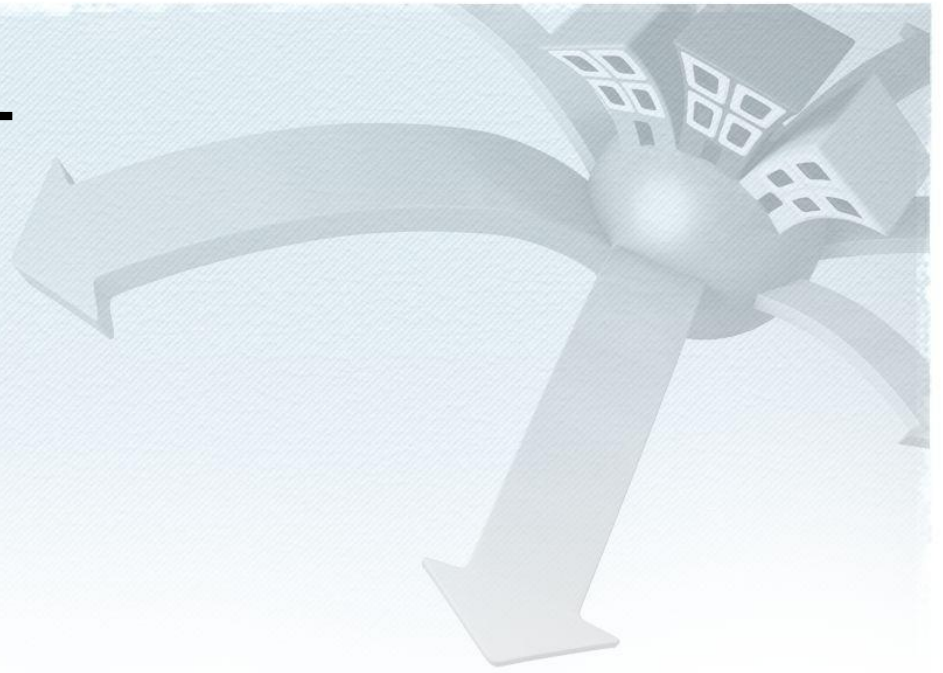


SmartForceNL



your social media marketing plan

part 1: getting to know and

understand social media

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1 Introduction

Everyone is talking about social media which, as its name suggests, involves bringing together social interaction and communication channels that are able to reach a wide audience of people. Social media is not about just viewing material, like reading a newspaper for instance. Instead, it is about getting involved in conversations; it's about making valuable contacts online. And businesses are rushing to be included. But there are problems. Every aspect of social media takes time, and there's hardly a businessperson alive who isn't already feeling there is just too little time in the day.

Even consumers are sometimes getting tired of social media. There are only so many hours to watch videos, chat with friends, and look at pictures of cats and babies.

Yet, despite these challenges, there is no denying that social media has great potential for virtually any organization's marketing, public relations, employee recruitment, or other communications programs.

1.1 How should you use this document?

There are literally millions of organizations either entering or already active in social media. Every one of them is at a different level of comfort and expertise. Because of this diversity, any document trying to help people get started in social media will seem too simple to some, and too advanced to others. Rather than trying to be all things to all people, this document focuses on the absolute beginner to social media, but assumes a basic level of comfort with computers and with commonly used browsers such as Internet Explorer, Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari, or Opera. It is also assumed that your focus is on using social media to assist your business or organization in its marketing, customer service, public relations, or employee recruitment activities.

This document is Part 1 in a three part series that will help you come up with a social media marketing plan that works for you and your business.

As the flow chart below demonstrates, this first document focuses on helping you get to know and understand social media. Part 2 delves into planning and implementing your social media, and finally Part 3 provides some valuable social media marketing tactics.

Flowchart: Breakdown of 3 parts of series



We sincerely hope that your starting here will make the entire process a lot less intimidating... and a *lot* more profitable.

2 Understanding Social Media

2.1 What is social media and why is it important?

Social media is a general term to cover Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, MySpace, and the hundreds of other places out there where you can create your own space and share content.



As opposed to traditional media, where millions of us sat to watch, listen, or read what the media was saying, we can now *become* the media, creating content that others can watch, listen and read. Even better, we can all share back and forth, commenting and building on what we each create, making this a very social media.

Never before in history could a student or senior sitting in St. Anthony or Shanghai write something or make a video that could be instantly seen around the world, for virtually no cost at all. Social media can make broadcasters of us all, and opens each of us up to the world's marketplace.

