # of clicks on links posted on Twitter
- # of visitors to the website
- # of followers on Twitter
- # of coupon downloads
- # of video views

Everyone on the team has to agree on what goals you're aiming for, and how you'll know when you hit them... or not!

First, determine your benchmarks so that you know what you're potentially aiming for and measuring yourself against. Looking at what others in your industry are doing helps you to establish benchmarks and set realistic goals for your business. Are you going to try to beat your competition outright? Or perhaps beat them only locally, for now?

Once you have figured out where you'd like to be in the future, you can express these ideas as goals. So long as your goals are measurable, i.e. expressed as quantity and usually vs. time, you will be able to move forwards and track your progress easily.

Below are examples of types of social media goals. The next section gives specific goal examples.

Brand Reputation



Dell failed to service a particular influential blogger, who eventually blogged about their service. The blog caused a flood of negative comments about *Dell's* customer service. This had such an impact that it created a public relations “hell” for *Dell*. This was aptly named the “Dell Hell”. They set a goal to reverse the problem. The ratio of positive-to-negative comments became one of their key performance e-indicators. They have definitely achieved their goal.

Brand Awareness

Skin MD Natural launched their lotion in social media and created interest in the phrase “shielding lotion” as a search term. From this, more than 400 mommy bloggers have written about the product, and the content spread through social media sites like StumbleUpon, Kirtsy, and Delicious.

There are now search queries for their brand and the generic phrase “shielding lotion” in many countries in the world.

Share of Voice

Reed's Inc discovered there is a vigorous conversation online about ginger beer, ginger ale, ginger brew, and the health benefits of ginger. However, the number of mentions of *Reed's* and their brands was very low. They instituted a social media program to engage brand fans and mom bloggers so that they can increase that share of voice.

R&D⁶ Expenditure

Dell's “Idea Storm”, *Starbuck's* “My Starbuck's Idea”, and *Crayola's* “Kid's Comments” are concepts that help these companies tap into the wisdom of their consumers.

98% of consumers indicate:
“I'd definitely buy a product I helped to evolve.”

Step Five – Finding the Key Influencers



What is influence? It can be defined as “implicit or explicit effect of one thing (or person) on another.”

What influences people online has changed dramatically in the last few years. The idea that the newspaper, magazine, TV station, or individual with the most followers or subscribers has the biggest influence is no longer valid.

Today, influence is about accuracy and trust. You want to reach the bloggers and social networkers who have influence – those who can cause others to take action, change their perception and / or their behavior. They might not be the A-list⁷ bloggers or power users in a network. It is someone that other people trust and listen to. They’re the ones who send a flood of traffic to your blog or your website, because when they link to you or recommend your product, their followers take action.

Examples



Fiskars have been making scissors for 360 years, but didn’t have a very hip image. When they did a survey of what consumers thought about *Fiskars*, people said that if *Fiskars* were a drink, it would be milk, if they were a snack, they’d be crackers.

Not very trendy or attractive! However, they did find that there was a lot of passion about scrapbooking and crafting online, which is something you need scissors to do, so *Fiskars* decided to become part of this passion. They reached out to five influential women in the crafting field and got them on board as ambassadors for the *Fiskars* brand.

The goal for this campaign was to raise awareness and create fans that were passionate about the brand. They have built a community of over 8,000 passionate *Fiskars* supporters. This led to other rewards:

- Product development – they ask Fiskateers for feedback on ideas, and Fiskateers take pride in

that

- Marketing – launching different stamp designs and ask Fiskateers which they like, which helps identify which stamps are going to be the most popular
- Sales – those stores where the Fiskateers were involved showed three times higher sales than others

There are influencers in each node of your social graph – some customers are more influential than others. Some bloggers are more important and their voice will carry more weight.

It is vital to know who the influential voices are in each node as these are the voices that create the narrative about your brand online,

Step Six — Develop a Content Strategy



Back in 2001, *Forrester Research* asked people why they returned to a website. The overwhelming answer was “content”. This holds true today. Success in social media depends on the quality of your content. Quality content engages people. In social media, people are creating, reading, saving, tagging, and sharing quality content.

If you don’t produce the kind of content they value, it won’t be re-published or shared.

How do you know what kind of content to create? Listen and observe. In the past, we had to rely on agencies to have a “bright idea”. However, when you really listen to your audience, you will discover the core content that will elicit a response. Opportunities easily spring to mind.

Example

A mortgage company discovered that young mothers in their first home were very concerned about the housing market and the subprime⁸ mortgage fiasco. They were looking for information in language they could understand. The mortgage company realized an opportunity to connect with these moms via informative articles and video interviews with their experts.

Example

A non-profit involved in drug rehabilitation found out that women turn to blogs for information, advice, and recommendations (2009 *BlogHer* Social Media study). The study also revealed that what they value most is a review or comment from someone who has used that product or service. Since women are the ones who most often call the rehab centers – a wife, mother, or sister of the addict – it was obvious that they needed to create content around the stories of women who had saved their families with this program, and get it out to women bloggers.

