Social media Implementation Guide

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These materials are most effective when used in association with the book Digital Marketing Strategy

DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

Social media Implementation Guide

This guide is designed to give you a step by step guide to implementing your social media strategy.

Other guides are available for other digital marketing channels. To best understand how this fits into your broader strategy see the book Digital Marketing Strategy by Simon Kingsnorth.

How it works

The guide is designed to be as easy to use as possible. Each guide is broken down into simple, key steps to take to ensure your strategy is as effectively and smoothly implemented as possible. So less of this chat and let's get to the detail.

1 Consider your goals

It can be difficult to know where to start when developing social media strategy. The first step is to listen to the conversation. Brandwatch, Salesforce Marketing Cloud, Hootsuite and Keyhole are indispensable for understanding what people are saying and how they respond to different messages. Next, determine who you want to be in the social realm. Are you calm and informative, witty and cool with the kids, soft and emotional? Since the biggest sin on social is inauthenticity, whatever you choose should be entirely consistent with your existing brand personality.

To refine your strategy, ask yourself what you would like to accomplish. Is it growth, awareness, sales, reputation management, customer service, thought leadership or audience development? Then, find out who your audience is, where they hang out, when they are online and how they are engaging with your competitors.

When developing your content strategy, take care to address how you will produce and manage your content as well as curate content created by others. Lastly, determine your success metrics, considering the mobile-first nature of social media, which impacts how, when, and where content is consumed.

2 Understand types of social media

Though things change extremely quickly, the myriad of social media platforms available fit into seven broad categories: social networking (Facebook, Meetup), blogs and microblogs (Twitter, Sina Weibo), media sharing (Youtube), professional networking

(LinkedIn), reviews and ratings (Trip Advisor, Yelp), forums (Reddit) and the sharing economy (Airbnb, TaskRabbit). Remember, the lines between categories are blurring - Instagram, for example, now functions as both a media-sharing and social networking site.

Social networking, blogs, microblogs, media sharing and professional networking are all places where companies can create their own content and start their own conversations as well as participate in those going on elsewhere. While sales pitches and offers are perfectly acceptable on those platforms, they spell near instant death on review platforms and forums where the emphasis is on the honest opinions of regular people. When analyzing types of social media, assess not just format but user intent and interaction style on each platform to better tailor your approach.

3 Understand the social networks

The main social networks are Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, SinaWeibo, LinkedIn and Snapchat. Facebook, owned by one of the richest men in the world, is the clear market leader with 3 billion users. Though it has a reputation as the platform for olds, 60% of its users are between 18 and 34. The platform allows targeted advertising much like Google does, and is an important channel for B2C. Organic reach is almost impossible on Facebook, but it offers paid ads that can be seen on Instagram as well. Next most popular is YouTube with 2.8 billion users. Cat videos live side-by-side with how-to vlogs on any subject imaginable. How-to content and product reviews are also popular, as is people falling into, out of or off of things.

Twitter, aka X, gets a lot of airtime despite having just 650 million users. User data is now private post-acquisition by Elon Musk. While still important for real-time content, it has declined in brand usage and trust, especially due to reduced advertiser presence and content moderation concerns.

Instagram has 2 billion users and is a core platform for visual storytelling, B2B and B2C engagement, with high influence on purchasing decisions. Stories and vertical video are now standard expectations.

LinkedIn is considered the least fun of the social networks, but it can work very well in the B2B space and is a great platform to establish your CEO as a thought leader. Improved social selling tools like the Sales Navigator and lead generation tools help with targeting, keeping your lead database up to date and engaging prospects. While it's not nearly as popular as it was even a year ago, Snapchat, the platform that invented Stories, is still where the kids are hanging out.

Lastly is Sina Weibo, with 584 million users. This microblogging site is essentially Chinese Twitter and is popular with coastal, white-collar Chinese. Like Facebook, Weibo offers sponsored posts, paid amplification and highly targeted ads.

4 Consider content for social media

Social media is just one prong in a more comprehensive content strategy, and the mediums have a few quirks that make it a bit different to other distribution and communication channels.

Video should be prioritized across all platforms, as both algorithms and users consistently favor it. Facebook, YouTube and Instagram all offer live streaming capability and allow users to comment in real time. The trick is to plan well before going live, as disorganization and dead air erode engagement almost immediately. Augmented and virtual reality – like the Pokemon Go craze – are massive growth areas and should be explored if it fits with your brand. Stories are now standard on Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat, which support a real-time content strategy. Social publishing platforms such as Hootsuite, Sprout Social, and X Pro, can help by streamline scheduling, performance tracking, and team collaboration.

5 Working with influencers

Influencers are social media users with large followings – primarily on Youtube or Instagram – who are open to leveraging their reach commercially. The most valuable influencers have a lot of followers and high audience engagement, though what matters more is that they have authority in the niche that best fits your product. Micro-influencers, i.e. those with smaller but more engaged followings, can often deliver better results than macro-influencers, especially for niche or trust-sensitive sectors.

The most common way to work with influencers is to market through them with paid product placement. An alternative is to market to influencers with the aim of raising brand awareness. When this is done well, it can lead to marketing with influencers, that is turning influencers into advocates who will happily mention your product for free. Lastly, be aware that in jurisdictions like the US, influencer marketing is classified as paid endorsement, which is likely to extend to other countries very soon.

6 Advertising on social media

Content from a user's friends and family is prioritized over brand content, so achieving the necessary reach organically is no longer really possible. While social ads – sponsored or viral content, paid reach - are a direct response channel, it is vital that the deployment strategy is distinct to direct response display ads. Social platforms are a great place for highly engaging and experimental ads, as people are more likely to share something that elicits strong feelings, positive or negative.

Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok offer highly specific targeting options, making it possible to tailor campaigns based on detailed user data. You should set up conversion tracking, such as installing the Meta Pixel, to monitor performance and optimize ROI. Campaign content should be matched to user behavior, for example, using immersive vertical video on Instagram Stories or TikTok.

7 Understand the SEO angle

While we're not privy to all the search algorithm secrets, it is clear that there's a strong link between social engagement and search rankings. Prospects increasingly use social filtering (checking out recommendations from friends) to discover new brands or take advantage of coupons or affiliate codes. More and more traffic is coming to websites straight from social media links, which means prospects are bypassing Google completely.

Social media is used increasingly as a discovery tool, and likes, shares and positive sentiment can boost content reach and drive organic traffic by increasing inbound links and overall brand mentions. Ensure your social content includes relevant keywords, consistent links to your website, and supports your broader SEO goals.

8 Measuring success

Quantifying campaign success on social channels can be quite tricky as there are many factors in play, not all of which you can anticipate or control. That said, there are some standard metrics that give a good idea of how things went.

Volume and reach metrics measure things like number of mentions, followers and views. Engagement and quality metrics give information about number of comments and replies, how brands perform across all platforms and number of posts or shares related to the brand. Overall sentiment measures the amount of positive vs. negative engagement. All of these metrics can be imported from Brandwatch, Facebook Insights and Google Analytics into a single dashboard for easy monitoring.

Due to increasing scrutiny and data regulations such as GDPR and similar laws worldwide, marketers must carefully manage how they collect, store, and use customer data, especially when using features like interest-based targeting or uploading customer lists for lookalike audiences. Mishandling data can lead to severe financial penalties or reputational damage, so transparency and consent should be integral parts of your measurement and targeting strategy.