

Creating Your Social Media Strategy



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Social Media



It's a little overwhelming, isn't it? Everyone is chattering about social media like it's the cure for every business woe you've ever experienced, and you know it can be valuable... but how in the world do you get started? And where should you be present? And how should you be present? And how in the world will you fit it into your already overcrowded day?

Think of this document as a deep breath to calm the nerves. We're going to walk you through your strategy step by step and by the time we're done, you're going to be doing the right things for the right reasons. And best of all – have a plan you can follow consistently.

Let's dig into the key elements of your social media strategy.

Why?

Why are you investing the time?

Really – this is the part that most people skip. Hey, just open a Twitter account, slap together a Facebook page or open a free blog account somewhere and then they languish.

Let's talk goals. What do you want to get out of your social media activity? What needs to happen for you to declare it a success?

Set 3-4 goals and make them SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely. For example:

~ *I want to create content that generates two new leads a month, within six months of launching our SM program.*

~ *I want to get my site on the first page of Google for these two phrases (list them) within a year of launching our SM program.*

~ *I want to give our best customers an easy way to tell others about us by sharing our content at least ten times a month within six months of launching our SM program.*

Okay – your turn:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____



Who?

Who are you talking to/with?

And don't say everyone. Or everyone over 18. Just like in traditional marketing, it's critical to know who matters. You only have so much time – so you want to spend it creating content for your key audiences.

While the *why* is probably the most important part of your strategy, the *who* exercise will be the most helpful, if you do it. It feels like a bit of work, so many people will skip over it. We seriously suggest you don't. We're going to create three personas.

A persona is a made up person who embodies your target audience's traits, likes, needs, fears, and behaviors. Let us give you an example. Drew did this for his blog a few years ago. If you read through this post, you'll have a pretty good idea of what we're talking about: <http://bit.ly/mmgpersona>

Okay...now, think about the three types of people you want to connect with through social media. (Could be existing customers, potential customers, referral sources, business partners, employees, etc.)

Describe them in detail, as the example showed. And last but not least – give them a name so that they're very three dimensional to you.

This is probably going to take about a sheet of paper per persona so do the whole exercise some place where you can capture all the specifics and share them with your team. On this master document, just capture their essence and name.

Persona One:

Persona Two:

Persona Three:



What?

What do our personas do online? (The Who, part two)

Now that you've decided who you want to reach, we need to figure out how and where to reach them.

Where do they invest their time when they're online? Some of this will be educated guesswork on your part. (Check out <http://www.quantcast.com> for pure demographic insight) and then be observant and/or ask.

Go beyond where they go. Think about how they access content. Do they subscribe to everything via email or are they an RSS feed reader user? Do they get on the Web via their phone, a desktop or are they trendy and use an iPad?

When do they get online? Is it part of their 9-5 world? Do they only log on from home or at night?

What social media sites (blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, etc.) do your personas frequent?

What tools do they use to access the Web?



Where?

Where do our personas hang out? (The Who, part three)

Now that you know who your core audience is – and the types of online sites and communities they frequent, it's time to identify places where you can bump into those folks and create initial relationships on their comfortable turf.

Don't believe the line "if you build it, they will come." It may have worked for Kevin Costner in *A Field of Dreams*, but it's not how social media works. There are many good blogs and Facebook fan pages out there that have very few readers. If you want an audience – you're going to have to put in the effort. And that starts with engaging them in conversation where they already hang out.

Make a list of five places (could be blogs, Facebook fan pages, LinkedIn groups, Twitter topics or conversationalists etc.) where you could jump into existing conversations on topics that are tangential or parallel to yours.

Maybe your professional association has a blog or LinkedIn group? Is there a business that is similar to yours in another region of the country that shares your outlook on the industry in their blog posts? Use www.alltop.com to find leading blogs in your category.

If you need some help, use these tools to identify where the conversations are happening:

Google Blog Search (<http://blogsearch.google.com/>) searches the blogosphere for any keyword or phrase you enter.

