



Welcome to The Beginner's Guide to Social Media!

Welcome to The Beginner's Guide to Social Media! Whether you're new to social media or just looking to close a few knowledge gaps, we're glad you stopped by. By now, we've all heard how valuable—even essential—social media can be. Whether your current sentiment leans more toward enthusiasm or trepidation, there's no way around the fact that social media is a far more complex field than it first seems. Diving in without a sense for what it's like can be overwhelming, and building a network that provides real value takes both savvy and hard work, but fear not—we're here to help! We hope you'll find this to be one of the most comprehensive social media resources available, and that no matter what your skill level is, there's plenty in here to help you improve your social presence. What are we waiting for? Let's dive in!

Chapters

1	2	3	4	5	6
Introduction	The Value of Social Media	Social Media Best Practices	Social Media Metrics and ROI	Find the Right Network for You	Facebook
7	8	9	10	11	12
Twitter	Google+	LinkedIn	YouTube and Pinterest	Blogging	Social Doesn't Stop There



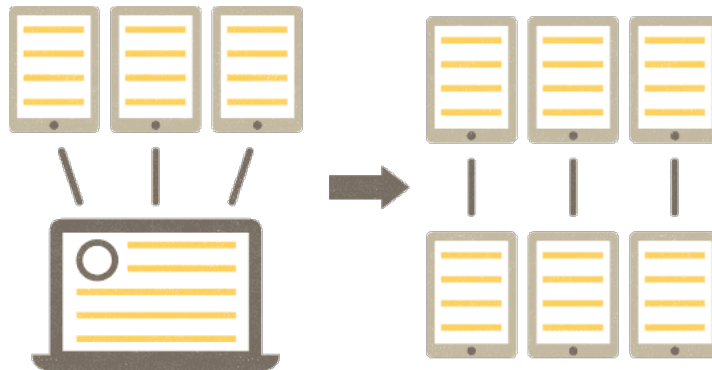
Chapter 1

Introduction

What is social media?

"Social media" is a way for people to communicate and interact online. While it has been around since the dawn of the World Wide Web, in the last 10 years or so we've seen a surge in both the number and popularity of social media sites. It's called social media because users engage with (and around) it in a social context, which can include conversations, commentary, and other user-generated annotations and engagement interactions.

Publishing content has become exponentially simpler over the last several years, which has helped skyrocket the use of social media. Non-technical web users are now able to easily create content on a rapidly growing number of platforms, including those that are owned (hosted communities, blogs, etc.), rented (social networks or third-party communities), and occupied (commenting, contributing, etc.). Today's web has shifted from a "one-to-many" to a "many-to-many" method of engagement, and we're loving it.

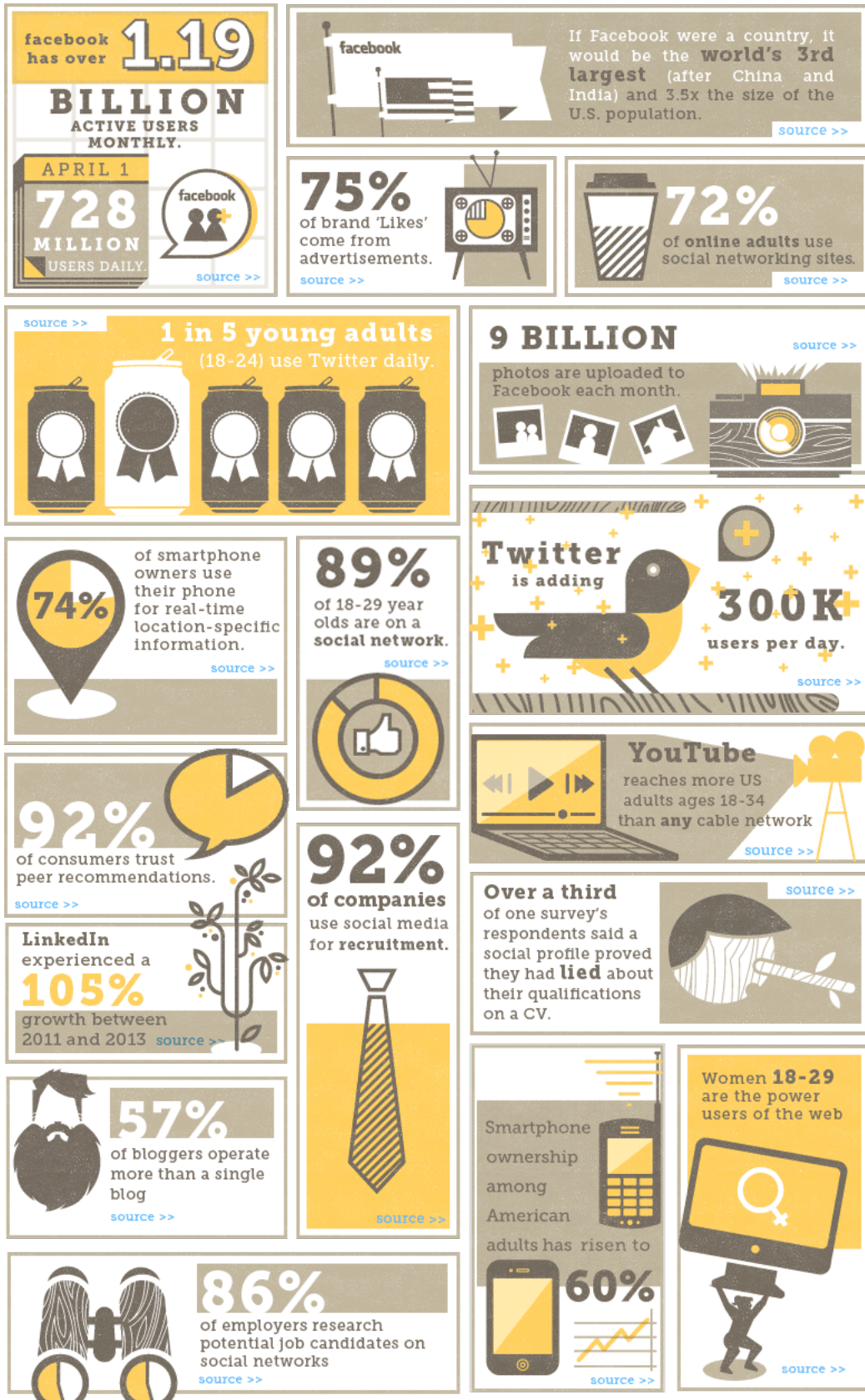


For businesses, the shift in web consumerism and accompanying rise in social media brings both opportunity and responsibility. The sheer amount of data that customers make available through social media alone has web marketers jumping for joy. The real magic, however, lies in the opportunity to grow lasting and scalable relationships with your organization's customer base through social media. This is also where your online responsibility to your customers begins to take shape. Just as your customers' behavior has shifted, so have their expectations for yours. Whether your business is listening and engaging or not, customers are having conversations relevant to your operations. It's better to be part of the conversation, right? We sure think so!



Is social media just a fad?

Over the last several years, there has been an explosion of growth in popular social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, and many others. It's safe to say that the era of social media is just getting started, and the need for social media in business will only become stronger over time. The whole world has seen the impact of the expansion and adoption of social media tactics, and the rising stats speak for themselves.



Why does my company need social media?

Whether you are running a small, local operation, or heading a global, enterprise-level effort, the statistics above make it clear: Your customers are online. They are interacting in social channels with their friends, colleagues, and other brands in search of information, recommendations, and entertainment. If your company is not around to answer, a competitor will be. In doing so, your competitor will quite likely take away the customer at hand, along with anyone else listening.

There are tons of opportunities to add value—even to delight!—and making that connection can help build a person's relationship with a company, brand, or representative. Those relationships create the foundation for what can eventually become one of your greatest marketing assets: customer advocacy.

Because so much of the customer experience now lives on the web, social media enables brands to take part in a customer's online experience outside of the typical channels.



If you ever find yourself in a bind, your advocates will help remind the rest of the world who they're rooting for. Advocacy is not something that you can stumble upon or buy. Advocacy is earned over time through continuous and positive engagement with your customer base. It is earned through experiences that delight, and through the delivery of the highest class of customer service.

Advocacy is the nirvana of social media, and it is through advocacy that your efforts start to truly scale and grow. It shows that your brand is doing such an amazing job that your customers shout about your brand from rooftops, sharing their opinions and experiences with their networks. That sharing is the best marketing a brand can ask for.

Identifying potential advocates is a good first step. You can use social tools (many of which are outlined in the rest of this guide), site data, customer data, and even your own observations to help you pick out which customers are likely to go to bat for your brand. You'll want to figure out what is most important to those potential advocates. What are they looking for? Are they fishing for recognition? Are they excited by exclusive access to news and/or content? Figure out what type of advocates your brand attracts and find ways to recognize them for their advocacy. It is important to note, though, that most of your greatest community relationships will be built organically. While your research and brand knowledge encourages people and helps you put the right foot forward, relationships take time.



The transition from a passive web to an interactive web has brought with it many changes affecting how individuals connect with one another and also how businesses operate. At this stage in the game, it's fair to say that a web presence is critical to the success of a business. You can't get ahead if you're ignoring your customer's online conversations or opting to look the

other way. Use this opportunity to get closer to your audience than ever before—reach more people in a genuine and authentic manner, drive more qualified site traffic, increase the authority of your brand, engage the people who influence your customers' behavior, and gain the data necessary for insights-based business decisions.

Maybe a better question is, why wouldn't your company use social media?

How can social be a springboard for success in other marketing channels?

Keep in mind that neither your customers' experience nor your brand starts with Twitter, Facebook, or your blog. Social media should take your existing brand and solidify it, galvanize it, and bolster it. Your efforts in social media should be an extension of everything else you do in all departments of your company. Capturing your company's voice and sharing it with the world through social media will open up unique opportunities in all other channels of inbound marketing, including SEO, branding, public relations, sales, and more.

Relationships

To get the most out of social media, make the relationships you build with it your end goal. That might sound a bit utopian for anyone who is grounded in more traditional and tangible business measurement and metrics, but take a step back from the bottom-line, ROI-seeking aspect to look at the big picture for a minute. The relationships built with customers are the foundations upon which other aspects of your business can and will flourish.

Relationships flourish when you cultivate them, and no other area offers you the opportunity to do this as well as social media. Social channels have broken down the walls between individuals at an unprecedented rate. In 2011, Facebook released data showing that its users were, on average, [3.74 degrees of separation](#) away from one another, making them nearly as connected to each other as [Kevin Bacon is to the rest of Hollywood](#). In the years since that study, the network has only continued to grow. That's pretty amazing, and social media can take credit for making it happen.

Some of the most successful SEOs and public relations professionals earn their notoriety, at least in part, from the relationships they are able to build. They're also good at what they do, of course, but great relationships bolster their already solid effort. The relationships you build with your customers lead to advocacy and loyalty, traits that can support your brand during both the good and the bad times, representing an investment that will remain strong on nearly any platform and under nearly any circumstances.



Feedback

Information can be shared through social media at an amazingly fast pace, and users are increasingly turning to social channels to share information in real-time. This information often takes the form of opinions, so if you're listening for the right cues from your audience, social media can become an invaluable source of insights and feedback. Incorporating social listening into product development work can act as an early warning system, save on customer service costs, provide valuable development feedback, and even help identify ideal beta testers without much expense.

Integration

Social media is not something you can simply "tack on" to the rest of your marketing, branding, PR, and advertising efforts; it needs to be a fully integrated part of the mix. In doing so, you can create a cohesive and scalable experience for your customers. Think of it as a means to an end, and not an end in itself. Also, it's not as hard as it sounds.

Be sure to integrate social media into your marketing efforts as early as possible to help amplify and solidify your work rather

than waiting until the end of a planning cycle to explore social options. If a social presence is clear from the start, your branding will benefit from additional customer touchpoints, PR will see a lift in impressions and reach, and customer service can proactively listen and activate where necessary.

As you can see, a social presence can have far-reaching impact for your organization when it is executed in an authentic and thoughtful manner. By making social engagement a core part of your operations rather than an afterthought, you have a better shot at fully leveraging its power.



How much of this guide do I need to read?

As you can probably already tell, there's more to social media than often meets the eye. While this guide is designed to be helpful no matter how much you read, we really recommend going cover to cover. Although every section might not apply to your social campaigns now, you'll gain a deep understanding of the moving parts you might want to implement later, and you will be well-poised to create the most effective strategy you can.

If you'd rather print it out and take it with you, we have a [handy-dandy PDF](#) of the entire guide available for you to download.

Chapter 2

The Value of Social Media

Building and engaging a community

Perhaps the greatest value of social media marketing is your ability to foster and engage with a community of other people. That engagement is at the heart of social media, and without it, you're left with a megaphone and no one to hear you. You have the opportunity to interact with customers from all over the world—including those who are right down the street—on a huge scale. If a current or prospective customer has something to say to you or about you, you now have the ability to respond immediately.



In addition to responsive communication, brands and businesses can begin to build relationships with their customers beyond those that happen during normal transactions. These relationships are what keep customers coming back, increasing both loyalty and retention. If those customers become advocates and increase your word-of-mouth presence, you'll start seeing amazing returns.

By providing a great place of engagement for your community and helping build valuable, authentic resources for your brand's niche, you're also building up authority for your brand within your industry. You'll find your customers increasingly trusting what you say and coming to you for resources that can help them solve their own challenges. Heck, you may even find yourself lending a hand to a competitor in the space. All brands start in a similar unknown place, and the more you give, the more authority you'll get back. A great example is [REI](#), which not only sells outdoor gear, but is also a known resource for tips on hiking, snowshoeing, [zombie survival](#), and a whole host of other activities centered around the outdoors.

Moving from "like" to "love" to "defend"

The feelings of any community member toward your brand can range from resentment to adoration and beyond. We'll address the negative feelings later on; the people we want to concentrate on now are those we hope to move along a spectrum from simply "liking" you all the way to being willing to defend you and your brand.

The first step is getting people to simply like you, whether on Facebook, by word of mouth, or however. The people who like you are consistently having their expectations met. This typically feels transactional with a low level of engagement, though there's certainly nothing wrong with that.

Like any relationship, forming bonds that take you to the next level highly depends on the needs of both your brand and the individuals with whom you're interacting. You want to form these bonds on positive experiences you have together that benefit both of you. (This is not to say that bonds can't be formed through adversity, but having say a positive Twitter exchange around helping someone is better than one around how your product is malfunctioning.) Even better if these experiences bring delight and build your unique brand voice. For example, when Kotex started their Pinterest account, they selected 50 female users and [sent them unique packages based on their Pinterest boards](#). Not only were these women surprised and happy, but all shared about what Kotex did on their social networks, creating a cascade of warm feelings.



There is another level where this relationship grows even deeper. When a customer becomes willing to defend your brand, you know you've really outdone yourself. This final "willingness to defend" stage is brand and social nirvana, as community members are not only engaging frequently and providing recommendations, but also standing up to [advocate your work](#) and defend you from brand detractors.

You can never expect your community to handle 100% of the customer service issues or questions that arise. They aren't fully equipped, and it's not their job. But you can expect, after your initial investment and cultivation, that some community members will begin to step up and help out when they can and where appropriate. (This is a good time to think about how to recognize and even reward your most active participants.) When that happens, you begin to see how your efforts will start to scale as you continue to boost your community engagement efforts. It frees you up to work on other engagements, and as you might imagine, an advocate standing up for a brand is far more powerful than a brand standing up for itself. There's a level of authenticity built into that sort of peer-to-peer interaction that can't be found in brand-to-customer interactions.

It's not just about marketing

The community engagement that social media affords is beneficial to nearly every part of your organization, from the product team to HR and more. As an added bonus, getting more colleagues involved will lighten your load. To get you started, here are a few areas that see the most obvious value.

Content creation

By using your search traffic data, on-site engagements, and social listening efforts, your social media presence can help you determine what people are looking for and create content that fulfills their needs. (Not to mention giving you a wonderful way to share that content once it's available.) Topics for content will likely fall in one of three buckets:



Learn and improve

This type of content is designed to optimize your customers' tasks or workflow. You are attempting to make their lives better by more fully utilizing your product (feature education, etc.), or even by offering assistance. The main goals of this content type are to build authority, drive connections, and increase engagement.



Explore and discover

Customers wanting to get creative and find new ways to use your product are looking for this type of content. For this group, building relationships is going to be tantamount; these relationships will breed ideation and community.



Question and answer

This type of content serves to meet customer support needs. Something has gone wrong, and customers seek a solution. This can range from a detailed forum thread on resolving a technical issue to a simple question and answer on how to make a product return. Your main goal is to drive answers.

Also, don't overlook the content that can be generated within your own community. User-generated content can be amazing — a gift, even! Your users can help write what your audience finds interesting, relevant, and useful. The possibilities are endless.

Using analytics tools like [SimplyMeasured](#), [True Social Metrics](#), as well as tools from the networks themselves, you can

measure the conversations you're having on Twitter, Facebook, Google+, and even YouTube for content creation ideas. The big takeaway: Members of your community are openly talking about what they want. In order to reap the benefits of that conversation, all you need to do is listen. It's remarkably easy to derive meaningful insights when you're looking in the right places.