However, rather than replace your Website, social media should enhance or support your site by building and deepening your relationships. Through social media you can establish trust, credibility, and even friendships, so that your key audiences will *want* to visit your Website or physical location, or contact you in some other way to use your products or services.

2.2 What are some of the popular social media channels?

The best way to become familiar with the wide variety of social media channels is to get online and “play” with your options. Don’t be intimidated by the plethora of channels available to you. There are some popular channels that your customers are most likely frequenting so why not start by checking out those ones. As you play around on a channel, you may feel overwhelmed with the vast array of features each channel offers – again, don’t get intimidated. Keep your eyes open for features that may be useful to your business.

2.2.1 Facebook (www.facebook.com)

Businesses of all sizes can create a Facebook page for free and use it to increase brand awareness. A Facebook page is a fantastic place for you or your company “voice” to post promotion details, accolades about your superstar employees, warm thanks to your customers, news about job openings, and virtually anything else that you think might interest your followers.



Facebook page for Ocean Quest Adventure Resort

2.2.2 Twitter (twitter.com)

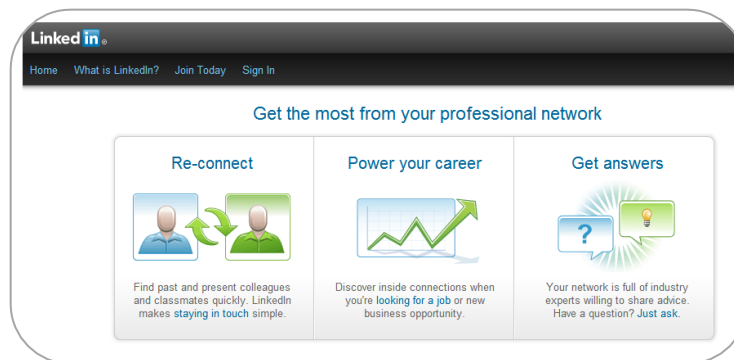
Twitter is a real-time microblogging service that can be used to grow your network of contacts. Instead of posting ads for products and services, you may have more success when posting tweets that show that you are paying attention to what is being said and are being responsive. Don't be pushy!



Tweet from the Idea Factory (@ifactory)

LinkedIn (ca.linkedin.com)

LinkedIn is a social networking site that is predominantly used for business purposes – in other words, professional networking. It is a powerful resource for generating leads.



What is LinkedIn? page on LinkedIn website

2.2.3 Foursquare (foursquare.com)

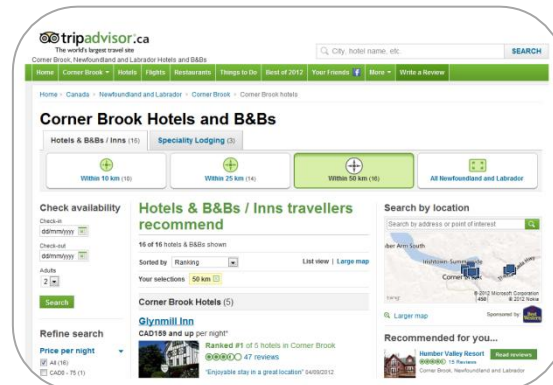
Foursquare is a free location-based social networking website that gives users recommendations for places (i.e., restaurants, stores) they should visit based on where a particular user has already been and where this user's tastes lie. Foursquare also allows users to let their friends know where they are by "checking-in" at a place using their mobile device.



Foursquare for Business page on Foursquare website

2.2.4 Trip Advisor (www.tripadvisor.ca)

Trip Advisor is travel website that enables travelers to share and view advice on travel choices, such as hotels, resorts, etc...



Corner Brook Hotels and B&Bs search on tripadvisor.ca

2.3 Is social media worth your time?

No marketing strategy or tactic is perfect for everybody. We are all unique, and so are our markets. However, some marketing vehicles or concepts can be adapted for use in almost any organization or project. As a prime example, social media channels such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter offer open doors to virtually every market or audience of possible interest. With proper attention to detail, they have the potential to be valuable elements in your organization's marketing mix.

There will always be some who say their market is not suitable for social media. Perhaps their target audience is seniors, or people in rural areas with little or no Internet access. In these situations, social media would indeed seem to have little marketing potential. However, if the company plans to still be around in a few years time, more and more seniors will have become comfortable with social media, whether to communicate with friends and family, keep in touch with topics or streams of interest, or even operate their own business ventures.

Even if a business is indeed serving some market that legitimately cannot be accessed through social media, they should still consider social media's ability to open up new opportunities to expand into new markets, or provide ideas and resources on how they can improve their marketing or other business practices.