Telling your story online in the right place to the right people gets results. However, you need a well-thought-out content strategy based on solid research to get those results!

Step Seven — Tactical Planning

Perform Tactical Planning & Pick Tools



There's a wide array of social media tools to choose from and the task can be confusing. Not to mention that new tools pop up all the time. Nevertheless, if you have all your data analyzed, and your content strategy in place, it's easy to pick the right tools. Your research will tell you where to start.

Every social media success case study has excellent content that perfectly meets the needs of the people for whom it was intended. Just as in any conversation, the right content gets people's interest and attention. If you are off topic or boring, you get no positive results.

Social Media has matured and most companies are expected to have a presence on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn. However, there may be other social sites you need to include for your business. Bear in mind that each platform requires its own strategy and you need to know where to allocate resources.

If the majority of the conversation about your product is on Twitter, you'll need a spend more time connecting with the people who talk about you there. The same is true for any of the other social networks.

You need to decide why you are using that channel, who to connect with and why, and what content you need to produce in order to get the attention of the right people on that network.

You will need someone with technical skills to help you get your tools in place. You will probably need a blog, a Facebook page, a Twitter account, a LinkedIn account, and a YouTube Channel for starters.

Here's the list of categories of social media tools:

- News Feeds (RSS⁹) to syndicate all your content
- "Share this" buttons, tagging, and bookmarking applications, to make it easy to share and forward your content

- Blogs – platforms and plug-ins
- Microblogging (Twitter)
- Podcasts
- Images – and image sharing networks
- Video – and video sharing sites
- Social Networks – Facebook, LinkedIn, Google Plus, niche networks
- Social Media News Sites – Reddit, StumbleUpon, Digg
- Social Media News Releases, with multimedia and social bookmarks
- Search optimized articles, with feeds and commenting
- Widgets and Apps
- Social Media News Room – create a social media content hub on your website

Step Eight — Create and Publish Content

Once you have a content strategy based on solid research, bright ideas will naturally flow about what to create and how to deliver this content. Experimenting with a Facebook page and a Twitter feed isn't enough. You have to create supporting content: a company blog, an interactive website, interesting articles, images, and videos.

Do you want bloggers and online reporters to write about you and send you traffic? Give them excellent content.

Example

A hotel or resort should be writing about their destination – give people ideas of where to go and what to do. Use great images and videos. Look at how [Intercontinental Hotels*](#) did this.

Example

A non-profit can create compelling content that motivates bloggers to write about their cause. The *Fresh Air Fund* generated over 400 blog posts from [this social media news release](#)[†].

Example

The “Will it Blend” videos have engaged millions of people around the world and increased *BlendTec's* sales by 500%.

Example

The *Microsoft* bloggers led to a change of perception about *Microsoft* as a corporation.

When the content fills a need, people will share the content, and they'll link to it from blog posts and tweets. This can raise your search visibility and drive lots of traffic to your content.

* <http://videos.howstuffworks.com/adventure/intercontinental-videos-playlist.htm#video-788>

† <http://freshair.smnr.us/>

Step Nine - Engage & Facilitate Conversations

It's not enough just to push out content. Social media is not just another marketing channel you can use to reach your target audience. Content should be created with a view to inspiring, and participating in, conversations about your brand.

Social media is about a two-way flow of conversation. People are no longer willing to be passive bystanders. They want to take an active part in the conversation.

Customer engagement can get you through the toughest of times – it's both a customer acquisition and retention strategy.

Engaging Your Audience

Followers and traffic are good and well, but are they engaging with you? 94% of Internet users active in social media say they expect a company to have a social media presence, and to be able to *actively engage with them*.

Despite all their marketing and PR efforts, *Microsoft* was still perceived as a faceless corporate giant. When Robert Scoble started blogging, he put a human face on the company and engaged with their users and developers. Microsoft now has thousands of employees blogging and it has changed those perceptions.



Dell has also demonstrated how to engage and succeed with social media.

On a small local level, *The Boston Court Theatre* in Pasadena, CA, is doing a stellar job of engaging the local arts community and growing a strong support base.

The *Forrester Research* report "Social Media Playtime is Over" clearly shows that dabbling or experimenting is not enough. You have to deliver genuinely interesting and valuable content that meets the needs of your audience and actively engages them.

Our recent study of the top 100 companies in the small, medium, and large categories revealed that only a very small percentage are actively engaging their audience. The playing field is wide open and this is a strategy that can reap large rewards.

Facilitating Conversations

Word of mouth has long been the holy grail of marketing. Peer reviews, opinions, and comments are now the number one influencer prior to purchase or decision online. Not only do you want people engaged with you, but also you want them talking positively about you to each other. Facilitating these conversations should be your ultimate goal.