Customer service

It's a pretty natural human reaction to complain when something doesn't go our way. In the past, we might simply have vented our frustration to a couple of friends. Now, we turn to Twitter and Facebook. A much larger audience is listening there — one that is not limited by geography and has the ability to easily amplify any complaints. As a company, when individuals use their social channels as a means of complaining about you, it can be frightening at first. It can feel like you're being attacked and like you have no control. But these truly are opportunities to jump in and help rectify the situation, even improving the customer's experience with your brand.



Bottom line: We're rising with the tide of our customers' expectations.

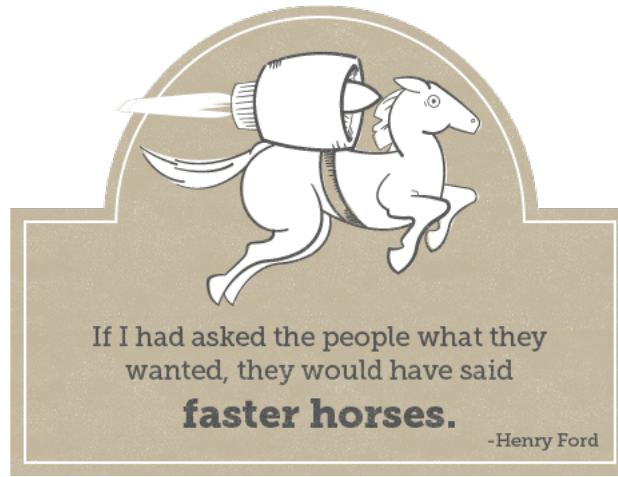
Not all customers will address you directly, however, so it helps to be listening. Always make sure it's clear and easy for people to easily contact you. It may help prevent a Twitter rant or an upset Facebook update.

Some customers out there are ready to engage with questions, concerns, and even complaints, and it's your job to be there. But you don't have to do it alone. Remember that as you move your community members into more meaningful relationships with your brand, they'll stand up to defend you. You have to put in the muscle up front, but after a while, you'll start seeing evidence of your community stepping in to help each other on your behalf.

With some training and an emphasis on consistent voice, social participation can be picked up by other customer service-oriented departments inside the company. When social engagement is not the sole responsibility of a social media marketing professional, but rather a distributed effort across functional areas of the company, you'll be able to better serve your customers while running an efficient and informed business.

Product development

At no other time in history have businesses had more access to customers at scale than they do now, and product development stands to benefit from this perhaps more than any other group. Input from social media, though, can be both a blessing and a curse, as people don't always know precisely what they think or want. There's a quote widely attributed to Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company, that goes, "If I had asked the people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses."



It's easy to make the mistake of treating all customer input as gospel. Feedback is incredibly important, but that being said, you should take that feedback in the context of everything else you know about your product and your brand. A few complaints are not necessarily representative of your entire userbase, so the feedback you're seeing may not be completely representative of the truth. There are several tactics you can employ to make sure you're gleaning all the right benefits of this customer feedback without assigning artificial weight.

Create beta/tester communities: This can be done in a couple of ways. You can curate a list of community members who would be most helpful—power users from across the social web, enthusiast bloggers, and so on—into a group connected by email, a Facebook group, or other social mechanism. You can also create special restricted areas of your forum-based communities where these power users can converse, engage, and network while participating in conversations you generate. This special access can serve as a reward for those community members, and it can lead to incredibly useful insights for you and your brand.

Listen for your competition: As you listen for product feedback, you'll want to analyze sentiment, look out for specific problems, and see what the greater community says about your competitors. Conversations happening around your competition's products/offerings can provide endless amounts of insight for your own efforts.

Measurement: Just as you can glean insights about your products by sifting through your web analytics, you can gain similar clues by watching and measuring the performance of your social channels. Do posts about one product frequently outperform similar posts about another? Your customers might be telling you something about which they like better.

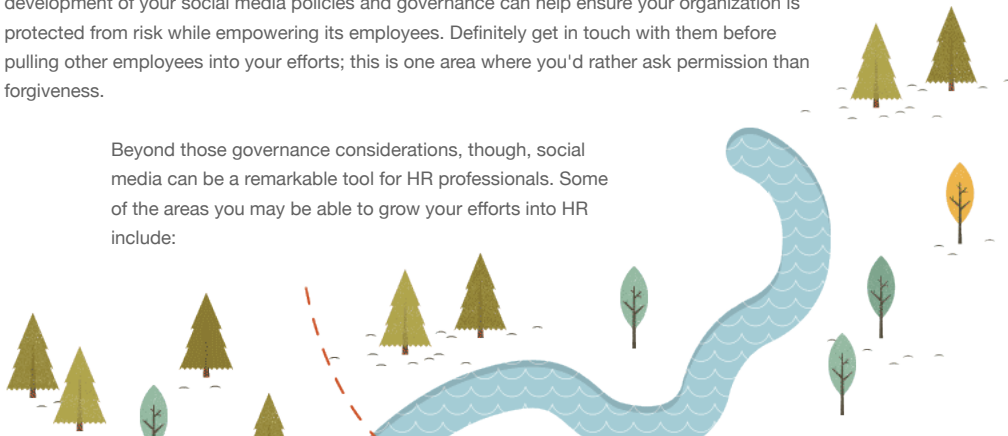


Human resources

Social media can play a wonderful role in HR, as well: encouraging employee engagement, finding and connecting with new recruits, and even helping with retention efforts.

A word about governance: Depending on the culture at your organization, your HR department might need to play a part in any implementation of social media, and regardless of the culture, getting their buy-in is always a good idea. Working with your HR professionals during the development of your social media policies and governance can help ensure your organization is protected from risk while empowering its employees. Definitely get in touch with them before pulling other employees into your efforts; this is one area where you'd rather ask permission than forgiveness.

Beyond those governance considerations, though, social media can be a remarkable tool for HR professionals. Some of the areas you may be able to grow your efforts into HR include:





Recruiting

Social channels are the perfect place to reach new applicants. People search for job openings online, and chances are that some of them have already "liked" you, so why not reach them where they're already spending their time? Given its interest, your community will also be more apt to share these openings with its networks.



2

Internal social networking

There are some social networks that are designed to be used entirely inside an organization. Some people like [Yammer](#). Some prefer [Chatter](#). Heck, some even use [Basecamp](#) or [Jive](#). Whatever flavor you pick, social networking tools used internally can be incredible for knowledge sharing, building a sense of camaraderie, and increasing cross-functional collaboration. Internal social networks can also be valuable for governance and policy awareness efforts.

3

Career advancement

Being active and fully aware of the "hows and whats" of social media is quickly becoming a mandatory skill in today's workforce. This skill cannot be overlooked, especially for HR professionals. Social media can also be used to network online and learn about trending topics in a specific field, discovering new areas of opportunity for the business that might include niche communities for related professions.

Social media is not something that should be solely utilized by any one team within a company. Ideally, the entire

organization is involved in some facet of the company's social media and has a deep understanding of their customers through participation. Cross-functionally distributing the social media effort also helps ensure the right people take the helm at the right time.

At the same time, it's important to maintain consistent voice and branding for every aspect of your company's social efforts, so you'll want to at least create a set of basic guidelines for everyone involved.

Wow, impressive. I'm a marketer, though—what does all this mean for me?

As more people throughout your organization realize the benefits they'll receive from social media, you'll be better able to focus your efforts on marketing instead of on being a help desk or a go-between. Additionally, you have the added benefit of scaling some of the costs associated with social engagement, and you will have multiple teams of people on your side helping to make the business case for investments in engagement evolution rather than going at it alone. This is a foundation for success.



How to get social media buy-in

As you make your case for your brand's social media endeavors, you'll likely need to show value to your leadership or clients. The good news is that with a little analysis, the data is on your side. Let's start by building a business case that's right for you.

You know your organization better than just about anyone, so trust your gut. If you're worried about pushback, you can run some small-scale tests to see how it goes and build a case for your effort. In safe pockets—places where you can play around and create the foundation for your business case without much risk—build out a trial or two that touch on some of the most pressing issues your organization faces, and see if you can't prove the impact of social media in those areas. You might even look to your competitors for some good examples. Once these tests have yielded results, present your new data to whomever needs to give the social sign-off. This strategy of starting small helps buy you the permission and trust you'll need to work towards some of the more difficult results.

- Framing your business case -

To frame your business case, you'll first want to make sure you're asking the right questions. Of course, the questions and answers you end up using will vary quite a bit based on your business and the market it's in. But here are some suggestions of broadly applicable questions and possible answers to get you started:

Fb

What are your objectives?

Increase customer-driven referrals and recommendations across the social web.

What problem are you solving?

Our small local business is at a disadvantage due to a lack of brand awareness and customer loyalty/advocacy.

What is the rationale?

Customer expectations and behavior are changing. Our traditional methods are no longer as successful as they used to be, and we're leaving money and opportunities on the table. By improving our brand awareness and gaining recommendations through social channels, we will be better positioned to acquire new customers online. These online customers represent an increasingly important channel for local businesses like ours, given the growth of mobile use and people's propensity to research purchasing decisions online before they buy.

Gg

What resources will this effort require?

We already have a solid web presence. We will need to dedicate more resources to community engagement on social channels, and we will need to develop and deploy a strategy to encourage reviews and recommendations.

Tm

What type of investment is needed?

The addition of one PT employee to assist in other duties allowing dedicated Marketing person to shift responsibilities towards social engagement, etc.

If you have tried making a business case and you're still being met with resistance, don't give up. Try building out specific case studies to add substance to your pitch, giving higher-ups a feel for what it will eventually look like. If you have an opportunity to start small, dipping a toe in the water with minimal risk, your results can speak volumes. Once you have something new to show, you can revisit and strengthen your business case. It's hard to argue with data.

Chapter 3

Social Media Best Practices

What kinds of content to publish and share

A common (and understandable) mistake that many people make as they're diving into social engagement is to limit their content to promotional updates. This is reflective of the traditional marketing world in which all outbound push messaging is just that, but things have changed; now we build our marketing efforts on trust, engagement, and community.

There is, of course, a time and place for marketing and promotional messages, but don't limit yourself. Consider broadening your scope a bit. This will make your content more appealing and lessen the burden of creation. Some options for types of updates may include:



Adjacent content: It's a pretty safe bet that if someone is following you they're interested in what you offer. It's an even safer bet to say their interests don't stop there. Share content that's tangentially relevant to your business or something involving common interests of your audience. For example, if you are a clothing retailer, you could post about up-and-coming beauty trends or news from a major designer. These topics quite likely directly align with the interests of your audience.



Tips and tricks: Add value to the conversation by sharing content that will make your customers' lives easier (bonus points for tips and tricks that help them use your products or services).



Responses: Not every update has to stem from original ideas of yours; you can bounce off the ideas that other people are already posting. Social media relies on conversations, so jump in and be a part of them. You can even look for [Twitter chats](#) that are relevant to your brand and dive in. (This is also a good way to get your account and brand more visibility.)



Non-promotional company information: If your company does amazing volunteer work in your community, don't be shy about sharing it! If there's a rather impressive showing at the company Halloween party, you definitely want to share that. Giving a sneak peek into the culture and community within an organization goes a long way to building relationships by humanizing the brand. Social media provides a fantastic way to go about this.



Job openings: Social channels can be an incredibly fruitful place to find new talent and publicize job openings. Job seekers are increasingly using social media as a way of learning about companies and their open positions; it's a match made in Internet heaven. Get those listings out there and be sure to highlight the most important ones.

Jokes: This is a tricky one, and it's more of a branding question than anything else. First of all, know what your brand is and what kind of personality it embodies. If humor is not a part of that, you might avoid this type of post. It can backfire and be incredibly awkward. If you are going to try humor, safety first! Ensure you're not unintentionally sharing something that could be offensive by testing it amongst your colleagues, friends, or even family. Always err on the side of caution with sensitive topics; [a disaster can be really painful](#). Once you've made sure the humor is acceptable, make sure it's actually funny, because a bad joke is just embarrassing.



How to share and publish your content

Frequency of updates

"How often do I need to update my account?" is a common question, and there is no right or wrong answer here—no best practice set in stone. It simply depends on your audience, their appetite, and what you have to say. There has been [some research on this topic](#) that can act as a general guideline in your efforts; but as with most things, it's best to test and see what works best for you and your audience on each platform.

One universal fact is that social media status updates don't last long. The half-life of a tweet, for example, [is around 18 minutes](#) for most users. This number isn't meant to suggest you should post that often, but rather understand that sending an update out doesn't mean it will remain visible for an appreciable amount of time. Users move on to more recent items in their newsfeeds quite quickly. The takeaway here is to keep an eye on how long your users are engaging and sharing something. More than anything, this is indicative of the quality of your content.



Again, though, it all depends on what is appropriate for your organization. For example, news organizations or media publications could easily be expected to update multiple-to-many times per day, whereas a clothing retailer would be exhausted by this rhythm and consequently turn off users. You definitely don't want to talk just for the sake of talking; if you don't have anything of value to add, don't post updates just to meet a quota. That said, you will need to make sure your account updates regularly enough to entice users to follow along. You want them to know they could be missing out on some good stuff if they don't.

Engagement

Fostering engagement as a brand comes in two flavors. The first is responding to users mentions, questions, commentary, etc. In the beginning of a community's development it's critical for a brand to be very present and active, and this means responding to most user commentary and all of their questions. The volume at this stage in the game should be fairly manageable for most.

The second flavor of engagement is that which results from a solid data-driven content strategy. By looking at things like search queries and social conversations, you can begin to build the foundation of a solid content strategy. As you're sharing this content throughout your community, you should collect data on how your audience reacts to it and engages with it. Consider all of this data to be feedback on how you're doing. You might re-evaluate the timing of your updates, the format or sentence structure you use (are you asking questions, making bold statements, etc.), and even the type of media you're using.



Ask for help: Want your community to help or participate in a particular way? Sometimes it's as simple as asking. If you've earned their allegiance by building value and investment into the relationship, you can ask for survey participation, product feedback, or whatever else you need. Maybe you need help supporting or sharing a new program or piece of content. You've made the relationship investment; they will often gladly reciprocate.



Keep it simple: Too many options may as well be no options. If your audience isn't on a certain network, why would you promote that sharing option on your content? Conversely, if your main focus is B2B, you may (for example) not need to include Pinterest as a sharing option. Look at your social audience and match up your offerings with their behaviors.



Cross-promote for discoverability:

There's nothing worse for a user than not being able to find your content, and cross-promotion is an easy way to help keep that from happening. Ensure your blog is linked to from your social properties. Keep all of your profile names the same across all social channels (utilize a service like [KnowEm](#) to be proactive on this one), and cross-promote your accounts. And (this is super-important): Develop and sell a unique value proposition for each account. Think about it—why would a customer need to or want to follow you on Twitter, if they already follow you on Facebook? Make sure you give them a reason.



Monitor and listen: Monitor social channels as frequently as you can. Utilize services that will help push notifications to you so you can ensure you're not missing meaningful conversations across the web. There are countless apps for Twitter and Facebook ([SocialEngage](#), [HootSuite](#), [TweetDeck](#), etc.) available, and you can set up alerts, as well ([Fresh Web Explorer](#), [IFTTT](#)). Often the admin tools of various platforms will have this functionality built in. As you monitor, genuinely listen to what your customers tell you. Social listening data provides endless insights for brands and companies willing to listen. This can be your product feedback channel, your user experience consultation, and even your early warning system for when things gone awry.