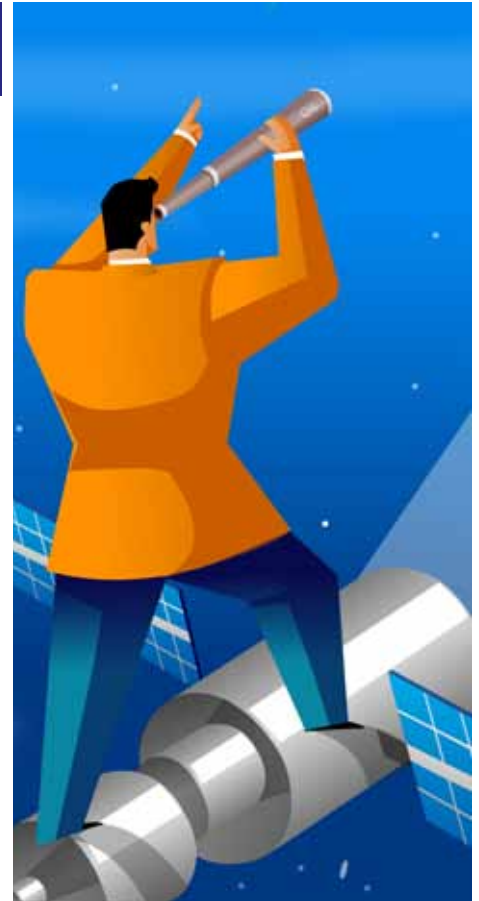
Twitter Search (<http://search.twitter.com/>) scans all Twitter posts for your keyword or phrase.

SocialMention (www.socialmention.com/) is a social media search engine that searches user-generated content like blogs, comments, bookmarks, events, news, videos, etc. and delivers email alerts when a new mention is posted.

List your five hot spots:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

We're going to use these hot spots when we get to the action plan stage of this strategy.



What?

What do they care about?

Many companies launch into the social media space talking about themselves. A lot. They post when they're having a sale or have completed a project. I can hear them now... "Enough about me, tell me – what do you think of me?" That's a conversation killer no matter what medium, but it is a surefire death in the social media space. (For more information, visit <http://bit.ly/mmgcocktailparty>.)

You need to create or share content that will matter to your personas. What do they care about? Why would they keep listening to you? What could you teach them? What could you learn from them? (Asking questions is the best way to generate conversation)

For each of your personas – think of at least five broad topic descriptions that would matter to them that are somehow related to your company. For example, if you made dentistry tools, one of your audiences would probably be the office manager at a dentist's practice. Her list of topics might be:

- ~ *Ways to entertain patients (and their kids) while they're waiting for an appointment*
- ~ *Health issues related to the dental profession (bad backs, carpal tunnel, etc.)*
- ~ *How to maintain dental tools*
- ~ *Dentist humor*
- ~ *Managing a medical/dental staff*
- ~ *How to grow a patient base through referrals from current patients*

You can see that none of those were about the dental tools you sell. So, if you talk about topics of interest to them 85% of the time, they will be happy to listen to your occasional (15%) talk about yourself and your offerings. Another way to think about this question is to ask – what kinds of information would this audience pass along to their peers? You can't force something to go viral (being shared) but you can certainly help by being worthy of sharing. While you're pondering topics, also note if you want to write about it, create or share video, photos, etc.

Okay – your turn:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



What?

What do we want them to do? (The What, part two)

Now that you know what you're going to talk about, you should also think about how you want the audience to react. What do you want them to do?

Yes, it's great that they are reading your blog posts or commenting on your Facebook page links – but marketing is about advancing a prospect to the point of being a buyer. Or moving a buyer to becoming a raving fan. So as you think about what social media tools you're going to use and the content you're going to share – ask yourself this: What do I want them to do next?

It might be to subscribe to an e-newsletter, request a quote, share your content with another prospective buyer, ask a question or buy something. But always give your audience a way to continue the conversation and move closer to you and your company.

What actions could you offer as a next step to your social media audience?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Note: Depending on where you're connecting with them, what you want them to do could be different. If they're reading your e-newsletter, getting them to sign up for your e-newsletter seems like a silly goal. But, getting them to request a quote or ask for a spec sheet might not be.

Or, the audience might dictate the action. You might want your peers to share your blog post but your current customers to re-order.



