

# Understanding Social Media Strategies

Whether you're new to social media or you're an experienced hand, you'll need a strategy to make the most of your time online. Without a strategy, your tweets and posts are like shooting a gun in the dark. If you don't know where you're aiming, you're not likely to hit your target.

Having a social media strategy will illuminate everything you do and ensure you stay focused on the prize. Let's take a look at how this works.

## What is a Social Media Strategy?

A strategy is nothing more than a plan to achieve your goals. Your social media strategy will help you determine which tactics you will use, and when. In addition, it will describe how you will measure success.

First you will need to set some goals. These might include:

- Link building
- Increasing traffic to your website
- Building credibility
- Improving your search rankings
- Building relationships with potential clients

Once you have determined your goals, you need to identify which social media platforms your audiences use so you don't waste time in the wrong places. How do you find out? We suggest you start by visiting clients' websites and looking for links to their social media sites. Look around on these social pages and see if there is much activity on them. Most firms that use social media spend the most time on LinkedIn and Twitter, though a few put considerable time into YouTube, Facebook, and others, too. You may also want to ask clients where they engage on social media.

Next, you should check LinkedIn for groups that discuss topics of interest to your clients — places where you can share advice and links to your thought leadership (to learn how, see *How to Use LinkedIn for Individuals*). And keep your eyes open for other online forums where your clients and prospects congregate.

Consider how you want to represent your brand on each social media platform. For example, Facebook may be the place to show off the lighter side of your company culture, while LinkedIn tends to be more professional and issues focused. Just make sure you don't present two entirely different experiences on different channels — your voice and tone remain consistent everywhere.

Finally, think about what you want to accomplish with social media and which metrics provide some measure of these goals. For instance, if you are most interested in creating visibility for your firm, you may want to track Twitter followers. Or do you want to drive traffic to your thought leadership? Then you may want to measure conversions from links you share on LinkedIn and Twitter. By watching and improving your social media efforts over time, you will be able to reach more and more qualified prospects and deepen your trust among your online network.

## Where Does a Social Media Strategy Fit in Your Overall Marketing Strategy?

Your social media strategy is part of a larger effort — your overall marketing strategy. Within your marketing strategy, social media plays a very specialized role: it allows you to expose your business to a narrowly defined but broadly dispersed audience at very little expense.

While the details will vary, most social media strategies might involve increasing visibility and establishing a firm's reputation as an expert.

Just keep in mind that social media can't do everything. Since social media platforms are communities, it's more difficult to personalize messages to individuals or finely segment your audience (these are things that email, for instance, handles very well). You also have to be careful that you don't come across as overly self-promotional, or you risk turning off your audience. So design your social media strategy to focus on these platforms' strengths, and use other marketing techniques to move your prospects toward deeper engagement.

One more thing to keep in mind: while social media can strengthen your brand, it can ruin it, too. You can spend months or years building a consistent voice and image across many channels. And you can bring it all crashing down in an instant if you say the wrong thing to the wrong audience. So think carefully about the words you use and the messages you send.

## Conclusion

Social media come with many advantages: they are immediate, they are measurable, and they have a wide reach. These characteristics make social media powerful marketing tools — but you need to use them in concert and in a way that supports your firm's overall marketing plan.

That means developing a thoughtful social media strategy: First, think through your goals and what social media can do to accomplish them. During this process, try to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each platform. Next, determine where your target audience engages in social media and build your strategy to focus on those areas. Finally, figure out how social media fits in the overall fabric of your marketing plan. Ask yourself where other tools, such as your website or email, can pick up where social media leaves off.

Once you've figured out your strategy, write it down and turn it into a plan. Develop a schedule to keep you in front of prospective clients on a regular basis. Most importantly, turn your social media activity into a habit. You'll be amazed how quickly you and your firm become visible, respected, and sought-after members of your network. Increased leads, revenues, and profits will follow.

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