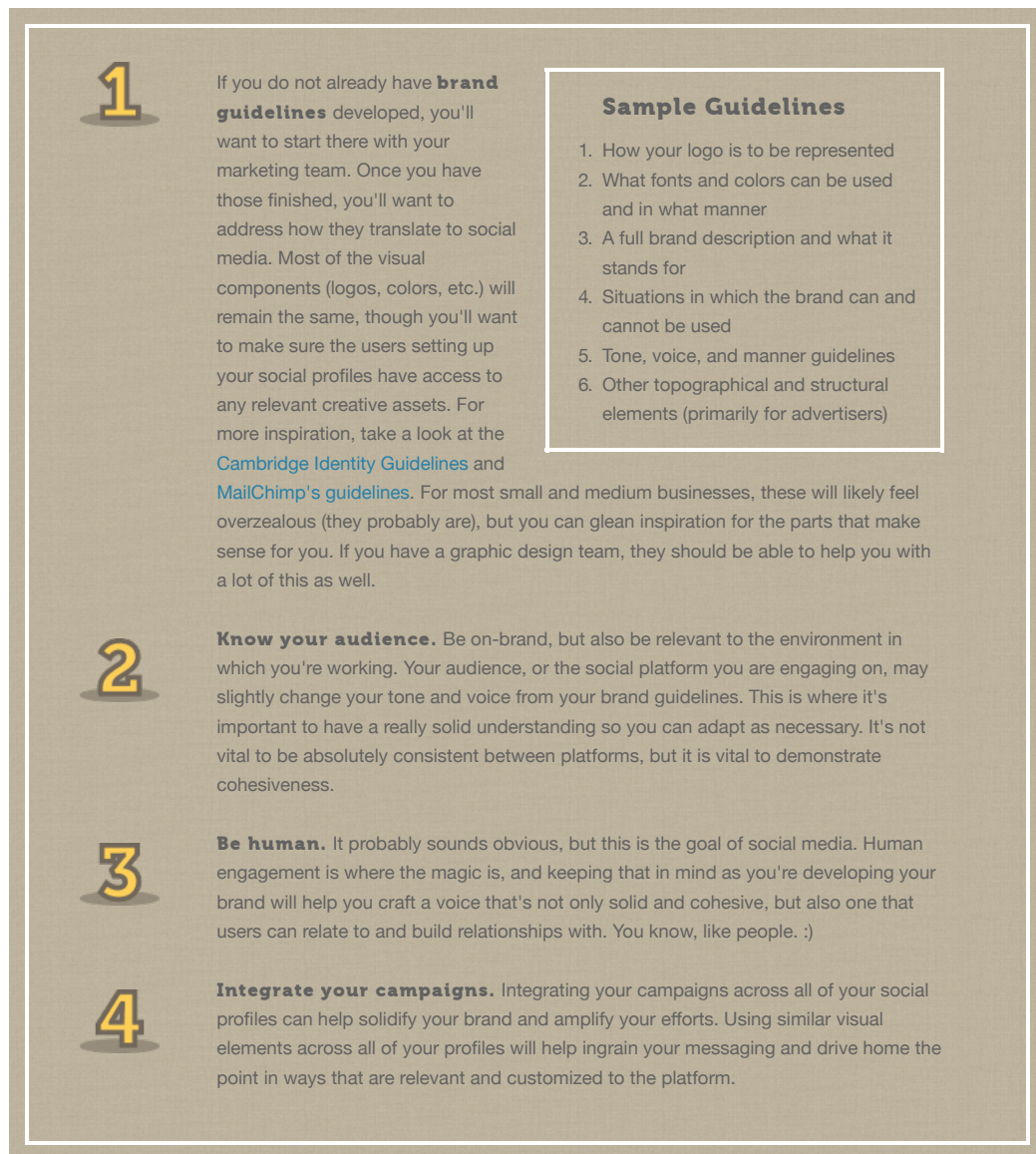


Gamify: People enjoy competition and like being rewarded for achievements, and adding game-like elements into your marketing mix can help you motivate a community. Foursquare is one effective example of this, moving its users through mayorships and badges. You can identify ways to incent your own community in ways that align with your business goals, making engaging with your brand fun. This can be a great way to increase the number of answers your community is providing in a help forum—add levels and achievements for answering questions, for high-quality answers, or for sharing out unanswered questions. Match up behavior and goals with reward systems. Companies like [Badgeville](#) and [BigDoor](#) have products that can help you use virtual rewards. These efforts can build on your existing social marketing, increasing sentiment, retention, and loyalty, all while decreasing churn, acquisition expense, and customer service costs.

Consistent branding and voice

There are many elements that go into a [brand](#)—both visual and otherwise—but ultimately what it becomes is your promise to your customers. You define their experience of what your product offering tries to fulfill. A "brand" can feel like a very amorphous concept; but consider the fact that your company's brand [helps add tangible value](#) to the organization, and when managed appropriately, it can help to protect the investments made to the business over time. How one actually determines the value of a brand is a fairly complicated endeavor.

Most of us aren't trying to compete with the most valuable global brands. That being said, there sure is a lot you can learn from them:



1 If you do not already have **brand guidelines** developed, you'll want to start there with your marketing team. Once you have those finished, you'll want to address how they translate to social media. Most of the visual components (logos, colors, etc.) will remain the same, though you'll want to make sure the users setting up your social profiles have access to any relevant creative assets. For more inspiration, take a look at the [Cambridge Identity Guidelines](#) and [MailChimp's guidelines](#). For most small and medium businesses, these will likely feel overzealous (they probably are), but you can glean inspiration for the parts that make sense for you. If you have a graphic design team, they should be able to help you with a lot of this as well.

2 **Know your audience.** Be on-brand, but also be relevant to the environment in which you're working. Your audience, or the social platform you are engaging on, may slightly change your tone and voice from your brand guidelines. This is where it's important to have a really solid understanding so you can adapt as necessary. It's not vital to be absolutely consistent between platforms, but it is vital to demonstrate cohesiveness.

3 **Be human.** It probably sounds obvious, but this is the goal of social media. Human engagement is where the magic is, and keeping that in mind as you're developing your brand will help you craft a voice that's not only solid and cohesive, but also one that users can relate to and build relationships with. You know, like people. :)

4 **Integrate your campaigns.** Integrating your campaigns across all of your social profiles can help solidify your brand and amplify your efforts. Using similar visual elements across all of your profiles will help ingrain your messaging and drive home the point in ways that are relevant and customized to the platform.

Sample Guidelines

1. How your logo is to be represented
2. What fonts and colors can be used and in what manner
3. A full brand description and what it stands for
4. Situations in which the brand can and cannot be used
5. Tone, voice, and manner guidelines
6. Other topographical and structural elements (primarily for advertisers)

Your social presence is just an extension of your brand, allowing that brand to reach many more people through networked experiences. This can be both a risk and an opportunity, so it's important to spend the time it takes to decide and define what your brand will be in the social environment, as inconsistency in this area can lead to a disjointed customer experience (or even a negative impact). Key questions to answer include:





What is our brand voice and personality?

What do we stand for, and what do we represent?

What is our value proposition and differentiating factors?

What are our defined visual branding elements (logo, font, colors, etc.)?

If you don't answer these questions first, your social presence can veer toward one of two extremes: Either your communication will come across as stiff and corporate, and the people you're engaging will feel like they're dealing with a robot, or your community manager will use his or her own voice in your communications, leading to an inconsistent or even inauthentic experience.

Providing a cohesive, branded customer experience that is completely agnostic of site, network, or location will serve to galvanize your community's comprehension of, memory of, and hopefully preference for your brand.



How to earn familiarity, trust, and likeability in your community

Building a reputation around these three qualities is part of what goes into building relationships. We're all in this social media puddle trying to accomplish big things for our businesses, but step back for a minute—let's think about this in a different way. How do you build relationships offline or in person? Building them online for your brand is not all that different.



Show up. Simple as that; just being present is the first step. But it doesn't stop there. You have to continue showing up. Give people a reason to invest in the relationship. If you don't prove you're going to stick around or pop in at least somewhat regularly, they don't have any reason to connect with you in the first place.



Be human. Be kind. Be real. Be funny. Be respectful. Be empathetic. Be all of the things you would expect someone to be toward you in every interaction. No one can easily relate to a bland personality. If your effort feels automated and heartless, you won't come across as very likeable. Also good to remember: When you're engaging with someone on social channels, it's best to assume all interactions are completely public.



Don't be exclusionary. This creates a balance in your relationships. You don't want to treat a select few so specially that outsiders new to your brand or account feel as if they're on the outside looking in. Strive to make every individual you interact with, and those watching, feel like they are special and part of the in-crowd.



Be aware of current events. During solemn times, natural disasters, tragedies, events of terrorism, etc., you definitely want to turn your marketing messaging off. If you're using a scheduling service to post content for you, turn it off immediately at the first sign of a catastrophic event of any kind. Your timing will be [seen as incredibly insensitive](#) and could cause severe backlash against your brand.



Be off-topic. Closely related to being human, it is definitely okay to go off-topic now and again. If every tweet or Facebook post is only your marketing, people will tire quickly and leave. Turn it off once in a while. Post something that's relevant, but perhaps only tangentially. Enjoy a joke now and again. Celebrate the holidays or world events. No one likes to be marketed to constantly, and that's not where the magic happens!



Add value. Sure, you can show up and make friends just by being congenial, but you're a brand. You want more than just "friends." You're building a network and trying to establish your company here. Adding value will help you be seen as helpful and authoritative, and ultimately, make you a wanted part of the community. Offer assistance, answer questions, and [go out of your way](#) to make someone's life easier or brighter.



Practice etiquette. Do not spam [hashtags](#). Brands have [gotten in trouble](#) for this in the past, and it can show your brand in a disrespectful and distasteful light. Don't be too pushy or forward; you want to make a good first impression.

None of this will happen for you overnight. An investment in these relationships is ultimately a long-term investment in your community and brand. Keep it up, and be patient—the more you invest, the more you'll get back.



Crisis management



We hope that we're never faced with a crisis as a business, and social media can add an extra layer of complication to such a situation. A real-world incident can be amplified by social networks, casting a shadow over everything you say, and customer service issues can smolder and quickly spread through social platforms. At the same time, though, social networks can be a wonderful way to practice transparency, as the best way to fight chaos is with clarity. Buffer, a social sharing app, exemplified this type of response when it was hacked in late 2013. [Their blog](#), and the comments below it, are a testament to the benefits of open communication through social channels.

When thinking about crisis management, all companies should be in one of the following four stages at all times:

1

Preparation: Understanding risks, building out escalation processes, draft responses, roles and responsibilities, training, etc.

2

Response and measurement: Responding if necessary, following up, measuring and monitoring reach, volume, etc.

3

Recovery: Typically consists of more measurement, follow up, case-studies, and knowledge sharing throughout the organization.

4

Prevention: Analysis of crisis and existing procedures, identification of opportunities for improvement, and acknowledgement of what worked well.

When in crisis mode work to first understand the level of severity, identify potential risks, and escalate accordingly. Work through the crisis by listening intently, showing empathy, transparency, and a willingness to correct whatever wrong had been done. After the fact, examining the impact and pulling insight from the situation can help the organization heal, move forward, and gain traction toward a strong preventative posture.

Recommended tools


Measurement leads to action; it's hard to argue with that. Conversely, what we do must be measured, or there's no proof it worked. An analogy with a [tree falling](#) comes to mind. :-)

There are really three big buckets for social media analysis. Some data points will cross between buckets, and others may even fall outside of these, but for most businesses these three major categories should cover your social data needs.

Measurement:

Account growth and competitive progress will fall into this bucket. We're really talking about hard data points in this bucket. Growth in followers and likes, reach, and CTR are all examples of measurement data.

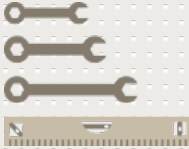
- [Crowdbooster](#)
- [Social Crawlytics](#)
- [Simply Measured](#)
- [Demographics Pro](#)
- [True Social Metrics](#)
- [Moz Analytics](#)



Listening and insights:

Social media gives us unprecedented access to conversations. Listening tools help you take the massive flow of information and distill the meaningful bits. The insights you glean will help inform you of key customer pain points, competitive opportunities, and even overall brand sentiment.

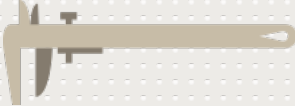
- [Topsy](#)
- [Radian6](#)
- [Sysomos](#)
- [Vocus](#)
- [RowFeeder](#)



Monitoring and response:

Getting a little more tactical, marketers need the ability to monitor all of those social conversations in order to take effective action. These tools typically have workflow functionality built in, so you're empowered to not only find, but act. This is not limited to reactive posting, either. These tools will likely function as your primary content distribution tool if you're not doing it directly from within each platform.

- [BuddyMedia](#)
- [SocialEngage](#)
- [HootSuite](#)
- [Sprout Social](#)
- [Meshfire](#)
- [Buffer](#)



Some tools may serve one or more of these needs. They can vary wildly in price and functionality, so taking a critical eye to what type and form of data you will need will help ensure you pay no more than what is necessary.

Chapter 4

Social Media Metrics and ROI

Part of the beauty of online marketing is that you can measure nearly everything you do. Before you dive in, however, keep in mind that measurement is only effective if you know what to measure and why. Collecting data from which no meaningful insights can be derived can lead to time wasted in what's not-so-lovingly referred to as "analysis paralysis."

Ultimately, we're working towards measuring any return on your investment (ROI). But remember, in order to measure ROI you need to have an I. Without a serious investment of resources, you may never find the return you're looking for. Measuring that ROI can look very different for different campaigns, and opening a metrics dashboard the day after you launch a social presence won't provide any useful insight.

For some, goals are as simple as driving traffic and measuring conversions. For many, however, things are far more complex. Your ROI may come in the form of cost savings from handling customer service issues on Twitter instead of over the phone. Perhaps you can track increased foot traffic from a Foursquare promotion or Yelp campaign.

One thing is certain: Measurement of useful data leads to action and (perhaps more importantly) budget. Solid data is what makes your business case compelling; without it, you're basing decisions and pitches on assumptions and instinct. Those can be helpful, but by measuring first, you can take your story to the next level.



How, you might ask, do you strike a balance? The key is finding the right things to measure and ultimately report for your organization. When trying to figure out what those are, remember that you will have two kinds of data.

Quantitative:

Quantitative data is generally numeric in nature and can be used in true scientific analysis, with sample sizes of statistical significance and results that are repeatable.

Followers/fans: This is one of the most common metrics we see brands track. Be sure you're not placing too much weight on this one. It may be gratifying to see growth, but if it's not tied to something more meaningful, it's just a number.

Engagement: An incredibly meaningful metric—perhaps one of the most important in measuring your own success and efforts—engagement can actually measure a host of different items depending on the channel. All of these different metrics combine to give you a sense for how well your audience is responding to your content.

For a blog post, this could be the number of shares and comments per post. On Twitter, this could be the number of mentions, retweets, favorites, and responses. Engagement tells you how well you're doing in having conversations with your community and whether the content you create piques their interest.

Timing: Take a look at the timing of your community's activity as well as your own. You want to ensure you're active when they are. This is often overlooked, as many accounts are only managed during business hours, but that isn't always when your customers are listening.

You can gain a general sense for when your target audience is online just by looking at the timestamps on their comments (and other activity), but you'll get a much better idea if you use a tool that can analyze an entire audience. Check out the tools recommended in chapters 6-11 of this guide for examples.

Click-through rate (CTR): Click through rate is a familiar metric for most Internet marketers, and it can be valuable in social as well—especially if one of your goals happens to be driving traffic back to your website. Think of it as a sort of social conversion that you can work to optimize.

Qualitative:

Qualitative data is based on observations, and it often takes the form of hypotheses that stem from smaller sample sizes than you'd normally need for a true scientific study. These hypotheses can then be tested using quantitative data.

Influence: This one's a bit controversial. Everyone wants to find their community's influencers, but there is currently no universal standard for measuring influence or finding those people. There are several tools available that offer "influence scores." (Klout and our own [Social Authority](#) are popular ones.) Though if you choose to use such a tool, you should have a good sense for [how it determines the score](#); you'll want to ensure it aligns with what you are actually trying to measure. Beyond tools, also consider looking at Twitter and Google rankings for influencers within a certain topic. If you have access to a relevant forum and its data (perhaps your own), look for influencers there too. This can help you target the individuals that will have the audience you're looking to reach. Our own Twitter tool, Followerwonk, [can be a great resource](#) for this type of research as well.

Sentiment: Sentiment analysis attempts to measure the tone and tenor of a conversation around a stated topic or item. In social media, this is largely used to tell if people love, can't stand, or are neutral about your brand or campaigns. Most sentiment measurement tools are automated these days, and if you choose to go this route, you'll want to make sure you understand the methodology behind the tool—particularly the margin of error—to help you understand the context of your reports. There are also manual sentiment analysis tools out there to use. However, there are many drawbacks to these including labor costs and your time. Not to mention that a really great manual solution may be much more expensive than an automated one.

Conversation drivers: With the right tools, we can look at nearly any platform (or all of them for that matter) and see what people are talking about. When it comes to your brand, you'll want to know the topics and context of conversations about you, your competition, and your niche. This incredibly useful knowledge can tell you, for example, who your customers see as your closest competition, what they're sharing in relation to your product, their concerns, etc. This is one of the most important and insightful qualitative measurements you can use.



PRO TIP

With any data you're collecting, whether it be quantitative or qualitative, the most important things to ask yourself are "What can I do with this?" and "What are my insights?" If you can't do anything with your data and you're not gleaning actionable business takeaways from it, then you should question why you're measuring it in the first place.

A deeper understanding of the tools you use and how they work will give context to the numbers you see. Don't be afraid to ask questions, dig deeper, and challenge the way things have been done in the past.

Chapter 5

Finding the Right Social Network for You

Deciding where to focus your social media energy can be a confusing process, as time is short and resources are limited. It's easy to get distracted by the buzz and articles touting the next big thing that brands "must do." As with any marketing channel, though, the more thought and strategy you put into your implementation plans, the greater your chance of success. You can avoid being overwhelmed by stepping back and starting with your own business objectives, product offerings, and target consumers.

What are the different types of social channels?

Not all social media sites and platforms are created equal, and each social channel won't always work the same way in helping users reach their goals. In looking across the online environment, it helps to organize your social options into categories. By looking at groups of channels with common themes, it is easier to frame your decisions about when, where, who, and how best to engage with your community online.

The easiest way to break up the categories is to think of them as owned, rented, and occupied. Here's how each of those categories breaks down:



Owned properties

Owned properties may include blogs, forums, or homegrown social networks, and they can be internal or external. The main difference with this category is that you literally own the channel rather than occupying a page on a platform that is owned by someone else. It may be on your primary site or on another domain, but it is fully under your control.



