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Social Media for Business Part 3: What's your Strategy

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Strategy?

You're probably wondering why you still haven't read anything about tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs in this series. That's because that is the easy part of social media. Before you actually go public, you want to make sure you've done your homework on what you want to achieve by going online. You want to have a plan and not just open accounts on different networks and not have any conversations on those networks. You want to plan, organize and then implement.

You've listened to (read) conversations online about your company, industry, and competitors and other

relevant, interesting information. Based on your observations, you have the option to get involved – starting with a strategy. You can also choose to not dive into social media just yet. A third option is to do a trial phase, as Chris Brogan suggests in his blog [Social Media Strategy – The Planning Stage](#).¹ The trial phase implies not using your product or brand name in your social media efforts. For example, if you're a baker, then all you would do is use a generic term like "baker" instead of "XYZ baker" in your online presence.

Based on the information you acquire through listening, set a goal for your social media efforts and a strategy to achieve that goal. The strategy includes not the tools that will help you achieve a goal, but the path you take to achieve it. It entails deciding various elements such as – target audience, messages, how these messages align with your social media goal and overall organization goal, resources available to execute the plan and legal implications of messages.

What you need for a strategy

There is no universal strategy that every business can put into place. Tac Anderson, in his blog post [The 3 Types of Social Media Strategy](#), talks about how your social media strategy should align with the overall strategy of your organization.² Just as you would not implement a marketing strategy without your business goal in mind, you should not dive into social media without a goal and a plan. [Brambleberry](#), a soap making supplies company, has a blog and YouTube videos of how to use their supplies, tips and recipes to make soaps and toiletry

products. The main goal of Brambleberry is to sell soap making supplies. Teaching people how to make soaps and providing them with recipes helps Brambleberry sell their supplies.

There are some key elements to consider while designing a strategy:

Goal Setting – “What do we need to achieve?”

Based on the insights you get from listening to conversations online, set goals in terms of what you want to achieve through social media. Decide on whether you want to focus on acquiring new customers or on retaining old customers. Also decide if you want to push old products to new customers or introduce new products to your old customers using social media. Some goals that you can set are:

- Have a voice online
- Increase brand awareness
- Generate leads
- Drive revenues
- Build customer loyalty
- Provide customer service online

Technology – “Do we have the technology to participate in social media?”

It is true that you don't need to be extremely technology-oriented to implement a social media strategy. However, you do need a computer that has access to the internet to access to social networks. You should have an email address and accounts on the social networks that you want to use.

Resources – “Who can help implement the social media strategy?”

You can choose to utilize existing staff members or set up a separate social media department. If you decide to use existing staff members, keep in mind that:

- You might not have continuous resources to execute a social media strategy. You don't want other functions to be disrupted with the implementation a social media strategy. Your employees should be able to contribute on various social media channels without getting distracted from their core functions.
- Your employees might not be interested in social media. Getting a sense of what their interest level is and whether they are willing to help is important.
- You might need to provide training to employees who have no knowledge of social media.

If you are hiring someone specifically for social media, work with the person to make sure that your needs in terms of the strategy are met. Also keep in mind the added expenses to pay the new staff member.

In short, prepare a realistic strategy to incorporate resource availability.

Spokesperson – “Who can help get our message across?”

Is there a spokesperson for the industry your business is in? Is there a popular person on a network who people trust and listen to? Is there a way you can use social media so that this spokesperson can endorse your product? For example, if you are an arts and craft supplies manufacturer, you might consider finding a popular blogger or “how-to” video host who can demonstrate how to make an art or craft piece using your product.

Monitor and Measure – “What metrics do I use to know whether my social media efforts are successful?”

Measurement and monitoring involves continued listening to online conversations. It involves tracking how your messages on various social networks are being perceived. It requires following the type of conversations are triggered because of your conversations online. While formulating your social media strategy put a plan in place that is easy to measure – a plan that will provide you with results that are tangible. We will cover more on choosing metrics in **Part V: Monitor and Measure**.

Messages– “What should we talk about?”

There are different ways to have a conversation with your customers. One way is to attract people to your online presence and not to your product. You might also decide to use social media to drive people to your product or service.

- Tone – Decide on the tone you want to use based on how you want people to perceive your brand. Do you want people to perceive your brand as fun, romantic, professional or casual? How does the tone match with your product or service?
- Competition – Just as you would differentiate yourself from your competitor using your marketing strategies; differentiate your business from your competitors using social media. Offer something different from what your competitors currently offer.

Conversations– “What conversations should we be a part of?”

Participate in conversations that are most relevant to the messages that you choose to convey, and the networks that you want to participate in. You can choose to only comment on other conversations or start new conversations. Once you start a conversation don't leave it. Make sure that you follow the conversation until it is closed.

Networks – “Where should we be present?”

Based on the type of conversations you want to be a part of, you can narrow down on the tools. Start thinking about what social networks you want to be present on. This is based on where you see maximum conversation about your industry or where your customers are. It is not necessary that you are using all the networks you come across. However, it is important to be present on those networks where your customers are.

Part IV: Tools for Social Media, the next part in this series, will provide information on the tools and networks available for you to consider as part of the overall strategy.

References and Additional Resources

¹ Brogan, C. (2008, June 24). *Social Media Strategy- The Planning Stage*. Retrieved August 13, 2010, from Chris Brogan: www.chrisbrogan.com

² Anderson, T. (2010, April 8). *The 3 Types of Social Media Strategy*. Retrieved August 13, 2010, from Social Media Today: www.socialmediatoday.com