Putting All of This Into Action



Based on everything you've already discovered in this document, now is the time to determine what social media channels make the most sense for you. Remember... you should think about aspects of social media (listening and creating content) – and plan to spend some time in both.



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Listening/Commenting/Sharing

Here's where your five hot spots come in. You're going to want to monitor these conversations and jump in and add value on a regular basis.

Why? Because every time you do – you get to list your name and your Web address.

Sooner or later, because you're adding value and are incredibly interesting – the people of that community are going to get curious about you and click on your website link to see who the heck you are. And that's how they are going to discover the content you are creating...and hopefully find it fresh and relevant – so they stick around.

These are also sites you can use to find good content to share with others and as kindling for your own content. There's nothing wrong with building off of someone else's thoughts, as long as you give them credit and a link back to their original site.

This is the part of the action plan that people will never take the time to do. Which is why they're frustrated when they have very little traffic coming to enjoy all of their hard work.

If you want people to discover you and participate in the conversations that you start... you need to exhibit that behavior first.

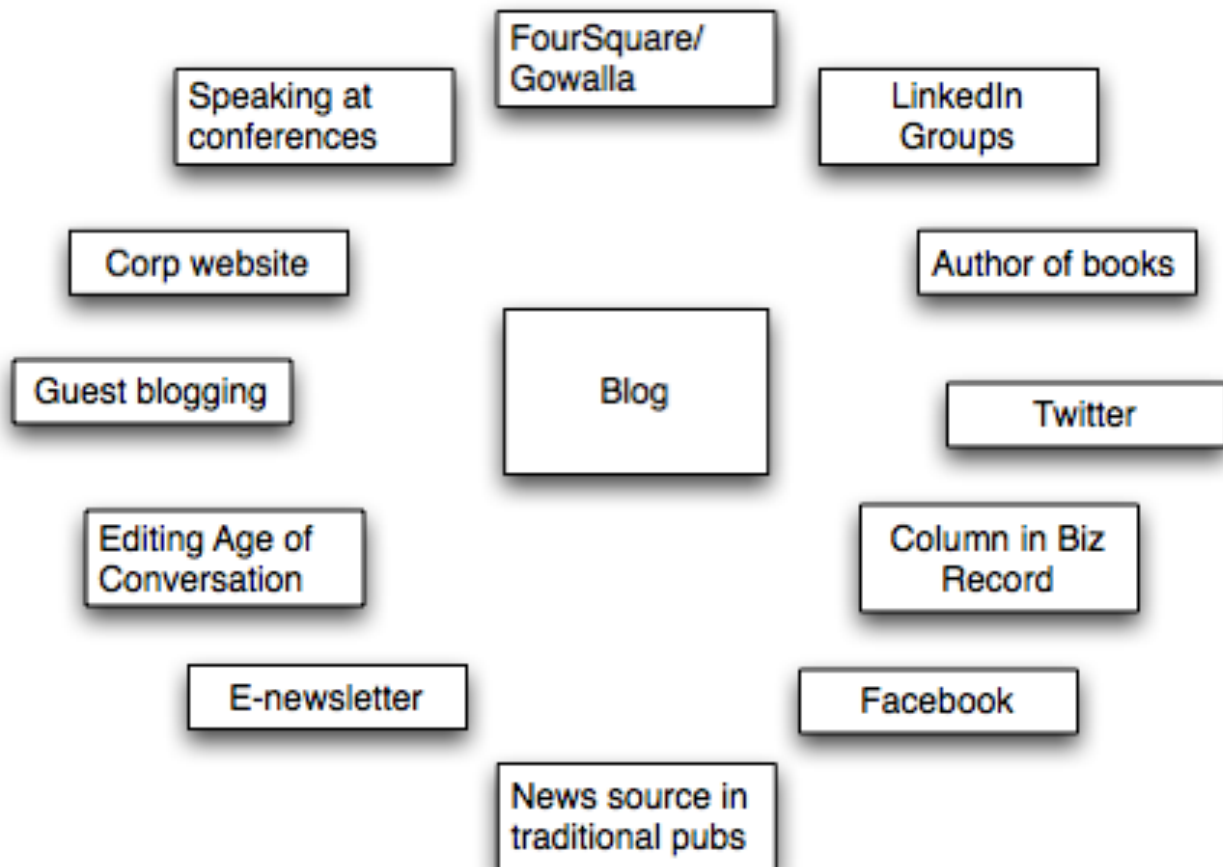


Creating Content

Okay...this is the part you thought we'd get to several pages ago. We now have the horse firmly in front of the cart, so it's time to think about what social media channels you're going to use.