Rented properties

Much like renting an apartment, a user occupies a portion of a channel with the permission of the owner. Sometimes there is a cost involved, but in the world of social media, that doesn't happen often. Sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr fall into this category. Facebook owns its site, and you're simply managing a presence on it. You may have official claim to the page, but you have no claim to the platform itself or a say in how it may change.



Occupied properties

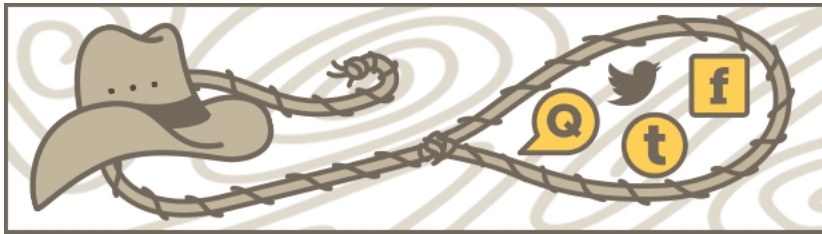
This category is the most removed from your control. Your company might have an official representative who interacts and engages in an occupied property, but there is no ownership of any kind, and these channels can be changed at any time. Reddit is probably the most popular example. Employees of a company will frequently participate in forums or community sites in either an official or unofficial capacity, but always on behalf of the company.

Consumer conversations take place across all three of these social channel categories, but before you dive into any of them, it's important to take some time and think through your channel management plans and participation strategies. For example, smaller brands with limited resources might select one site based on the high mileage they can get from their consumer base before needing to branch out into multiple channels. As a representative of your brand, you have the opportunity to add unique perspective and value to whatever channel will work best for your organization.



Which network should I sign up for first?

There is no one answer to this question. For each and every business, this question will be answered differently. A good first step for any organization is to visit KnowEm.com. This site allows you to register your brand name across more than 500 social networks. This will help to ensure that your name will be registered where you need it to be, regardless of which platform you end up deciding is right for your brand. And for those that you may not need to use right away, your brand name remains protected from squatters. Consequently, Knowem also has one of the most [comprehensive lists of all of the social networks](#) on the web, so it is also a good place to look for networks beyond the obvious Facebook, Twitter, Google+, etc.



That said, it's a pretty safe bet to say that nearly everyone should have a Facebook page. With over 1.19 billion active monthly users (as of [Sep. 2013](#)), it's quite likely you will find a healthy number of your customers here. You may find the same thing in Twitter.

Another tool to help you narrow down the "where" of your social strategy is to go on a bit of a listening journey. Use one of the many social listening tools to find out where your customers and greater industry are having relevant conversations. This insight should help uncover where it makes the most sense to set up your presence.



Single vs. multiple accounts

Whether or not to attempt multiple accounts on one social network is a big question. The answer: It depends. Some large companies, like Nordstrom, have a [corporate Twitter account](#), while many of their stores have their [own accounts](#). This allows them to communicate rather specific and relevant information to regional followers, while maintaining their corporate account for overarching news, promotions, and announcements. Other companies have found it helpful to segment their accounts by product, such as [Google](#), [GoogleAPIs](#), [Blogger](#), and [so on](#). In this case, it makes sense based on their offerings to divide the conversations up by audience and product rather than geography. [Nike](#), [Comcast](#), and [Delta Airlines](#) are good examples of brands that have successfully implemented multiple accounts for multiple purposes.



The most important thing to consider when deciding if it makes sense to segment your profiles on these networks is whether or not you're better able to add value to the customer and the conversation. Are you better able to address your customer needs on one account, or are there regional considerations that may make that more difficult?

Additionally, you should carefully consider your ability to manage multiple accounts. Tools like [Hootsuite](#), [Sprout Social](#), and [SocialEngage](#) make it easier than ever to manage multiple accounts from one dashboard, but remember—there's nothing sadder than an abandoned social account. It doesn't send a good message about your brand and its ability to follow through.

How to get started



First things first. Ask yourself a few questions:

- What behavior am I trying to drive, and to what business end?
- Of the social channels out there, which types lend themselves to the specific products and/or services I offer?
- Who are my target customers, and what do I know about their online behavior?

Identifying your own goals will help you decide which type of social media channel makes the most sense for your efforts, and clarifying the desired behavior of your community members will help define how you go about engaging with them. For example, are you trying to increase brand awareness? If so, consider marketing activities that include the collection and sharing of [customer testimonials](#), [highly-shareable content](#), and [buzz-worthy interactions](#). Are you shooting for increased traffic and conversions? Look for opportunities to engage with relevant, interested customers who are ready to pull the "buy" trigger. The point is to match your engagement efforts with the outcomes you want to see.

Let's look at an example. Imagine you're running a growing beauty products company with large national and global aspirations. Here's a step-by-step roadmap to choosing the right social platform for that business:



PRO TIP


Don't limit your thinking to vertical. Go horizontal too.

Sure, your customers are interested in your products' niche, but what about their other interests and topics—the ones indirectly aligned to your niche? For example, say you're a retailer of sailing boats and gear. There are surely some amazing sailing-related communities that make perfect sense for you to approach, but there's a high likelihood that your customers also have a strong degree of interest in travel, other outdoor activities, and perhaps even food and wine. Think about how can you participate in those horizontal communities, and say hello to a vastly expanded audience!



Focus on what is most important to your community rather than what is most popular

Once you get going in social, it's easy to get distracted. There are new apps, tools, and networks that pop up on an almost-daily basis, and you could easily spend your entire day just checking them all out. The idea, though, is to strike a balance between tools-obsessed marketing and being an ostrich with its head in the sand. It's better to do fewer things effectively than many things ineffectively. But you should also keep your eyes and ears open for the up-and-coming social trends; there will be a time when it makes sense for you to jump in. Here are some things to consider:



- Look for platform functionalities that work with your product offering or market space. For example, clothing retailers are well positioned for the image sharing social networks that have become popular, like Instagram and Pinterest.
- Emerging technologies and/or functionality that allow you to communicate and share with your community in new ways.
- Additionally, keep an eye out for technologies and sites that have the potential to reach new demographics that fall within your target audience or their influencers.

When all else fails, keep your eye on your goals, but don't be afraid to dip your toes in the water and test, test, test. Invest enough energy so you can get a meaningful response, and use this as your guiding light on whether or not you should go deeper.

As new networks emerge, how do you launch a new presence?

In social media, there are certain truths and norms. Once you've applied those to your business in launching a presence on one network, you will quickly see that they are portable across nearly all other networks. The rules of engagement may differ slightly from site to site, as will the semantics, perhaps, but the fundamentals will remain unchanged regardless of the platform and are always the best place to start when branching out.



Goals and measurement: Determining your new channel's goals should be something you think about from the very beginning. Why are you engaging on this new channel? What are you trying to get out of it? After you have identified your goals, you have to decide how to measure your success. For emerging platforms, this may take a while, depending on what analytics tools are available in the marketplace and how the platform's API is set up. (You could always build your own if it's open enough and you have the resources.)



Branding: Your social authority is vital, and effective branding can go a long way to establishing your authority as a brand. Social channels also provide you with exciting possibilities to express your brand and increase brand impressions. Make sure your avatars are on point and your bios are dialed in, and make your first impression count!



Content seeding: There is nothing quite as sad as visiting the page of a social profile you're interested in and finding absolutely nothing there. Before you start following people or actively directing traffic to your new profile, make sure you post some content over the course of several days. This helps reassure visitors that there is something there worth following.



Influencer connection: After you get your branding t's crossed and your content i's dotted, it's time to start looking for people with whom you can engage. Start by seeking out those individuals you've identified as influencers from other platforms. You have likely already established a relationship with them, and relationships are portable across platforms. Leverage that. As you interact with them, seek out more individuals who are relevant to your space in their followers. Before long, you should have the basis for a nice little network.



Discovery: Once you have established that this new network is a place where you plan on investing time and energy, add links from relevant places to help your customers discover your new presence. Write up content about what you're doing that is interesting, and highlight it on your blog. Cross-post from your other social channels to drive awareness.



Content calendar/publishing: As with all of the other channels you have established, it's important to keep a content or publishing calendar. You can do some content scheduling through available tools like [HootSuite](#), [Spout Social](#), and [SocialEngage](#). When planning a content calendar, you can be as sophisticated as having a plug-in baked right into your content management system or as simple as using an Excel spreadsheet. It's really about whatever works for you, and planning ahead helps to ensure you're fully optimizing events, promotions, and interests relevant to your audience.

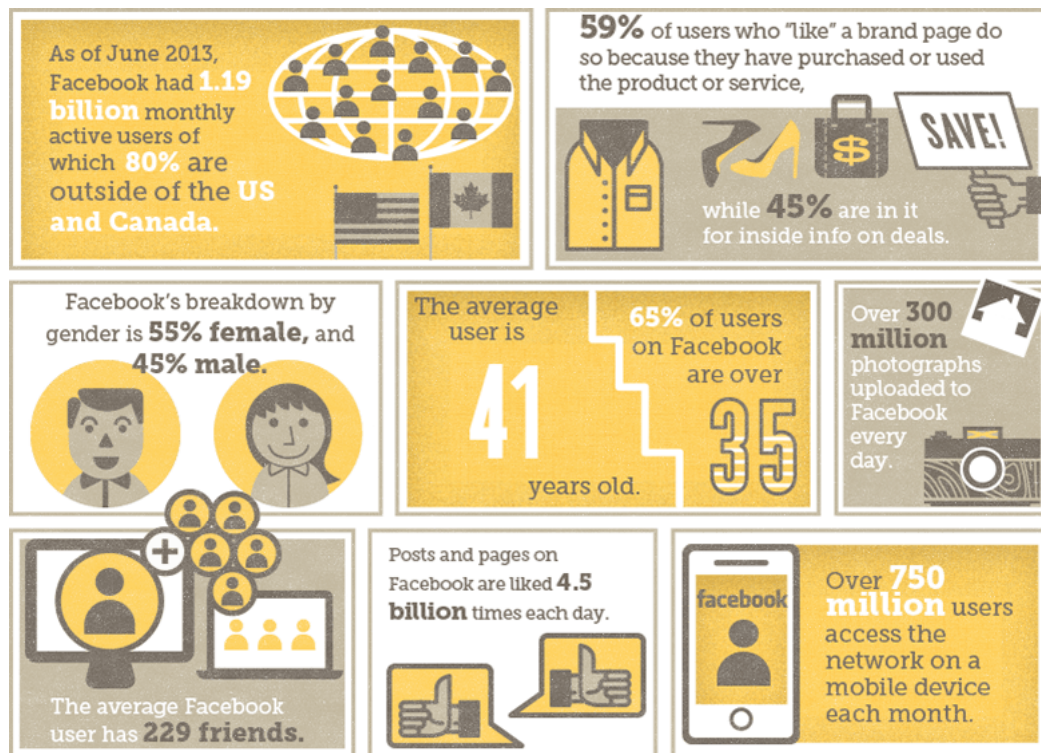
When you're ready to get started, there can be so much to do that it seems overwhelming. The great thing about social, though, is that once you get the basics settled, most of them are transferable to whatever new site comes along that you want to try. These best practices will help you set yourself up for success in social regardless of your size or what the platform is.

Chapter 6

Facebook

When Facebook started in 2004, it was a bare-bones social network focused on connecting college students. Nine years and more than 1 billion active users later, Facebook has become the most widely-used social network to date and has shaped online interaction as we know it. From connecting distant friends and family members, to bridging the gap between brands and their communities, Facebook has taken the way we interact online to a whole new level.

Key stats and demographics



Looking for sources? Click on any of the stats above!

How are people using Facebook?

Since its inception, Facebook has become an integral component of people's online social presence. For many, Facebook is the only online social network in which they participate, though the level of engagement varies across the user spectrum. From those that check the network periodically throughout the week to those who are almost compulsively active, the core driving force to participation is connection: connecting with colleagues, friends old and new, alumni networks, and for an increasing percentage of users, even professional connections.

The network itself has transformed into one with highly customizable privacy and visibility settings. Users can dial down their

visibility to the point where they are nearly invisible on the platform. They can choose which posts or updates are visible and to whom. Conversely, those users who have chosen a more all-in approach can leave everything completely public, from the images they're tagged in to their active stream on Spotify.

Features go beyond the individual user's page to brand pages, events, groups, and now a pseudo-standalone messenger service.

1

Groups are user-created and have varying levels of privacy and security, much like individual profiles. Users can organize groups around any topic or event they like. From professionally relevant groups to those organized around special interests, such as nutrition, the variety is limited only by interest of the users. These groups have undoubtedly been a welcome and sticky addition to the platform over time.

2

Events allow users to organize around a point in time. Security here is fairly customizable, allowing for public, private, and somewhere-in-between events. A key feature here is the baked-in ability to export your Facebook events to other calendars, no doubt increasing usage and reliance on this feature that blends users' personal and professional lives.

3

Business pages have been an evolutionary product for Facebook. Over the years, they have taken several different shapes, though they are fairly stable today. Like other types of pages, the feature set is ever-evolving as they add more to meet the needs of the marketers behind the brand's efforts. Facebook has recently added more features in terms of analytics, reporting, security, and access, as well as increased the richness available to those wishing to dive into Facebook advertising.

4

Facebook Messenger is a new way to combine email, instant messenger, and Facebook messages. As new stand-alone group message services popped up throughout 2010 and 2011, Facebook clearly saw an opportunity and acquired one of the more popular group-messaging apps known as Beluga. They have since re-branded this app as Facebook Messenger. On iOS, Blackberry, and Android devices, this is a stand-alone app, but it also integrates across the Facebook app and web experiences.

As users increasingly rely on social platforms, these social networks will grow and respond as Facebook has. While there's still a great deal of opportunity in this space, Facebook offers users the most choice for the many facets of their lives while enabling flexibility for privacy and visibility. As users continue to adopt new behaviors and ultimately expectations, Facebook will need to continue to adapt to stay at the top of the social pile, so expect continued change and evolution. This change is necessary and beneficial, but can be frustrating from a marketing perspective.



Strategies and tactics for success

As more and more people and brands jump onto Facebook, the noise level for individual users increases. While Facebook's News Feed algorithm helps the noise level by showing users what it deems the most relevant content, in order to really stand out from the crowd, brands must be remarkable, interesting, and add value.

In order to ensure your content is seen, you'll need to optimize and take Facebook-specific functionality into account.



Content: Everything you post on Facebook is content. As we now know from the News Feed algorithm, how users interact with that content is important. Consider every piece of content you post an opportunity for increased and specific engagement, and don't be afraid to have a little fun. Take a look at these examples from [Delta](#) and [GE](#). While completely on-brand, you can see they're a bit unexpected and show they're not afraid to show their human side. Also, images are incredibly effective on Facebook—posts with photos get, on average, [39% more engagement](#).



Post timing: Also related to the ingredients of your content is when and how you post it. Be sure you're tracking what time of day your fans are most active. Focusing your engagements during these times will help you grow your community. Also be sure to pay attention to things like sentence structure, phrasing, and types of posts that are particularly engaging to your audience. Many Facebook users check the site [on their lunch breaks and after dinner](#), and while the latter is outside of normal business hours, it's worth testing to see if that's a time when your audience is looking for content.

Moderation: Brands have increasing levels of responsibility for user-generated content posted on their walls or in comments. You'll want to proactively think through your stance on inappropriate content on your Facebook page, and your best practice would be to make this stance publicly available. This lets your community know what you will and will not allow, lessens the chance of a surprise, and builds a sense of safety and sets expectations.



Facebook is an open and public space, so you can't control everything people say. **Instances in which it is appropriate to remove user content would include:** advertorial content, harassment and abuse, derogatory or offensive language, threatening posts, and posts that contain sensitive information (credit card numbers, addresses, etc.). **Instances in which you should address the comments instead of removing them include:** customer complaints, negative commentary, and critical statements. You may not like what people always have to say, but in social, you always have to listen.



Engagement: Because we are building something rooted in relationships, you can take full advantage by joining in the conversation with your customers. They want to interact with your brand, and are going out of their way to do so. Honor that. The type of conversation will dictate the cadence and rhythm of your response. This is largely dependent on your product as well; for example, an airline's response rates to customer service issues ought to be rather quick, as their customers' needs are likely far more time sensitive than those in another industry. Only you can determine what is right for your organization and product, but at least in the initial stages of building a community, it's better to err on the side of faster responses.

Community: Make your audience's experience on Facebook about their experience and their connections rather than your CTR and conversion rates. Concentrate on them, and you'll succeed. Your audience will turn into a community that thrives, grows, and supports one another. By enabling engagement within the audience, you can help increase the level of stickiness and affinity they will have to the brand, moving toward customer advocacy.



User flow: While the page environment Facebook gives brands is mostly set, you want to make sure you're directing your users where you want them to go. If I am a user looking for support or help, will I know where to go? Just as you do when designing landing pages for your website, consider the goals of your Facebook page. What do you want users to do when they land on your page? What information do they need to be able to access easily? Make sure these elements are front and center. You can easily change the order of the apps and even optimize the icons used to display those apps for visibility. [JetBlue](#) is a great example of a clear and obvious user flow.



