



Social Media Strategies

Your use of social media channels must be strategic, advancing your company's goals and enhancing your profitability

"Your use of social media channels must be an enterprise-wide effort that delivers measurable, positive results."

SOCIAL MEDIA HAS FOREVER ALTERED THE WAY WE communicate. Blogs, microblogs, wikis, social networks, professional networks, online news wires, RSS technology, podcasts, videocasts, and other social media tools necessitate a revised communication strategy.

You can employ these social media tools for a myriad of reasons:

- ◆ Communicating with employees and empowering their collaboration.
- ◆ Engaging your customers and prospects to attain the results you desire.
- ◆ Building your reputation and brand, and shaping your perception in the marketplace.
- ◆ Influencing behavior, increasing awareness, and growing a community of supporters.

Social media is fragmented and personal, and yet is a more effective means of communicating. Information is garnered from many different sources; you are no longer in control of all the messages.

Understand the five C's of social media. All social media share a common set of characteristics, the five C's: conversation, contribution, collaboration, connection, and community. Through social media, people state and discuss their thoughts and opinions, their experiences and expectations, and their perspectives about your company, your employees, your products, and your services. How you engage in this dialogue fuels your social media community, toward ill will and goodwill.

Grow your communities and engage them. You must manage your social media communication to achieve the greatest benefit from your company's efforts — essentially the collective efforts of your executives, management, and staff. Your target audiences are now your communities. You must engage them.

Set guidelines for interaction. Since messages can come from anyone in your company, setting guidelines is wise. Employees must be responsible and respectful, consider their obligations to the company (especially about disclosing confidential information and keeping the right of privacy), speak with authority only

when appropriate, and maintain common decency in their language and word choice. Policies can attend to participation in enterprise and employee blogs, social media networks, and online communities, perhaps even setting time limits so that staff don't get so involved that they shirk their daily responsibilities. All of these issues, and more, must be addressed in your social media guidelines.

Measure and monitor social media channels.

You must listen. This is key to setting your strategy for participating and responding and planning. You listen by measuring and monitoring.

There are dozens of tools, sites, and companies that help you listen. Some are free, some cost; some are effective, some a waste; some complicated, some simple. With this myriad of choices, contemplative investigation and analysis are needed. For instance, while there are numerous methods to monitor Twitter, success is not so much about the method, but about the characteristics of what you monitor so that you achieve meaningful results.

Blogs, of course, come with built-in monitoring tools, accepting comments from anyone and allowing you to reply. But do you review comments before permitting them to be posted? Such are the strategic decisions that must be made.

Establish your communication goals. While it's true that you no longer control the entire message, you can establish your communication goals and create strategies to send messages you want heard. Use your blog, your web site, and your responses to convey those messages. A well-written, polished news release is appropriate for established media channels. But trust in corporations has eroded. More human, seat-of-the-pants, open and honest messages are received better through social media channels.

Your return on investment. When properly implemented, social media enhances your company's brand and reputation, and ultimately your bottom line. But first, you need guidelines and a plan with clearly identified goals and strategies for an enterprise-wide effort that delivers measurable, positive results.