With any movement, there have always been some people who say it is not important or that its time is over. You've probably heard plenty of people who say blogging is dead, social media is passé, Twitter is dying, or Google+ has no future. Those statements may all be true some day. But for now, those channels and many more are helping countless companies explore and expand their marketing and customer service efforts. Social media will no doubt seem old fashioned some day. But today, it is vibrant and full of potential for you, your company, and your customers.

2.4 Is social media a good fit for your business?

What works well for one company may not work at all for another. This is certainly true for social media. To determine whether or not you and your company are likely to benefit from social media marketing, carefully consider the following questions:

2.4.1 Do you have some time to commit to social media on a regular basis?

Social media is not a "do it once and forget about it" exercise. You will be building relationships, and like any relationships, they will need to be nurtured. If you are successful in social media, people will actually be engaging with you, asking questions and offering feedback and comments. That interaction is precious, and to leave such input unanswered would suggest insincerity or disrespect for the customers you have fought so hard to earn. At the very, *very* least, you should be engaged in social media at least two or three times per week, and preferably on a daily basis or more.

2.4.2 Are you comfortable engaging with people?

Social media is, well, social. Not all of us are. If you are easily annoyed by others or tend to snap back quick answers when someone is misinformed or says something that needs to be corrected, you would probably do well to have someone else handle your social media work for you. Interactions happen quickly online, and what gets said stays there for a very, very long time... essentially forever. If your responses do not come across as inviting and friendly, social media will be very good at delivering a message you did not mean to send.

2.4.3 Do you enjoy change and learning on an ongoing basis?

Social media is changing at an incredible speed. Over 200 million people now use Google+; just a year or so ago, it did not exist. Pinterest is now one of the fastest-growing social media platforms; a few months ago no one had even heard of it. Over the past few years, millions of us have grown comfortable using Facebook, but in recent months its timelines and other changes have completely changed the structure of our Facebook experiences, whether we like it or not.

Changes come rapidly, and the rate of change in social media is likely to increase with each passing day. If you enjoy learning and continually changing the way you do things, it can be a fun and profitable way to spend your time. However, if you are the type of person who just likes things to remain the same, you may find that social media is going to be a constant source of stress.

Social media requires work... and a lot of it. The good news is that it can deliver a solid return on your investment... and a lot of that too. By making sure it is a good match with you and your company, you are all the more likely to find it a very rewarding experience for you and your customers.

3 Using Social Media for Business

3.1 Don't sell. Socialize!

When starting out as a business in social media, it is tempting to think of it as another place to sell your product or services. Approaching things with this mindset is almost a certain recipe for failure.

Social media is, as the name suggests, a social experience. Many people compare it more to a cocktail party, or networking event, than a sales venue. If you imagine people meeting after work to get to know each other and share a few laughs, it should be easy to see that someone hurriedly working through the crowd, handing out business cards and saying why their product is the best, will not be well liked or even welcome there for very long. Don't be that person.



The ideal social media approach, whether in Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or virtually any other channel, is to build relationships. The marketing value of this is that you not only gain very valuable insights into your customer base, but you also establish a sense of trust and even friendship that will often make people much more inclined to or even eager to buy from you. Again, there can be a fine line here between *pretending* to be nice in order to get someone's business and *genuinely* being nice. No matter how good an actor you may be, people will sooner or later see through your act if you are pretending. You're here to build long-term relationships, and over time even the best actors become known for who they really are. So don't act nice. *Be* nice. Be caring and be interested in what people like and don't like. Be real.

This is not to say that you can never speak about your business in social media. In fact, there will be lots of opportunities to do so. People are often looking for advice or clarification, on topics related to almost any business. As you establish yourself as not only an authority on your particular product or service, but also someone who is very trustworthy and nice to know, you can build an exceptionally strong marketing channel for yourself. And as an added bonus, you are likely to build new partner or supplier channels, and in all likelihood, a number of new friends too.

3.2 What are the main points in a social media strategy?

The bridging of your business and social worlds through social media is not always easy to do. Focusing too much on making the sale will almost certainly turn people off from your business, and create the exact opposite outcome of what you wanted. On the other hand, focusing too much on being social can be a very rewarding experience from a personal point of view, but may or may not yield any actual business results for the many hours you may put into it. Your challenge is to find the best road between the two.

Having a social media strategy will help you do exactly that. It will identify what you hope to achieve from the investment of your time and energy into social media. It will pinpoint:

- the types of people you want to reach;
- the messages you will give them, and
- the channels through which you will deliver those messages.

What's next? In *Part 2: Planning and Implementing Your Social Media*, you will be taken step-by-step through the creation of a social media strategy for your business.