Credibility: A huge part of your brand is built on trust, and the foundation of that trust is your credibility. Grammar and spelling are universally important, and all efforts for their correct uses should be made. Fact-check sources and news before sharing them on your networks. Ensure the safety of your users by not sharing links to malicious sites. Essentially, make sure you don't give your community a reason to believe you are anything other than what you are: awesome.



What success looks like

There are millions of companies using Facebook to showcase their brands and interact with their communities, but a few stand out above the crowd. Take a look at how these leaders in the Facebook marketing space:



Squarespace: This relatively young company has already built a significant following, and digging through their page gives you several reasons why. Regular updates with a great blend of content, and a team that's quick to respond to users' comments is a winning combination in the B2B world.



Burberry: People engage at a much higher rate on Facebook with rich media content, images, links, video, etc., and Burberry gets that. Right away, you feel immersed into their world. The captivating images pop and beg you to keep scrolling. Their [apps add a great deal of value](#) rather than simply offering up additional marketing content.



Julep: There is little people like better than attention. Julep, a chain of Nail Salons and a membership-based subscription to monthly nail polish and other beauty supplies, has been extremely successful by creating their "Fan #NOTD" (re: Nail of the Day). They highlight the creativity of their community with their products by rewarding the most expressive customers and sharing their user-generated photos.



ESPN: The ESPN Face the Fan Chat is a regular series of interactive content the sports network hosts on Facebook via an app. This live-streamed content does a great job of integrating more traditional content for a socially engaged audience. This fan engagement is nothing new for them, but taking it to Facebook reaches a whole new demographic.



Etiquette tips and guidelines

Like offline social interactions, Facebook has its own set of unwritten do's and don'ts for users to follow. Facebook is, first and foremost, a social network built to help users stay connected with one another. It has also evolved into a platform for businesses to engage with their customers. This hierarchy is important to keep in mind, and means that you must know the ropes before diving in. Here are a few tips to get you started with proper Facebook etiquette:

Don't spam: This is a big no through all of marketing. Always be tactful, classy, and do not spam. This includes sending mass-event invites and messages and invitations to like your brand pages from your personal account. It's not impossible to spam as a business page either, but Facebook's functionality prevents most of it.



Respond: Response times are going to vary based on the issue and the product in question, but in social media timeliness is critical. Users expect things to happen much faster on social channels than on more traditional web channels like email. In most cases, same-day responses are required. Don't ever let your community feel like they've been forgotten.

Say no to clustered updates: With the notable exception of image albums, avoid making multiple updates within a short time span. Beyond News Feed algorithmic concerns, it's just annoying to your followers. Your signal-to-noise ratio falls, and you may lose the long-term attention of your audience.

@Name: If you want to call out another public Facebook page or user, you can directly link to their Facebook page, which also notifies them that you're talking about them, by putting an @ and then typing their name. (Facebook will help your selection with a drop-down.) This also makes it clearer to whom you're addressing. Note that private users can't be called out in this way unless you're replying to a comment they left on your page.

Highlight important posts: If your brand has any very important updates; e.g. acquisitions, sales, or feature in news articles; you can highlight them in your page's timeline. This expands the post to both columns, and may get these important updates further into people's News Feeds.

Messages: People can send your page private messages. You'll find the most of these messages will be customer service-related, so make sure to check them. The messages section functions like an email inbox.

Notifications: The notifications box will show you the most recent likes, comments, wall posts, etc., on your brand's page. Depending on the volume of incoming activity, this administrative section can be useful when tracking activity by your community. Due to Facebook's focus on recent activity, you'll probably only receive comments and likes on recent posts, but the notifications can help track activity on older posts.

Page favorites: You can mark other brand pages as favorites on your business' page. This is a helpful way to promote partners, good causes, or others you're connecting your business with.

Posting: While many social media tools allow you to post from them to Facebook, you'll have the best results by posting directly to Facebook from Facebook itself. Facebook's algorithm biases toward post that originate from its own interface. Responses and comment moderation, however, can be done via social management software without issue.

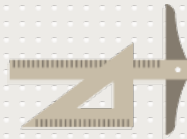
Scheduling: Thankfully, Facebook does allow scheduling of posts directly in their interface. If you are sharing linked content, this content must already be live on the web, which can be a pickle for those scheduling unpublished blog posts or other content. Scheduled posts will appear only to the moderators in the "Activity Log." Keep in mind, though, that engagement is a primary goal, and you'll want to be around for the responses to your scheduled posts.



Recommended tools

Facebook for

Business: A helpful portal for business page owners offering support for page creation, ad campaign management, and other platform resources.



Simply Measured, Unmetric, Unified, Crowdboster, and True Social Metrics

are incredible resources for Facebook measurement and deep analytics for your brand pages, as well as for competitive analysis and benchmarking across industries.

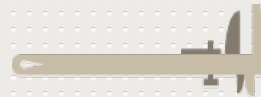


Facebook Studio:

Facebook recently launched its studio, which highlights great marketing and campaign work from across its platform. Here you'll find case studies, awards, and examples of great work to inspire your efforts.

Facebook Page

Insights: (available in the admin panel of any business page): This tool offers up increasing amounts of data specific to your brand page. While this doesn't give you any type of competitive insight, this panel tells you about who your fans are, where they're located, and how much they're engaging with your page and individual posts. Much of this information can be downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet for further analysis.



Facebook Brand: Like any good organization, Facebook has implemented guidelines for using its own brand materials. This page gives you official logos, images, and all you need to know about how to mention Facebook without frowning Mark Zuckerberg's brow.

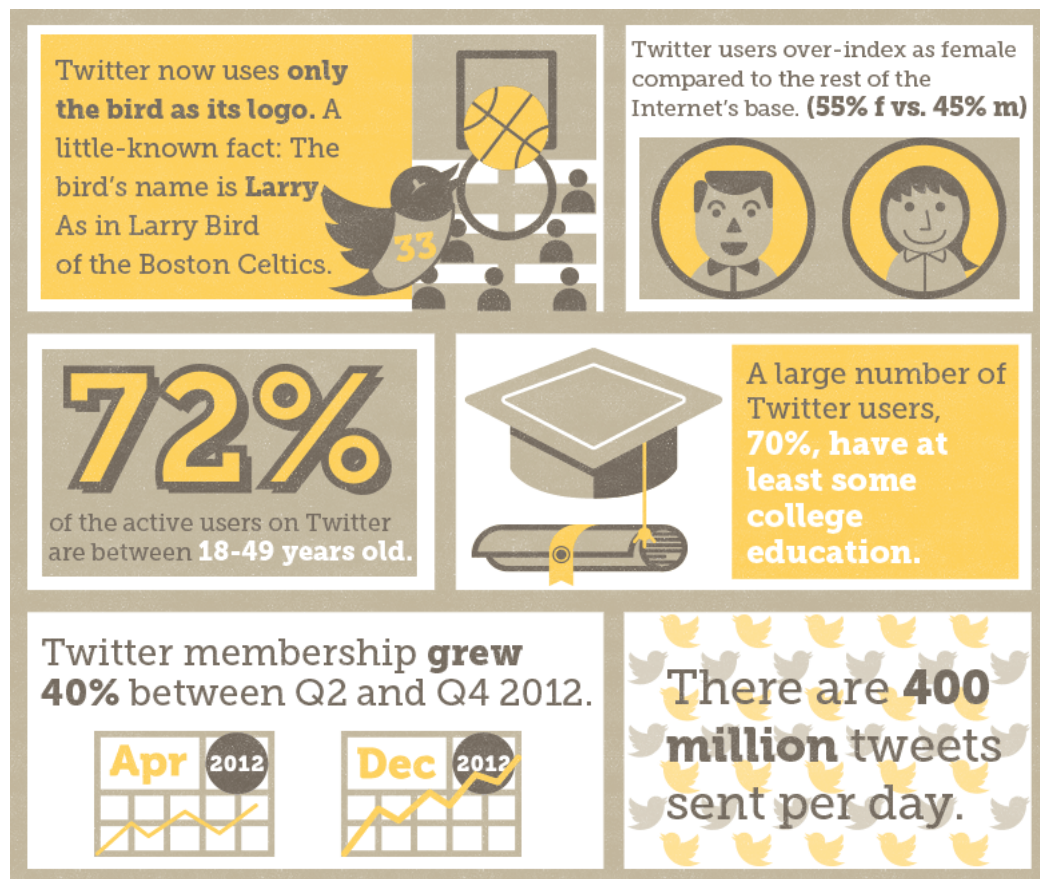
Facebook Ads: If your brand has the resources, you can give your content a boost by buying ads on Facebook. These ads can be fine-tuned to the exact social graph of your target customers.

Chapter 7

Twitter

Founded in 2006, Twitter's 140-character bite-size updates have transformed the world's access to real-time information. Its simple interface allows for sharing anything from breaking news to sports, to great content, to worldwide politics. In a time when we're oversaturated with media, Twitter also allows us to access what we need to know. Much of the reporting from the Arab Spring uprisings was done directly through Twitter. Through all of this, brands are joining the network not only to promote their messages, but also to quickly and succinctly address the needs of their customers.

Key stats and demographics



Looking for sources? Click on any of the stats above!

How are people using Twitter?

Twitter has become a tool for everything from [facilitating the collapse of governments](#) to showing off your newborn. Through

Twitter, [athletes](#) have added sideline commentary and Hollywood has dialed up the [drama](#). Consumers use the service to share and find content. For many, Twitter has replaced their RSS subscriptions and traditional news media.

Due to its mostly public nature, Twitter's most powerful use is connecting people. The platform allows complete strangers to come together over common interests and ideas and to participate in conversations that range from the relatively mundane to the incredibly important.



- Participate in [Twitter chats](#) relevant to the interests of your brand's customers. You'll find like-minded people to help expand your network.
- Save searches for common interests or popular hashtags to find people talking about those topics.
- Use tools like [Followerwonk](#) or [Twellow](#) to find like-minded users. Also look at who they interact with and get engaged with those communities.
- Tools like [Xobni](#) and [Rapportive](#) integrate with Outlook and Gmail to help you uncover social profiles of people you already know.
- Twitter's [Discover](#) experience can help you dive into different conversations. Also, check out [Twitter Categories](#), which lets you browse the best accounts on a wide variety of topics.

Some users may choose to essentially live-tweet their day, while others limit their contributions primarily to content sharing. Your goal is to identify what types of users you'll be looking for and engaging with and gain an understanding of how and why they're using the tool. By understanding their motivations behind using the site, you'll be better able to target your efforts and content in meaningful ways.



Strategies and tactics for success

Your success on Twitter depends on your specific goals, of course, but there are some universally applicable strategies that can start you off on the right track. By continually keeping these tactics in mind, you can speed your progress toward your own goals.



Branding and voice: Being aware of who you are and who you aren't is critical on Twitter. You only have 140 characters to communicate your thoughts, so every word matters. Your company's brand and voice seeps into every interaction, passive or active, that you have here. As you grow, you will naturally get a good sense of whom the idealized brand representative should be. How would they talk? How would they respond to conflict? How would they joke around? Questions like this may initially seem silly, but it's better to answer them ahead of time than to create answers based on your mood or the amount of sleep or coffee you've had in a given moment. Consistency of voice is important, as people like to know what to expect in their interactions with you. Over time, this consistency will help you build trust and confidence with your audience.



Also, ensuring your account name and profile are filled out according to your brand guidelines is critical. Think of these fields as your "first impression." Many people will visit a Twitter profile only once to decide whether or not they want to follow you. Your bio should be on-point, and your handle branded and appropriate. Your location should accurately reflect where you are. Your follower count may come into play here as well. Controlling your follower:following ratio can help you further establish credibility, showing that you care enough to follow your community members back.



Utilize tracking and variables in all of your shared links. This will help you to better evaluate the success that individual content pieces have. Look at the day and time your audience is most active, the types of content they engage with most frequently, and the style and tone of your language. From there you can better understand how to share and engage with your community.

Be interesting: There's nothing worse than boring tweets. "Boring" is understandably subjective, but you should strive to be interesting to your target audience. Streams that constantly push promotional messaging get old very fast. How do you establish brand loyalty when the only thing you say is, "Here's 50% off [something]?" There must be more than that you can say about your business, and if there's not, you may need a new lens with which to view your organization.

Add value: It's important to be consistently present, but not so loquacious that you tweet simply to hear yourself speak. Every tweet you send should add value in some way. A good rule of thumb is to ask yourself why you would want to see this information if you were a follower.



Responsiveness: Due to the condensed format and quick pace of Twitter, it's essential to respond to your community as swiftly as possible. The platform makes it easy for people to find your brand, and you're sure to get many customer service requests that need your immediate attention. If you ignore a critical tweet for too long, you may find that one person's voice is soon amplified by their followers. Also, don't just respond to emergencies or questions—make sure you also say hello and respond to kudos given to your brand. As you grow, you'll have to figure out how scale, but too much tweeting is a great problem to have.



Measurement: The beauty of Twitter is that data is plentiful; the tricky part is setting up those measurement frameworks and dashboards so that they align as closely as possible with your business objectives and goals. Data is what really influences your bottom line in social; it helps you tell your own story and find both opportunities and successes.



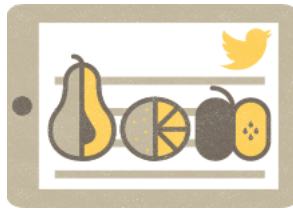
What success looks like

Developing hordes of followers is no small feat and, providing enough value to keep them engaged can be tricky. Companies consistently earning the attention of the Twittersverse are worth keeping an eye on; here are a few particularly impressive examples:



Taco Bell

The fast-food chain is quickly gaining a reputation for their spicy snark (no pun intended). Consistently funny, engaging, and sometimes a little irreverent, Taco Bell is completely on-brand, and it works quite well for them. From a content development perspective, give them a follow and take a look at how they reach out and engage with their audience.



Whole Foods Market

Whole Foods, an organic grocery store chain, uses Twitter to really reach out and engage their consumers around relevant content and interests. Not just about their in-store experiences, but also about their experience with food in general. Take a look at their weekly Twitter chat, using the tag [#WFMdish](#), where the topic varies weekly, but centers on healthy foods and cooking. This is a great example of expanding your thinking about content and engagement horizontally, not just vertically.



Charity: Water

A wildly popular non-profit movement, Charity: Water largely gained traction on Twitter. In three years, they raised over \$15 million dollars to bring clean water to people around the world. Charity: Water relies heavily on engaging content to get their message out. This includes video, impactful images, and consistent branding on Twitter backgrounds and profile images. By artfully telling their story and building connections between the audience and its mission, they created true momentum and support.

Etiquette tips and guidelines

Like any social interaction, Twitter has its own set of best-practices to follow in order to be successful. Here are a few tips to get you started:

Don't spam: This should be a rule across all of your marketing efforts, but it bears repeating here. There are many new accounts popping up with marketers behind them having the best intentions, but no matter how you slice it, spam is spam. Jumping in on irrelevant hashtags to market your product is unhelpful. Likewise, relentlessly mentioning every person in your feed to draw their attention to a piece of content or offer is typically received as annoying. Be sure to keep your tweets relevant, helpful to followers, and spam-free.



Direct messages: DMs are great when you need private information, like a shipping address. Traditionally, you can only DM people who follow you and vice versa. If you have a verified account through Twitter, you can select a special setting to allow anyone to DM you. However, you cannot respond via DM unless the person DM'ing you follows you.

Never send automated DMs as it's considered spam. Do not, under any circumstance, send auto-DMs to your followers. Auto-messages aren't engaging, and you aren't reaching out personally for relationship building. If you'd like to reach out to every single person that decides to follow you, do so in a personalized and unique way.



@ replies: When you start a tweet with an @username, only people who are following both you and @username will see your tweet. If you want more people to see it, just put a period or other marker in front of the username. Or you can always just rephrase your sentence.



Hashtags: By using #hashtags, you're exposing yourself to a wider audience. Many people follow conversations using various hashtags, but possibly won't be following you. Hashtags are meant as a shortcut to explain what your tweet contains or to show you're part of a conversation or event. If your brand's jumping into a hashtag, you should make sure that you're contributing value to the conversation instead of just promoting your business.



Retweet (RT): There are two ways to RT, manually or through Twitter's native RT function. RT's a great way to boost your community's members content, make them feel good, and say "you're awesome!" If there's a link you want to track or a grammar/spelling issues you want to fix before RT'ing, you can edit the tweet and post it as "RT @username: Puppies are cute!"



Scheduling updates: A variety of tools help people schedule out tweets. Scheduling updates is the community manager's very best friend as you are not always online or otherwise available to update Twitter when you need to. You create the tweet, set the time and date, select the account you want to send it from, and schedule. Scheduling allows you to publish content when your community's most active.

Make sure to watch your scheduled posts. Scheduling posts can be an incredibly useful tool that allows you to scale your energy. However, pre-scheduled tweets can be detrimental in times of crises, e.g. global disasters, national tragedies, etc. It's important to quickly turn any scheduled posts off even if these crises are not directly related to your brand; global events can erupt, creating an inhospitable environment for off-topic content. Worse yet, your posts may unintentionally become the source of controversy during a crisis. For example, [LiveNation went horribly wrong with Twitter, during a horrific accident at a RadioHead concert](#), which they were liable for. Be sure to keep an eye on your scheduled posts if you choose to do so.