We recommend that you build your web of content creation in a hub-and-spoke model. You need to have a core, or hub, for all of your social media activity. You can have lots of spokes...but they all build off the same hub.

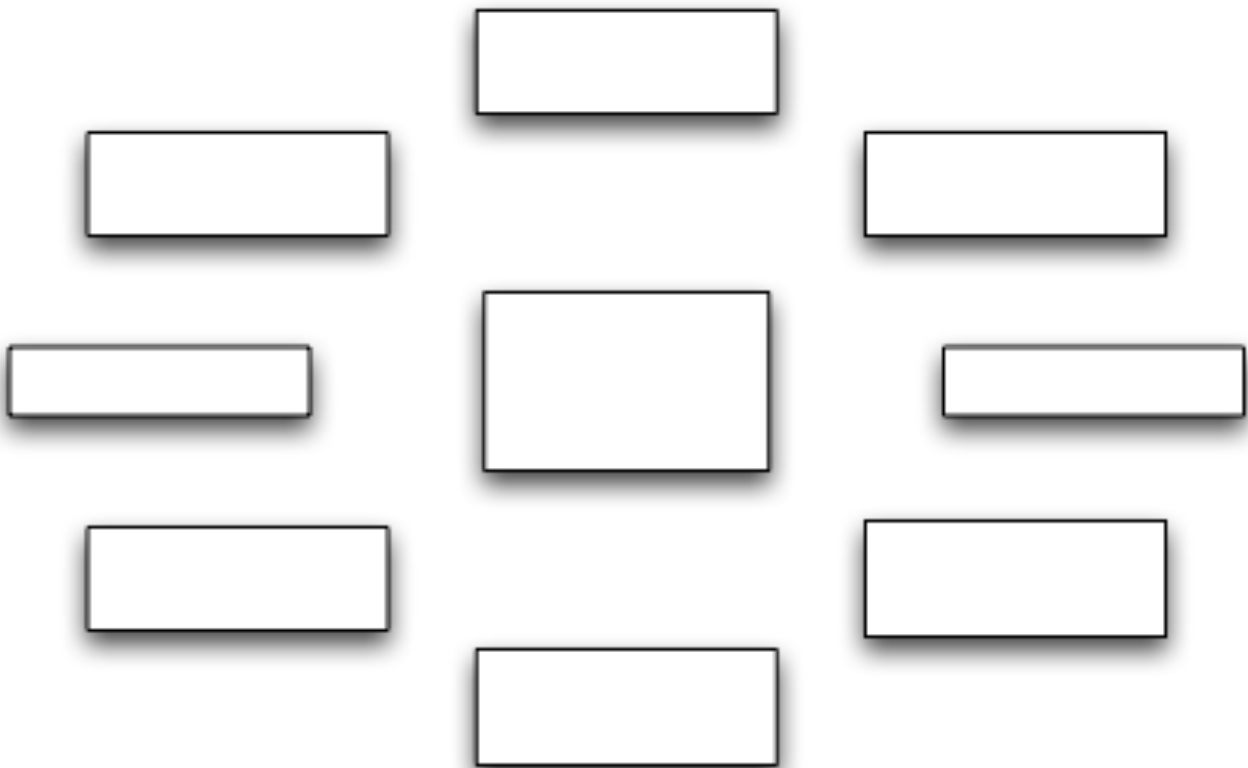
Look at how Drew's model plays out – with his blog being the center of the action. Note how we've blended online and offline marketing among the spokes.



Creating Content (cont)

Now we're not suggesting that you need to have anywhere near this many boxes or levels of engagement. But you can see how all of the spoke activity was born on the blog or points back to the blog.

Using the blank hub-and-spoke below... think through what you want as your spokes and hub. Keep in mind that every spoke does not have to be where you create content. It could also be where you listen and comment. You might also include some items you are already doing – but can now link back to the hub.