Make it easy for them – provide excellent content that they will want to share and discuss. Then give them tools to make it easy to do this: send to a friend buttons, share this, bookmark this, subscribe, discuss, comment, like, and tweet buttons..

Since word of mouth, online conversations, reviews, and comments are regarded as the most trusted forms of information today, getting people to talk about your product is the goal.

Example

A skin care company saw this comment about their product posted in the *GardenWeb* forum:

“I work in restaurants and using barrier skin shields is very common. One of the bad things about washing your hands constantly is getting small open cuts on the hands that allow bacteria and viruses to enter freely. I am sure this is a problem in hospitals too. A shielding lotion works well to handle this.”

Example

Carnival Cruises offers their customers tools to post their cruise stories online, with images and videos, so that friends and family at home can share the experience.

Step Ten — Measuring and Reviewing

Why Measure?

“During a recession, with dollars stretched, marketers are under increased pressure to prove their programs. Social media, being largely experimental for many brands, needs to measure to quickly ‘course correct’ programs in real time. During times of cutbacks, marketers must know what to cut, and in order to do so, measurement is key.” *Jeremiah Owyang: Altimeter Group*

If you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it. It’s that simple. You need to know where you are when you start, what needs to be achieved, and as you move along the path, you have to have tools to measure your progress. That way you can see if you are on track and adapt fast if things go awry. Your measurement has to be based on business objectives, and those objectives have to be set as measurable goals. Just setting up attributes to track on a dashboard is not enough.

What you are going to measure will depend on what goals you have set in the initial part of your strategy. Based on listening and research, you should have determined what actions you need to focus on in social media. Measure what you did and what impact it had, and then you can see what result it had.

Having mountains of data is all very well, but “what does this mean?” is the crucial question.

Being able to evaluate the data and come to a conclusion you can use to tweak or expand your program is the point. You need to tell your story to others, the client, your superiors, and the “C” suite.

Return on Engagement

Forrester Research stated the following:

“We propose a new metric, *engagement*, that includes four components:

- “Involvement
- “Interaction
- “Intimacy
- “Influence

“Each of these is built from data collected from online and offline data sources. Using engagement, you get a more holistic appreciation of your customers’ actions, recognizing that value comes not just from transactions, but also from actions people take to influence others.

Once engagement takes hold of marketing, marketing messages will become conversations, and dollars will shift from media buying to customer understanding.”

There are many tools available today to track engagement.

What to Measure

You will have defined your metrics and statistics in step #5. These should include the likes of “how many people clicked a link in a blog post?”, “how many times was a message retweeted?”, “how many followers does the person who retweeted you have?” etc.

In this step, you’ll record your measurement of each metric. This is keeping statistics. Once you have completed your measurements, you’ll review each statistic.

Share of Conversation

Share of conversation is another important factor that should be tracked. It measures the degree to which a brand is associated with the problem or need that it is setting out to help with.

Reviewing Your Results

Reviewing your results is imperative for the following reasons:

- You can identify your winning actions and enhance these
- You can identify your unhelpful actions and eliminate these
- You can identify your non-optimum strategies and adjust these
- You can continuously adapt to market changes
- You can ensure you are taking effective steps towards achieving your goals

Conclusion

Social media is not a fad – it is here to stay. Your customers expect you to interact with them where they are – and today that’s on social websites. They expect you to be active and effective online.

A well-planned social media program based on listening to your audience will result in deepened relationships with your customers and other stakeholders. By tapping into the knowledge and desires of your customers, your PR strategy and content will be right “on the money”, and meet the needs of your audiences.

Markets have become conversations. Successful companies know how to...

- **Listen**
- **Learn**
- **Respond**

Contact Us

Whether you are new to social media, or are a seasoned veteran in need of “filling in the gaps” in your knowledge, our training courses and coaching can guide you step-by-step through the 10 steps of social media research, setting objectives, planning, implementation, and quality control.

The result is not a certificate. It is **you, successfully implementing** social media in your business, **competently** and **confidently**, with effective, measurable results.

Enquiries

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Glossary of Terms

¹ **social media:** the technology that enables us to share our thoughts and ideas online.

² **ROI:** Return on Investment. What you get out versus what you put in.

³ **fire-starter:** someone who can start a “conversation fire”. In other words, a person who can get others talking about something.

⁴ **dashboard:** a term now used generally to refer to a web technology based page on which real time information is collated from various sources. *Adapted from Wikipedia*

⁵ **tweet / retweet:** the equivalent of a cell phone text message, sent via Twitter. It often includes URL links. A retweet is such a message that has been sent again or forwarded by another person.

⁶ **R&D:** Research & Development.

⁷ **A-list:** a group of desirable or admired people.

⁸ **subprime:** being of less than top quality; used to refer to the market of people whose credit ratings are low.

⁹ **RSS:** Really Simple Syndication. RSS is the technology that allows one to syndicate and distribute content on the web. The most widespread use is in distributing news headlines and blog posts.