Shortening links: Twitter now auto-shortens your links, but you should consider using a separate shortening service with built-in analytics, as it will allow you to track clicks of your content that don't point back to your own web properties. [Bit.ly](#), [Buffer](#), and [HootSuite](#) are all good options. You may even consider buy a customized shortened domain.



Twitter lists: Making lists of users can help your targeting efforts when you're trying to reach industry influencers or join in conversations relative to your niche. If you're making a public list, remember to be empathetic to people who aren't on it; it's best to stay away from lists that qualify or rate people or their services. Making the lists private avoids this issue.



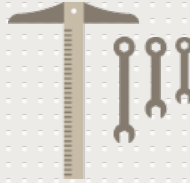
Use Twitter handles: If you're talking about someone who's on Twitter, use their @username. It's just polite, and your community wants to know when you're talking about them, as it's an easy ego boost. This also encourages the people mentioned to share what you've posted or further engage with your community.



Recommended tools

Followerwonk:

Admittedly, we're a little biased about our own tool. Followerwonk takes a data-driven approach to measuring an account's audience, but bias aside, we think you'll love it too. This tool helps you identify demographics, growth, interests, what time your followers are most active, and even tells you what audience members you share with competitors. Followerwonk helps you explore the social graph and really understand who Twitter users are.



Crowdbooster:

Depending on the size and number of accounts you are monitoring, this can be a free tool. It offers a fast and lightweight view on growth and what's working from a content perspective.



IFTTT: "If this, then that" allows you to set up rules for your online activity. Essentially, macros that work across your social accounts and even your website to create conditional triggers for events. Helpful for many activities beyond Twitter.

Twitter Cards: By setting up your web content with the right metadata, you can make rich content appear every time someone tweets a link to it. There are currently several varieties of cards, including templates for articles, photo galleries, apps, and even products.

Additionally, Twitter launched Lead Generation Cards, which go the extra mile in helping businesses drive conversions. They include rich content and a clear call to action, allowing new customers to engage with your content in a single click.

HootSuite, Social Engage, and Sprout Social:

These apps allow users to manage their Twitter accounts more effectively. With varying degrees of control and functionality, you'll want to take a look around and figure out what works best for your needs and your team. These tools all do essentially the same thing: help you engage, measure that engagement, and interact with your followers on Twitter in ways the web interface sometimes makes difficult.

Twitter for Business:

Twitter's own one-stop shop for hitting the ground running with your business. It's a great resource for those just getting started with the platform.

Simply Measured: This rich analytics tool allows you to measure follower growth, engagement, reach, and even figure out who your influencers are.



Chapter 8

Google+

If you're like most of the Internet, you've probably delayed your investment in Google+ in hopes of a sign that it's time to make a move. Consider this your sign.



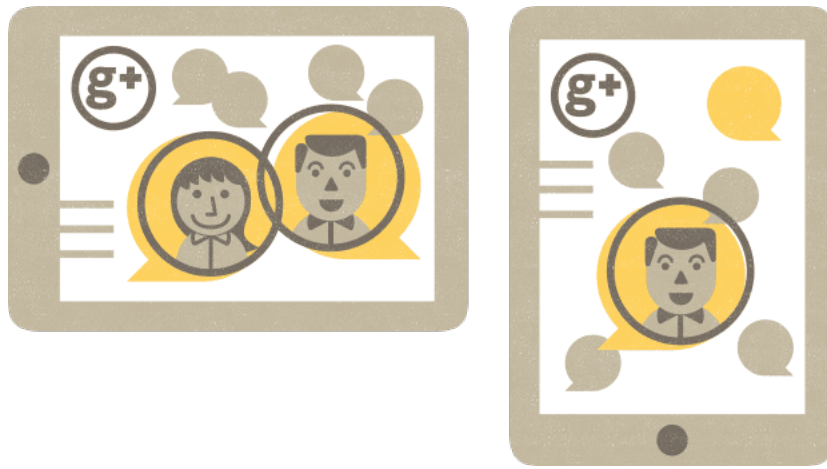
Google's social endeavor, Google+, became the new kid on the playground in 2011. It initially adopted many features from Facebook and Twitter, mixing in its own unique functionality like Circles and Hangouts. The platform is a little different from other social networks, in that it acts as a social layer across many of Google's own properties—including the display ad network—thus connecting millions of sites. With nearly [67% of US search engine volume](#), Google is still the biggest player in the search engine game. And, with [Google+ posts passing link equity](#) to other pages, building a presence here is a better idea than ever.

So how many people actually use Google+? The latest numbers from Google, [posted in October of 2013](#), show that there are about 300 million active monthly users who upload 1.5 billion photos every week.

While exact numbers aren't available, [reports commonly estimate](#) the site's users as about 70% male and 30% female. [CircleCount](#) reports the US as the biggest audience, followed by India and Brazil. Perhaps most interestingly, by a large majority, those [reporting a job role are students](#). The large majority of the remaining top are in either technology (developers, engineers, designers) or photography. The secret here is really about determining if your audience is there, and at this point, it's a safe bet it is.

How are people using Google+?

Google hasn't released much in the way of stats and information about how people are using the network aside from raw usage data. G+ is anecdotally believed to be largely male and tech-driven, which much of the available data seems to support. Early adopters are still the largest and most active groups on G+.



Much of how users actually engage on the network is the same as on Twitter and Facebook. However, because [circles force categorization of people](#), Google+ is far more easily customizable and allows a greater level of flexibility and dialed privacy. This would, in theory, allow users to enjoy the network with more people in more relevant ways. For example, you could share content specific to your professional network with people in that circle, while sharing the pictures of your kids to a more private circle, all from the same platform. Another feature that seems to be growing in popularity with users, marketers and brands alike is the Google+ Hangout. Hangouts can be public or invite-only and allow users to connect with one another with voice and video without needing to download any software. Google has also added [communities](#), which appear to mirror Facebook's groups, giving additional functionality and interaction opportunity to the site.

Strategies and tactics for success

Finding success on Google+ will—at least for now—be largely dependent on your audience and whether or not they have made the jump to this network. If they haven't, you'll need to either find a way to relevantly target the users that are there with your content in hopes of leveraging the benefits to your advantage, or you'll keep an eye on the network and test the waters here and there, waiting until your audience arrives to dive in.



Brainstorm: Gather and invite brand and product influencers into a specialized "community" where they are allowed and encouraged to have conversations with brand representatives. Use this as a forum for troubleshooting, gathering feedback, and generally engaging with particular influencers.

The increasing functionality of the network is exciting. With the addition of Communities, it is easy to see potential from a conversation and engagement perspective. As an added bonus, Google made it so your community can be tied to your brand page. Awesome.

Now the ability to add events through [interactive posts](#) to a brand page gives even more functionality. You can invite users to an event and notify them directly; when they RSVP, it will automatically be added to their calendar. Consider the impact here to both your online events and even those held at brick-and-mortar locations. Extending your offline events to your online and shareable audience could help net exponential reach (and ultimately attendance)!

Regardless of the platform, there are some universal truths to social media marketing for businesses that will hold true on Google+ as well. It's important to spend time clearly identifying the objectives you are trying to meet. Having these goals laid out will give you a way to measure your success, making the rest of your effort far easier.



Promote Google+ pages in other platforms:

Leverage your other channels (social and otherwise) to increase visibility to your burgeoning page. This increased visibility will help build the community there while also presenting an integrated front.



Image sharing:

The G+ community responds well to imagery, particularly professional photography. Social is a channel that rewards authenticity, though, so mix some more "homegrown" media in with the highly-polished brand imagery.



Implement authorship and publisher:

Implement authorship and publisher: Implement [publisher status](#) for your brand and site and help your blog authors [with authorship](#). This will help establish authority and will add a personal touch to content as Google SERPs will show author faces in results. Over time, this also allows the authors increased visibility. Use this to your advantage and let them build their voice and audience. All of these factors will increase the visibility and authority of your presence. Depending on the nuances of your content's authorship, you'll want to [make sure your content's properly marked up](#).



Format posts:

Use the * [and](#) _ and other operators in conjunction with paragraph spacing and post layout to call attention to your content and make it more professional and appealing to your audience. And don't forget to tag relevant people using "+" and their name.



Find and befriend tastemakers:

It is easy to find key influencers on G+. It's still a smallish community where it may be easier to get the attention of and build relationships with influencers in your space. Tread lightly though; don't spam and always be respectful.



What success looks like

Though many companies initially delayed their efforts on Google+, there are many that stand out as shining examples, and they have the +1s to prove it. Here are a few of our favorites:



MATLAB: A company that helps coding professionals better use their respective languages, MATLAB continuously provides its community with educational tools. They share content from their six blogs and numerous webinar series, offering an official certification program and general advocacy to grow the coding profession. Additionally, they reach out to audiences speaking both English and Japanese.

RedBull: The varied content that RedBull shares on Google+ is a great example of how to think horizontally about your brand and what it means to engage with consumers. In every post, the brand appeals to interests that exemplify what it means to be a part of the RedBull community and a RedBull drinker. You will not see posts about the product itself, its attributes, or even direct value propositions. What you will find is exciting images of extreme sports stars, video content about risk-taking, and even engaging music videos.

Asos: Asos does a great job of highlighting highly-engaging and interesting content on its page. The best part? They are present and accounted for in the comments. While many comments on Google+ can be spammy and add little value, the brand clearly monitors the page and reads through the replies to help grow their community. This gives the user a reason to actually reach out and converse with the brand and follow them.

King Arthur Flour: It's the little flour company that could. A once small and regional flour company has been able to blossom on the web. One of the tactics they're using and seeing impressive success with is engaging on Google+. Sharing lots of recipes and using delicious pictures gets a lot of people talking. You'll notice that they put a lot of effort behind their yummy content!



Etiquette tips and guidelines

Inexperience doesn't have to be a drawback when you're building your circles. If you keep your conduct classy, you'll have no trouble earning the respect of your audience. These tips will get you started.



Add value: Create good stuff. While trite, it is true. Giving people something to get excited about and a reason to want to follow you is the best way to grow your community. Google+ allows you to target who gets to see your content if you wish, so use that tool to your advantage and get creative. Can you create a special circle just for your top influencers and advocates? You betcha! The sky's the limit!



Engage: If you're putting out quality content and giving people a reason and opportunity to engage with you, you must be there to back-up that conversation. Be there to get involved, address questions, and add to the conversation.



Respond: If a follower takes the time out of their day to ask a question, come to you for help, or even just share something with your brand, it is simply the right thing to do to engage and respond to them. Don't ever leave them hanging. The only thing worse than not being present in a conversation is being around and ignoring half of it.



Frequency and scheduling: As with other platforms, timing is important with your posts on Google+. It's a little easier here because of the built-in filtering that circles offer, but like other networks, you'll need to figure out the optimal times and frequency for posting to your Google+ page. Currently, there is no way to pre-scheduled posts in Google+, except through a Chrome extension called [Do Share](#) or third-party tools such as [Sprout Social](#) or [Buffer](#). Do beware, though, that not all third-party tools allow for formatting.



Don't spam: Google+ is no different with regard to spam. There are even unique ways to bother people on Google+. For example, when "events" were introduced, there were waves of complaints coming from users who had felt as though they had been spammed by those trying out the feature. Users can share a post directly with groups of people sending them specific notifications of that post, or even via email, as opposed to simply showing up in their feed, a feature susceptible to spam. The "communities" feature attracts shameless spammers, too. These features must be used very thoughtfully to avoid annoying your audience. As with all social networks, Google+ will surely adapt to prevent some of these issues over time. In the meantime, avoid exploiting them for the sake of reach. You will be sacrificing authority and the respect of your community.



+Name: If you want to call out another Google+ page or person, you can directly link to their Google+ page (which notifies them that you're talking about them) by putting a + and then typing their name. (Google+ will help you with a drop-down.) This is similar to the @ symbol in Twitter, and helps make whom you're addressing clear to everyone. Definitely try to include author names when you post blogs, so they can engage with commenters too.



Notifications: As a page manager, you'll see the infamous Google+ notification bell on the righthand side of your screen. This will show you all of mentions of your brand on Google+, shared posts, new circlers, or community invites. To keep track of which ones you've already paid attention to and engaged with, you can x them out on by hovering on the right side of the individual notification box.



Recommended tools



CircleCount: If you're curious how the Google+ demographics align with that of your clients or brand, this site can help. By analyzing millions of profiles, they look at top influencers and show your posts aggregated in a quick snapshot of how they're doing. Having already analyzed over 23 million profiles, they are working to become the number-one data source for Google+.



Google+ Ripples: From a marketer's perspective, this is probably one of the most exciting tools available to us as a part of Google+. Ripples shows you just how your content is shared in an easy-to-navigate manner. If you want to see who your influencers are and how they're impacting the effectiveness of your content efforts, using this tool will put a giant smile on your face.



Google's Official Policy Guidelines: As with any social platform, you should be familiar with Google's intentions behind the Google+ platform, including the company's own explanation of how to use it. The policy guidelines from Google highlight actionable restrictions and also include features of the site, resources for brand to get support, and information around custom URLs.



Simply Measured: The Swiss Army knife of social analytics tools also has measurement for Google+, along with most of the other major players in social media.

Chapter 9

LinkedIn

The world's largest professional social network connects colleagues with each other and businesses with current and potential employees, all while enabling community development and content sharing. LinkedIn's potential lies in its power to build authority, establish thought leadership, and cultivate a robust network. Join us for a peek behind the curtain to see if LinkedIn is a match for your business.

Key stats and demographics



Looking for sources? Click on any of the stats above!

How are people using LinkedIn?

If you took your water cooler, networking event, business card holder, and Rolodex, smooshed them together, and put that concoction up on a domain, you would approximate LinkedIn.

People build out their profiles to showcase their professional background and resumes. They are able to connect with individuals they know or have worked with, leave each other recommendations, and find new connections. LinkedIn can also be a great place to look for and find a job, as it takes the utility of job boards and adds in the human connections that are so invaluable in finding the right position.

For companies, especially recruiters, that is just the beginning. Business professionals have created their profiles and gotten recommendations from co-workers, making it a solid fit for brands looking to recruit new talent. LinkedIn allows hiring managers to search and filter candidates based on multiple factors, and users can join groups based on professional interests.



Beyond recruiting efforts, LinkedIn is a great place for a variety of helpful social activities to boost your business.



Business development:

LinkedIn is a fantastic platform for generating B2B leads, with nearly [three times the conversion rate](#) of Facebook or Twitter. Your mileage may vary, but this certainly signals the platform is one that comes with great opportunity. Some tips include:

- 1 Keep your company page up-to-date**
- 2 Use the products and services spotlight**
- 3 Solicit recommendations for your products**



Establishing thought leadership:

Establishing yourself and your brand as an authority in your area of focus will help build authority and trust among your customers, both current and prospective. LinkedIn's feature set can help brands stay up-to-date on users' professional networks, in addition to establishing a business presence and sharing company news.



Add your blog's RSS feed to a widget that will automatically pull the feed in and showcase to the company page followers.



Groups are a great place to offer professional assistance and advice, although they are only open to individuals, not to companies.



Building customer advocates:

Be careful not to overdo self-promotion. Advocacy and word-of-mouth magic happen through positive engagement. When brands engage customers and build strong relationships based on respect and trust, customers will "like" the brand and perhaps even love it. LinkedIn makes it easy to be both personal and specific. You know a lot about the person you're interacting with, so use that information.

LinkedIn drives business value because it is based on a user's professional interests. This makes it an obvious and natural fit for sharing brand-based updates, news, and info; as well as driving traffic to company-focused websites.



Strategies and tactics for success



Personal use

- Complete your personal profile thoroughly and [honestly](#).
- Find your connections and reach out. Every once in a while, pick someone you haven't talked to recently and send them a note—without needing anything—just to say hi or share something interesting that you think they'll enjoy.
- Link to your profile from your blog, Facebook, and/or Twitter accounts to help people find your profile. (In fact, if the content being shared is relevant, link back to those pages from your LinkedIn profile. Keep in mind, though, that those links might draw hiring managers to those associated pages.)
- Participate in Groups. Your personal authority and trust can be boosted, leading to new opportunities, leads, and connections. Note that this functionality is currently only available to individuals.
- As LinkedIn continues to become a place for people to share quality content, we will see more engagement around that content. Be a part of that movement: Share your own content and share high-quality content from others.



Business use

- Complete your company page and ensure it is always up-to-date. If you change your structure or have company news to share, be sure you're updating your company page on LinkedIn; this will update in your followers' newsfeeds.
- Make updating your LinkedIn page part of the compliance process when fundamental updates occur at your company, as LinkedIn is often a source of truth for individuals doing research.
- Make sure to respond to your posts, reviews, and questions. If a user leaves a product review, thank them. If they have a complaint, address it. Answer questions and offer advice and assistance.
- LinkedIn can be an amazing source of competitive intelligence for your business. Follow your competitors' pages and watch for their news, updates, and employee changes. Certain exits and job openings can provide insight into strategic direction.