Your action plan's schedule

Now that you can see the bigger picture of your social media's digital (and analog) footprint – determine your social media schedule. For each box, identify how often you are going to add new content.

So your schedule might look like this:

Every day:

- Review listening post data (Google Alerts, SocialMention, Kurrently, etc)
- Tweet link to content that would be of interest to one or more of your personas
- Comment on at least one of the hot spot locations
- Jump into a Twitter conversation and add value or start a conversation

Every week:

- Two Facebook fan page posts – one asking a relevant question and the other, sharing knowledge
- Scan your LinkedIn groups to see if you can add to the conversation

Every month:

- Host a webinar on a topic of your expertise
- Submit your best blog post of the month to article marketing sites
- Attend a local Tweet up (a gathering for Twitter users)





Your action plan's schedule

Your turn:

Every day:

Every week:

Every month:



How will you be real?

Here's the kicker. If you write like you're "marketing" or "selling" you will very quickly be talking to yourself. Social media is a different beast. Whether you're Dell or Debbie's Deli – people want to interact with a real person. A living, breathing human being.

So how do you find the blend of communicating about your business and being real? It's simple – how do you talk to people who walk in your store, e-mail you a question or call your business phone number?

Better yet – how do you talk to clients you've worked with for years? You talk to them like you. All of you. You might mention that you're having a sale but you might also share that you're heading to Hawaii for vacation.

That's how you are real. Don't use technical jargon. Don't sound corporate. (even if you're in charge of social media for a huge corporation). Let your personality breathe into your blogging, tweets and wherever else you might hang out online.

There's a fine line, of course. You want to watch your language and tone. You're still representing your organization. But be you. And don't worry if a little bit of your personal life seeps through. People do business with people. And they like knowing you have a dog that ate the sofa cushion, or the kid who got on the dean's list in college.

Relationships are forged by sharing and connecting. Be sure that you give them enough of you to make that connection.

Be real.



Final Thoughts



Just a few words about this. Don't think of your social media activity as a separate activity from your other marketing and communications.

Think about how you can integrate all of your marketing efforts.

- At your client appreciation gathering – have a computer opened up to display your Facebook page and ask your guests to become a fan/like it.
- On Twitter, share a link to your print ad campaign (which of course you posted on your blog or website).
- Put your Facebook page URL or Twitter name on your business cards.

It's all one big effort so don't lose sight of how they connect together.



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Holy buckets! Where do I get stuff to write about?

Hopefully the work we did in the “what” section of this exercise got your brain percolating a bit. But it can be a daunting concept – you are a content creator and you’re going to be producing content on a regular basis. So what happens when you get writer’s block?

Let’s identify some sources of kindling... idea starters, brain joggers, and even complete news to you places. There’s nothing wrong with getting inspiration from someone else’s writing or ideas. As we said earlier – just give them credit. And don’t be surprised if people start using your words as their kindling too!

Some kindling sources are:

- Content you’ve already created (back issues of newsletters, presentations, articles, interviews you’ve done, etc.)
- Books you’re reading
- Blogs in your RSS feed reader (you might want to subscribe to a few more... to keep the fires stoked)
- Conversations with clients or customers
- Questions you often get asked about your product or service
- Trade publications or industry websites, magazines or meetings
- Twitter/Facebook conversations
- Questions your employees/teammates ask you

Where else could you find kindling? List at least five specific sources so you’ll never have a dry spell:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Congratulations. If you’ve actually worked your way through this entire exercise, you’re well on your way to really understanding and enjoying the potential of social media.



A Final Thought or Two

First, congrats on actually working your way through this ebook. You've thought through strategy, audiences, topics, media -- it's all downhill from here, right?

Almost. Social media is not for the weary, thin-skinned or instant gratification crowd. It's an investment of time, energy, focus and expertise. That investment will pay off in ways you can't imagine. But it won't be overnight. So don't get discouraged and don't check your stats every day. You'll drive yourself nuts.

Instead -- recognize that what you're doing is for the long haul and stay the course. It probably won't end up being exactly the course you charted. Social media has a way of taking you on some pretty spectacular adventures with some unexpected destinations. But it will serve you and your organization well.

That, we promise. Enjoy the ride!