What success looks like

Companies that have found ways to grow professional communities have seen the most success on LinkedIn. This task requires more than just posting valuable content; the superstars of LinkedIn have found ways to facilitate meaningful interaction within their networks. Here are a few that stand out.



Teach for America: The Teach for America team clearly recognizes that LinkedIn is a valuable and high-potential platform for their recruiting efforts. They have a very well-developed page taking advantage of all of the features available. This creates a deep experience that adds to the authority they're building here. They not only share openings they're trying to fill, but also work to start conversations through the content they share. Additionally, they have worked to build and showcase testimonials on their company page, adding a level of trust to their presence.



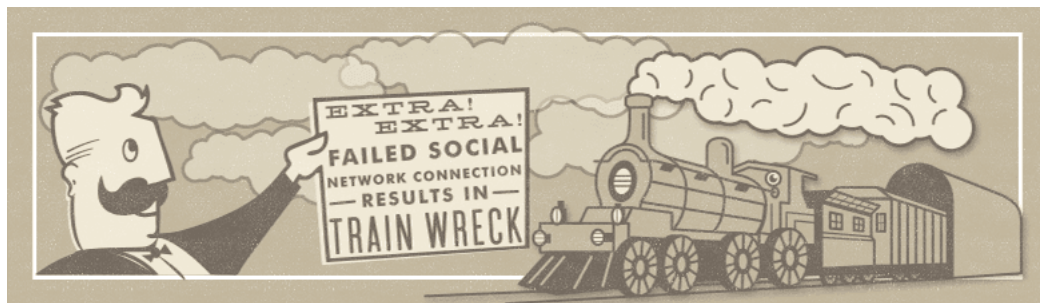
The Bridgespan Group's LinkedIn Groups: Bridgespan builds relationships with and supports non-profit organizations, and when it comes to community-based engagement, it has taken a bit of a non-traditional approach. Where many companies would attempt to build out and maintain their own on-domain forums, they've chosen to curate their community on LinkedIn with nine separate, functionally different LinkedIn Groups. They have broken up the Groups in ways that are meaningful for the community members, thus ensuring valuable conversations.



SAP: Companies can also have their own Groups centered on their product, offerings and related topics. This can be a great opportunity to host discussions, much like one would host a networking event. The SAP Group on LinkedIn allows the company to post targeted jobs and recruit new employees, with data and demo information about the group helping the recruiters narrow their searches.

Etiquette tips and guidelines

Connecting with professionals on social media involves a mindful and even graceful back-and forth; it's all too easy to come across as insincere or even spammy. The best relationships are cultivated through a natural and careful progression of communication. Pay attention to social cues, and you can avoid the many things that might result in a complete social train wreck.





A business card is not an invitation to be annoying:

We've all likely seen this happen: the business-card crop duster. The high-speed networker at an event circling the room like a Roomba looking to collect and distribute as many business cards as they possibly can. LinkedIn requests are immediately sent, likely without a personalized email, and invites are sent for a bunch of groups, events, or even to download their eBook. Please don't be that person. :-)



Be genuine: In every interaction you have on LinkedIn, be yourself as much as you possibly can. When connecting with someone else, avoid sending the standard "I'd like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn." Not only is it less likely to be accepted, you may even get marked as spam, resulting in your inability to send future connection requests. Personalized interactions make the other people feel like you actually value and care about them and take interest.



Cold mail: You might find someone on LinkedIn with whom you'd like to get in touch. If you do, use a personalized approach and give context to the email you send. Let them know who you are and why you would like to connect. (Your "why" should never be because you have something to sell.)



Recommendations:

LinkedIn recommendations can be an incredibly powerful thing, but should only ever be solicited from people you know well and who know your work. The recommendation itself will be much better for it. If you request one, feel free to tell the person you're approaching about a specific goal you may have for the recommendation. You don't want to do this in a pushy way, but you may get a more useful recommendation, and it can actually make their life easier as well since they'll have a predetermined area of focus.



@responding: While LinkedIn has no smart user alerts, using the @name when responding to comments on your Page or in Groups is a good practice to keep conversation flow coherent and directed. However, LinkedIn did recently start doing an activity alert; instead of just emails, it now tells people when conversations that they've been part of are updated.



Sharing content: Not all your content needs to be shared on LinkedIn, as what you share here can very easily reflect on your professional reputation or make you look self-absorbed. Avoid tools that automatically transfer posts from other platforms. Above all, be conscious and aware of what you're sharing, and try not to share too much—since connections are so important, LinkedIn is one place where you really don't want to be hidden from people's feeds.



Fix broken windows:

You want to make sure to clean any spam from your LinkedIn Groups. Members—especially those who need new jobs or other types of promotion—sometimes have a problem telling spam and low-quality postings from what you need to engage and grow your community. Be gentle and empathic, but make sure to have rules for your group which you can cite when moderating comments.



Discussions: There are ways to view LinkedIn Group activity in "Discussions" under "Choose Your View: Latest Discussions" and "What's Happening." "What's Happening" shows the discussions with the most recent activity, so you can keep tabs on current conversations. "Latest Discussions" shows the most recently posted discussions.



Recommended tools

Building a professional community can be a very different experience from business to business, so finding the right features and functionality that work for you is an essential step to success. Here are some of the more useful tools to help you customize your LinkedIn experience.



LinkedIn for

Outlook: If you use Outlook, this tool brings your professional network right into your mailbox. It also scans your Outlook contacts and finds new connections for you on LinkedIn. Having this information in your inbox can help you better keep track and engage with your contacts.



Buffer: This app, which raced to its millionth user in less than three years, will help you schedule posts and give basic click/reach analytics for all posts on your company page, in your groups, and in any of your individual profiles.



TrueSocialMetrics:

For the analysis enthusiasts, TrueSocialMetrics gives you a huge amount of data about applause and engagement on your LinkedIn page.



LinkedIn Maps:

Brought to you by LinkedIn Labs, this nifty tool lets you log-in with your LinkedIn credentials and visualize your network over a map.

Chapter 10

YouTube and Pinterest

YouTube

After its humble beginnings in 2005, YouTube has become more than just a place to watch cat videos. Eight years later, YouTube has morphed into the world's second-largest search engine, a driver of online culture, and a springboard for Internet fame. There's still plenty of cat videos to go around, but YouTube has its sights on bigger, better ideas.

Key stats and demographics

- YouTube sees over one billion unique visits each month
- Over 6 billion hours of video are watched each month
- 100 hours of video are uploaded every minute
- Mobile devices account for more than 1 billion views each day
- According to Nielsen, YouTube reaches more US adults ages 18-34 than any cable network
- Thousands of YouTube channels are making six figures annually

Source for statistics

How the network is being used by consumers

In a word, sharing. Content is being uploaded and shared through YouTube at record rates. Users can follow [channels](#) (which have gotten more sophisticated in their design and functionality over the years), upload their own content, comment on and discuss videos, and follow other users' content. With the ability to link directly to or embed videos, YouTube has become a primary source of video entertainment for users all over the web. Its ability to monetize through ads—both for itself and its users—adds a layer of financial sustainability.

Strategies and tactics for success

Engagement: The comments on YouTube are famous for being a bit of a wasteland. Many of them are meaningless and often from trolls. Many brands shut off their comments for good reason. You may opt to leave comments on, just to see what type of engagement you get, and that is okay too. What is not recommended, though, is to leave them on and ignore them; either tend to the garden or get rid of it altogether. And you can see powerful results by choosing to engage with your audience.

In order to improve commenting on YouTube, YouTube comments are now directly tied to G+ accounts. As a business, you'll need to link your G+ brand page and your brand's YouTube account. First, you need to make your YouTube account an administrator on your G+ page. Then make sure you're logged into your YouTube account and then follow YouTube's connect instructions. After everything's connected, alerts for new comments on your YouTube videos will appear in your G+ notifications, and your YouTube videos will show up in a tab on your G+ brand page



Content Strategy:

Help content and other how-tos: For some products, tutorials and how-tos are going to be incredibly valuable. Help your audience learn how to better use your product, including ideas about how to use your product in novel ways. Help them learn how to do things that may not be directly related to your product, but are highly relevant to their interests.

For example, a nail polish brand may occasionally highlight how-tos for special-event hair. This is incredibly relevant to their audience, but not directly related to their product. This is a tactic we've mentioned before: think horizontally.

Exclusive content: This can take the form of early access to new products, special channel-specific promotional deals, or even insider company news. Giving these limited audiences exclusive access to different types of content will make them feel honored and "in-the-know." Also, creating channel-specific content will give each individual a reason to follow you on more than one channel, increasing the depth of their relationship.

Incentivize participation: Have your community create content and share it on your behalf across their networks. You then can curate based on hashtag or on a central repository (e.g. a blog post holding YouTube content), or find some other way to help draw attention to and connect the user stories. This activity can drive awareness of your presence and help engage the audience while cutting down on the amount of work required of you.



Measurement: Just like your other marketing efforts, it is imperative that you know what success looks like. Tailor your efforts (content, engagement, etc.) toward initiatives that help you move the needle and prove your success by measuring progress against your identified goals.



What success looks like



Old Spice: You almost can't have a conversation about YouTube marketing campaigns without talking about what Old Spice did in 2010. They changed the game with their personalized response campaign, and its results proved it worked. The secret sauce for them was taking something that worked and resonated with their audience and made it more engaging and interactive. More recently, [REI used the channel](#) in a similarly responsive and agile way during a holiday effort.



Zillow: With a broad range of videos uploaded (everything from real estate industry news to an adorable video of a four-year-old teaching you how to use the iPhone app) and a [separate presence](#) to teach agents and brokers how to market houses using Zillow's tools, this online real estate firm is a great example of how to think outside the box when it comes to YouTube.

Etiquette tips and guidelines



Engage responsibly: If you have comments enabled on your videos, make sure you moderate them and stay engaged, as YouTube is more prone than other platforms to generate spammy comments. You'll want to make sure your channel continues to provide value. If you happen to find yourself in the presence of trolls (and the sun isn't out to turn them to stone), remember to keep your cool; you act on behalf of your brand in a public forum.



Comment wisely: Whether you have comments enabled on your videos or not, there are likely going to be times when you'll need (or want) to comment on other threads and videos. The standard advice applies there, as well: don't yell at people, check your spelling and grammar, use your brand voice, and definitely don't leave spammy comments yourself.



Advertise safely: This isn't a decision to take lightly. For high volume channels, it can be revenue-producing, but that needs to be weighed against the brand impact and the customers' experience with your content.



Favoriting and subscribing: If you favorite a video, it also shows up on your profile page as a video you favorited, sharing it with your friends and subscribers. Subscribing to someone's channel means that you'll see all of their latest uploads and favorites in the feed on your page. This the equivalent of following someone on Twitter.



Uploading videos: Luckily, YouTube takes about every video format under the sun. Uploading the video is the easy part, filling out the information about the video is the real work. You want to make sure that your description is SEO- and people-optimized, that your title and keywords are on target, that your videos are properly categorized, and (if possible) that you provide a transcript of each video. Every bit of relevant information you can add to your YouTube upload gives you more opportunity for people to find your video and makes it accessible for all types of users and search bots.



Recommended tools



YouTube TestTube:

This works much like Gmail Labs. For those of you looking to stay up-to-date on potential, new YouTube features (or even just get access to some neat elements), you'll want to occasionally check TestTube and see what they have to offer.



YouTube Analytics:

This offers the equivalent of Facebook Insights for your videos. You'll find numbers on engagement, discovery, and demographics.



YouTube Advertisers: This is a central hub where you can get an idea of what other brands are doing for inspiration, and it's also a portal with a great deal of content about ad solutions.



YouTube Charts: A list of videos sorted based on most views, popularity, comments or other criteria. Looking for content ideas? This is a great spot.

Pinterest

Through beautiful images and easy-to-use "pinning," this website has taken the online community by storm. Following its beta launch in 2010, Pinterest provided a way for users to simply share and create image collections for hobbies, style, businesses, and more. Whether you're a business owner connecting with your users through images or simply trying to redecorate your home in DIY-fashion, Pinterest has something for just about everyone.

Key stats and demographics

- Pinterest has **20 million monthly active users** (70 million registered users)
- More than 50 million unique visitors per month
- 5 million **"article pins"** per day
- Women are **five times** as likely as men to use Pinterest
- Pinterest users in the US spend **about an hour on the site** each month
- Shoppers spend more on their purchases when referred from Pinterest—**roughly twice as much** as referrals from Facebook and Twitter.
- Pinterest **drives more referral traffic** than Twitter, LinkedIn, and Reddit combined.

How are people using Pinterest?

Image-based sharing is becoming increasingly important for brands and consumers alike. The effectiveness of imagery has led sites like Pinterest and Instagram to quickly become the new staples in daily digital life. In a world where people don't necessarily want to spend a lot of time reading, rich media helps users share, communicate, and consume stories quickly and easily in meaningful ways.



Strategies and tactics for success



Engagement: The Pinterest community is growing quickly and can be very engaged. This is a great opportunity for your consumers to interact with you, so be sure to pay attention to your comments for opportunities to have conversations. They may be asking questions or just offering words of praise or concern. Using a tool like [PinAlerts](#) or Pinterest's analytics to monitor where and how your content is shared can help you catch opportunities that don't come directly to you.

Content Strategy:

Highlight customers: Highlight customers using your product, content they've created, or even their stories. It will appeal to their natural desire to be acknowledged and included. This also helps them feel like they've added value back to their community and instills a sense of ownership.

Behind the scenes: Give your audience a look behind the curtain by showcasing behind-the-scenes pictures. This increases the feeling of getting special limited content, and thereby, their affinity for your brand.

Community relations: If your business is involved in community or charity activities, share that with your audience. You may feel like this comes off as bragging, but it can be done in a humble and selfless manner. Your customers follow you because they're invested in you and what you're doing, and your efforts outside the office are an extension of that relationship. You might even get them involved!

Know your audience: Know everything you can about your audience, and give them what they want to see. Humor works particularly well on video, for example, and beautiful imagery of any kind tends to work incredibly well on Pinterest. You might even try to get to know people by spending time on the platform in your personal profiles. You can use that to get to know what works there and how people share and communicate.



Discoverability: Set your site up to be shared socially on Pinterest. Make sure the social sharing buttons on your content pages are easy to find and use. Directing people's attention to your Pinterest page will also help them find your content and enable sharing in new ways. Also, don't forget to implement appropriate tracking so you know how well these are working!

What success looks like



Sony Electronics: There are so many things right with what Sony is doing on Pinterest. From [brand new products](#) to a collection of [vintage products](#) and all the way to highlighting [sale products](#), they're utilizing a mixture of content for their brand fans. Sony use their ads as interesting points of content as well, but also don't shy away from some of the more off-topic boards. They've got the content nailed down.



Starbucks Beautiful Objects: The social media-savvy brand has extended its reach to Pinterest. One of their boards is only slightly related to coffee and shows how Pinterest doesn't have to be just about your product images. Go off topic a little, but stay relevant.

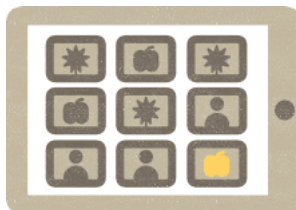
Nordstrom: From naming their social team members on the page to regularly posting on boards as broad-ranging as "[Totally Throwback](#)," "[Nautical Vibes](#)," and "[Beach Wedding Ideas](#)," this is one department store that knows how to pins. And, with a following of more than 4.4 million people, their strategy clearly works. Nordstrom gets bonus points for bringing their social integration full-circle, adding "[Top Pinned Items](#)" displays in its stores.



Etiquette tips and guidelines



Give credit: Sharing other people's content is at the heart of Pinterest, so giving proper credit is of the utmost importance. Ideally, everything is pinned from its original source, even if that means digging a bit to find it. You want to provide the best user experience possible, and if you pin content directly from a Google Image SERP, for example, users would be linked back to that SERP instead of the page where the image originated.



Change captions: Repinning isn't like retweeting on Twitter. You'll want to be sure to update the caption on a repinned pin to make it your own. It should represent you and your brand, and should show relevance to your community. Don't forget to use target keywords that your audience searches for so they can easily find your pins.



Don't flood: Pinning throughout the day is going to be a brand's best bet, and there are tools to help you schedule pins in advance. If you pin all of your content at once, you'll flood your followers' streams, and it could annoy them enough to unfollow your brand.

Organize: Keep your boards organized, as people will follow them for specific content. A user who subscribes to a "recipes" board doesn't want to see images of fancy cars or interesting furniture. If you want to share new types of content, create new boards.



Group boards: Group boards allow more than one user to pin to a board. You can collaborate with partner companies, your coworkers, and anyone else with whom you'd like to collaborate on unique and interesting content. You'll definitely want to have a strategy and purpose behind a shared board.

Secret boards: This is probably not a feature you'll use for your brand, but you can create boards that are shared with a limited group of people and invite them to pin on them as well.



Verify your site: In order to have a verified account and have Pinterest Analytics for your site, [you'll need to verify your site](#). Pinterest's Analytics will show you statistics on how many pins have been pinned from your site, what sort of traffic Pinterest drives to your site, and more.

Recommended tools



Pinterest's Blog: They highlight a variety of users and brands and showcase interesting news. Keep an eye on this blog to stay on top of any changes and also as a source of inspiration from users doing interesting things.

Postris: Helps you find the most popular boards, pins, and people on Pinterest.



Viraltag: A bulk scheduler for Pinterest helps you avoid overwhelming your audience and upload several pins at a time. Viraltag also features analytics and allows you to upload to multiple Pinterest accounts.



Curalate: This tool helps you measure board and pin engagement, generate traffic, find advocates, and more, depending on the pricing package. It also helps with Instagram.



PinAlerts: Basically Google Alerts for your website's content on Pinterest, among several other measurement features.

Rich Pins: Pinterest has made it possible for your products to show up as more than just photos. By prepping your site with the right meta tags, you can add rich content like prices and reviews to other people's pins of your content.

Chapter 11

Blogging

First things first: This is nowhere near a comprehensive guide to blogging. There are dozens of good books written about creating, growing, and maintaining a blog, and if you're interested in going down that path, we'd recommend you find a few you like. We hope, though, that this chapter provides enough background to give you a solid understanding of whether or not it's the right endeavor for you.

As web publishing has gotten easier, blogs have become more prevalent. Individuals with little to no technical experience can start up and run a blog using any number of different platforms. Consumers read blogs at greater rates now than ever before. Exact numbers are difficult to find, given how widely distributed blogs are, but there are more than [33 million new posts](#) each month using WordPress alone.



What does the blogosphere look like?

- There are an estimated 31 million bloggers in the US alone. [\(source\)](#)
- In one survey, almost 87% of bloggers had been actively blogging for at least two years. [\(source\)](#)
- 57% of bloggers report having more than one blog. [\(source\)](#)
- 35% of businesses blog at least once every month. [\(source\)](#)
- 60% of bloggers report to be men. [\(source\)](#)
- Nearly 2/3 of [influencers](#) earn revenue from blogging, but 80% of them report earning less than \$10,000 per year. [\(source\)](#)



How are people using blogs?

Every blog has its own set of objectives. Some are run by individuals, some by companies, and others by some combination of the two. While you can find a blog covering just about anything, there are several overarching buckets they usually fall into:



Corporate: These blogs are written by a company for its consumers or stakeholders. They are often found on the main company website or a dedicated subdirectory/subdomain therein. (Side note: there's good evidence that says a subdirectory is [a better choice than a subdomain](#).) Topics can vary from news and announcements to product launch info and even community relations efforts.



Personal/diary: Bloggers who keep a personal journal online may have aspirations to develop them into other types of blogs, but their primary function is sharing their lives and experiences and generally target existing friends and family.



Hobby or interest: These blogs are focused around a theme. It could be professional in nature (tech blogs often fall under this banner) or completely personal (involving something like fashion, beauty, sports, etc).



Professional: These folks are in it to make a profit. They may base their income on ads or even affiliate sales, or they may have other means of income; the key is that these blogs earn them a paycheck.



Community/communal: This category often looks like what is often called hyper-local news. A local Seattle blog, the [West Seattle Blog](#), is a great example of this working quite well. The blog covers news related to its particular neighborhood and has rich user forums that often generate a great deal of the content.



Strategies and tactics for success

Successful blogging is a lot of work. Depending on what success means to you and your company, it can involve any number of people—marketers and product managers are just the beginning. A blog is your opportunity to showcase your company's culture and personality while shedding some light on the products you offer.



Authority: Your blog should be used to help establish authority through content that adds value to your industry as a whole. That said, how you set your blog up can impact the authority in some niches. A self-hosted blog is going to be the safest bet for everyone. It is an extension of your website and should be treated just as professionally.

Content: Depending on your industry and the frequency with which you'd like to publish, content creation can be a challenging task. The key is to stay creative and think like your users. What kind of information would they like to see? What kind of information would help them use your products more effectively, or would make their lives easier? What would entertain them? You can get to the bottom of many of these questions by looking into your site analytics. It's a bit more trickier with Google now [masking people's search keywords](#) with "(not provided)" in your GA dashboards, but there are plenty of other sources of valuable information about your users. If you're using AdWords, you'll still have access to some keyword data.

You can also look to your competitors' sites, social conversations, your inbound Q&A, customer service requests, and any other feedback channels you have. Just look around you, and you're bound to come up with other ideas. Another idea is to open the conversation to your

colleagues, and even the customers themselves, to make it a group effort. Creating a content calendar where you can organize these ideas will work to keep you on track and prevent you from losing any of those great ideas.



Timing: Timing isn't actually everything, but it sure is an important part of the puzzle. It is especially important today, when we receive a constant flood of information from social channels. The perfect timing will depend on your audience. Ideally, you want to find the time and day when your community is most available and willing to receive and share your content. This is going to be a time when they're very active, but not so active that your message is lost among the noise. Try experimenting with different times of day until you get a feel for what that "optimal" time is for you. Tools like [Followerwonk](#) can help. You'll also want to keep an eye out for industry happenings, news, and other major events that may impact the attention span and appetite of your community.

Style: Blogs afford you an opportunity to step outside the bounds of the heavily vetted copy on the rest of your site and really develop your company's brand voice. Take advantage of that opportunity, and don't be afraid to show the world who you are. Raise that brand flag with pride!



At the same time, make sure your choices are intentional. Have a good sense for what your voice sounds like before you use it, and stick to it. That's not to say that individual authors or even individual posts can't have different tones, but they should all pivot from one primary brand voice. While this may sound limiting, it actually makes content easier to create, because you have a good sense for how your brand persona would approach a particular topic or situation. There's only the writing to figure out from there. That's the easy part, right? :-)



Frequency: The only thing worse than never blogging at all is starting to and not maintaining the effort. As a visitor to a company's blog, it is disheartening to see that the most recent post is from several months ago. This gives the visitor no reason to subscribe or participate. You certainly don't need to blog every day, or even every week for that matter. Find an attainable cadence, set expectations with your audience, and stick to it. Perhaps you only do a monthly industry roundup. That's cool. Just tell people in advance so they know what to expect.



Engagement: As we've mentioned before, engagement is where the real magic happens. Posts really come alive when they start to see comments and conversations from the audience. Engagement is also where a community starts to take shape. The biggest key is how you moderate it. Comments left unchecked are a golden ticket for spammers, who are crawling the Internet for opportunities to drop links. Not to mention [the trolls](#). There are a several good ways to moderate the comments on your blog, depending on your goals. Some people choose to have an approval process, but the more popular a blog becomes, the more labor intensive that strategy becomes. Some choose to have a site-specific log-on and profile, but this can cut down on engagement for those unwilling to take the time to create one. It's up to you and your own workflow to determine what the right strategy is for you.

Beyond the comment moderation, there is a lot of work that can go in to actually responding to comments and engaging with the audience on your blog. The same fundamental truths we outlined for social networks apply on your blog, as well. Be respectful, prompt, honest, and personable. Oh, and don't feed the trolls.

Consider creating a "reader's bill of rights" for your blog as your community grows. This document should outline what the standards for your community engagement are, including what the behavioral expectations are for both your community members and for your employees. It can help to not only keep you honest, but instill a sense of fairness and faith in your audience. At the highest level, it can be the "True North" you get to point to in times of conflict.

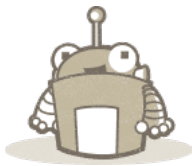


What success looks like

Successful blogs become known as reputable and enjoyable sources of information, earning the trust and admiration of their readers by providing valuable content on a regular basis. Valuable content, though, can take different forms for different people. Take a look at these success stories for a few examples.



West Seattle Blog: Perhaps one of the most celebrated hyperlocal blogs there is, the West Seattle Blog represents a small, but civically active neighborhood in Seattle. The blog began when a power outage in the neighborhood sparked the need for an instant and neighborhood-specific news source. From there, it has only grown. Now averaging a [nearly half a million visits](#) each month, the site has an avid community forum where discussions regularly end up on the front page of the blog, and from there, sometimes even the evening news. The West Seattle Blog is a regular source for reporters in the area and a "first-thing-in-the-morning" read for most residents in West Seattle and beyond.



Moz Blog: Born in 2004 as a venue for Rand Fishkin's thoughts, struggles, and discoveries as he learned SEO, the Moz Blog has expanded its scope alongside its parent company. The blog is now a hub for thought leaders in the inbound marketing industry, with an average of a million page views each month and many posts garnering more than 100 comments. With its focus on educational content that empowers readers to make effective decisions, the Moz Blog has become a must-read for anyone looking to learn more about inbound marketing.



OkCupid: The dating site struck gold when it turned its lens inward to dig up content for its blog. It pulled back the curtain and showcased the data behind their users' behavior, which is not something many sites like theirs are too eager to do. It paid serious dividends. Their blog alone has over 38,000 backlinks from nearly 900 linking domains, and while they stopped posting quite a while ago, they stand as a great example of success even today.



Recommended tools

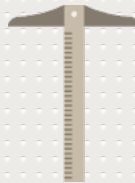
WordPress: One of the most popular blogging platforms in existence, WordPress is a free and open-source tool that can be hosted either on WordPress or on another domain of your choice. Incredibly flexible and easy to use, it is often the default option for both advanced and novice bloggers. There is an entire industry built around the creation and sale of custom themes and skins for WordPress, making the otherwise templated platform more personalized and customizable. WordPress can be used with existing sites as well, making it an frequent choice of businesses and consumers alike.



Blogger: A free blogging platform built by Google. This tool is quite similar to WordPress in theory, but without many of the features and flexibility. Blogs here can either be self-hosted or left on blogger.com. It's much better-suited for a casual personal blogger than a business or professional blogger.

Google Analytics:

Measurement is a must if you're interested in tracking your progress against business objectives (which you really should be). Google Analytics (GA) is a free analytics tool that provides insights about user behavior, traffic, and social behavior on your website. Your GA account can provide tons of useful data that will help you get to know your customers, what they're looking for, and how you can better serve them.



Comment Plugins: Most of the blogging platforms come with built-in commenting features, but for one reason or another people may choose to go with a different tool (often because of features, sharing, or concerns about spam). Some of the most popular are [Disqus](#), [Facebook](#), and [IntenseDebate](#).



Google Alerts: Another free Google tool, this one helps you keep an eye on your online reputation across the web. You can freely program the tool to send you alerts via email whenever it finds a mention of a keyword or keyword string you specify. You can set these up for yourself, your business, and even your competitors. When you've put some muscle behind a particular piece of content, it's also a good idea to set up a Google Alert for the title of that post. This will help you identify extensions of the conversation that you will want to get involved in. This is also a useful tool in protecting your content, as it can help you identify when your work has been stolen or scraped.

Fresh Web Explorer Alerts:

This is one of our favorite Moz tools. With a subscription to Moz Analytics, you now have access to set up e-mailed alerts for new mentions of custom queries. We like to think of it as [Google Alerts, only better](#).

Linkstant: By keeping an eye on when people are linking to your blog, you can follow the conversation. People will often read a blog and then start a conversation on their own site, usually linking back to the original spark—your blog. By participating in the conversation on the new site, you can usually generate a circular flow of traffic and engagement driving your readership, traffic, and links. This tool will alert you via email every time someone has linked back to your site, helping you uncover these opportunities.

Chapter 12

Social Media Doesn't Stop There

Aside from the most popular social networking sites that we know and love, there are plenty of other places around the web for users to interact and for companies to build relationships. Here are a few of our favorites.



Forums: Forums are perhaps one of the most mature forms of social media. In fact, many of the features associated with our more modern social networks, such as threads, discussions, and PMs (private messages), began in forums. Forums are made of various boards full of individual threads of user comments and conversations. They are highly customizable, set to either private or public, and hosted on nearly any website. Some stand alone, while others may live on a subdomain.



Instagram: Now owned by Facebook, Instagram is for creating and sharing photos and [short videos](#). With over [150 million monthly active users](#), the network boasts an incredibly active and vibrant user base that posts over [55 million images per day](#). Users can subscribe to pages curated by their friends and brands they like. Through the "Explore" function, users can also view the most popular videos and pictures across the network and search using keywords and hashtags. The app has lightweight editing features allowing users to creatively alter their images before they're shared. The videos have a maximum length of 15 seconds, so creativity counts. Instagram allows users to share their videos and pictures to other networks, including Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, Tumblr, Flickr, and through emails.



Vine: Vine is a Twitter product that acts very similar to Instagram video. Creativity reigns on Vine, where short 7-second looped videos created in the app are then shared on Twitter or across other networks. The major difference here is that Vine is a standalone product, whereas Instagram video is integrated into the Instagram experience. It's also worth noting that Vine content must be created in the app, whereas Instagram content can be loaded into the platform. Vines are growing in popularity and adoption. To see what some of the leading brands are doing, check out [brandsonvine.com](#).



Tumblr: Tumblr is a web- and mobile-based micro-blogging platform that allows users to publish (often in short format) text, images, and other content, both publicly and privately to their blog. Users can follow one another and in turn re-blog (share content from someone they're following). The platform boasts over [140 million blogs](#) and 65 billion blog posts. Now owned by Yahoo!, this popular platform may undergo updates and changes as the acquisition takes hold.



Quora: Quora is a question and answer-based social network, which started in mid-2009. Users follow one another to interact and can even follow topics they're interested in. They are encouraged to participate and answer questions through various points and voting mechanisms. These same mechanisms also help to ensure that answers to questions are high-quality, authoritative, and relevant. Quora is not alone in the Q&A website space; Yahoo! Answers, AOL Answers, Formspring, and Google's Baraza keep it company.



Reddit: One of the elite few of the social networks to have had a special event hosted by President Barack Obama, Reddit is a social news and content network that is truly "the front page of the Internet." Users are able to submit either a self-post or a link, and the topics tend to vary wildly. The community is able to then vote the post up or down, thereby dictating its placement or proximity to the front page. Comment threads on the submissions become a large part of the community and the entertainment value. One popular feature of Reddit is their Ask Me Anythings (AMAs). Their AMAs have featured such prominent public figures such as US President Barack Obama, comedian Louis C.K., Jeopardy! champion Ken Jennings, and internet celebrity The Oatmeal.

Social media goes global

There is no doubt that Facebook and Twitter are the current major players in the social media space. If you have a global presence, however, there are some other highly relevant places to invest your time—especially if you're operating in parts of the world where [Twitter](#) and/or [Facebook](#) may be censored.

Qzone: Created by Tencent in 2005, this social site permits users to blog, share photos, and listen to music. It's highly customizable (like the old Myspace), and there are paid participation elements.

Key markets: China and South Korea

Users: [Over 600 million](#)

RenRen: Known as the "Chinese Facebook," this site is particularly popular with college students.

Key markets: China

Users: [Over 194 million](#)

Badoo: Founded in 2006, Badoo is a social discovery site centered on dating. The site operates in 180 countries.

Key markets: Spain, France, Italy, and Latin America

Users: [Over 195 million](#)

Kontakte (VK): This site is very similar in design and functionality to Facebook. Keep in mind that they've recently acknowledged a spam problem, which likely inflates user numbers.

Key markets: Russia and former Soviet republics, including Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Moldova

Users: [79 million](#)





Odnoklassniki: Most similar to a Classmates.com (in fact its name translates to Classmates), the site was created in 2006. Most of its users tend to be under the age of 35.

Key markets: Russia and former Soviet republics, including Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Moldova

Users: 65 million

Mixi: Started in 2004, Mixi focuses on making connections based on common entertainment-focused interests through community forums and microblogs.

Key markets: Japan

Users: 14.5 million

Daum: Starting in 1995, Daum is the primary community forum, blogging service, email provider, and search engine for South Korea.

Key markets: South Korea

Users: 38 million

Orkut: Started in 2004 and now owned by Google, Orkut focuses on connecting you with friends and sharing videos, photos, and microblogs in a way very similar to Facebook.

Key markets: Brazil, India, and Japan

Users: unknown (Google hasn't recently shared any official numbers)

Cloob: Created in 2004, Cloob has managed to work within Iranian laws to bring social networking to Iran. In order to stay in business, the site does censor content.

Key markets: Iran

Users: Possibly 1 million or more

Line: Founded in 2011, Line has taken social sharing through instant messaging, photos, video, and audio and video conferencing by storm.

Key markets: Japan, Thailand, Taiwan, Indonesia, Spain, and more

Users: 230 million and growing rapidly

That's it! Well, for now, anyway. Social media is an area that changes with every passing day, and we'll do our best to keep this guide up-to-date with everything you need to know.

We'd like to wholeheartedly thank [Kristy Bolsinger](#) for writing the content of the guide and bearing with us through the publishing process, [Rob Eagle](#) for designing much of its graphic content, [Ashley Tate](#) for wrangling it into shape, [Trevor Klein](#) for managing the final stages of the project, [Erica McGillivray](#) for her tireless efforts updating the content as we moved toward launch, [Lindsay Wassell](#) for her long hours of thorough edits, [Deric Wise](#) for his superb design prowess, [Kenny Martin](#) for making blindingly quick work of the development, and everyone else who devoted many (many) hours to seeing it completed.

Thanks for reading; we hope you found it valuable! :-)