



Is Your Social Media Strategy Really a Strategy?

The ecommerce industry is aflutter with social media buzz. This is understandable – social media usage has grown faster than the adoption of television. With this in mind, many small online businesses are flocking to social media – in fact, one report states that utilization of social media by small businesses has doubled since 2009.

Here are a few reasons why:

- Social media is a cost-effective way to establish relationships with customers.
- Social media serves as a great source of open feedback and competitor intelligence.
- Fans/Followers of branded social media pages are more likely to buy from that company and recommend it to friends and family.
- Everyone else is doing it.

Wait, “everyone else is doing it?” That doesn’t seem like a very good reason to start a social media campaign!

Unfortunately this is the rationale many small online business owners use when entering the social space. But the problem with an “everyone else is doing it” approach is it typically leads to a haphazard social presence.

Sound familiar? If so, it’s quite possible that your social media strategy isn’t a strategy at all. Instead, it’s more of a mix of tactics thrown together under the guise of a strategy. But what’s the difference?

Highlights

1. Set your objectives

Some ideas include: brand awareness, thought leadership, networking opportunities and SEO benefits.

2. Choose the right channels

Take a holistic approach of integrating various social media channels to achieve your set objective.

3. Establish a timeline

By setting monthly or quarterly benchmarks, you can objectively gauge your progress.

4. Put together your metrics

To provide a legitimate strategy, you must establish metrics to gauge your progress.

5. Deploy, measure, adjust

The entire point of setting objectives and benchmarking them is to make sure that your strategy stays on course.

A **strategy** is a comprehensive plan meant to achieve a long-term objective. A tactic, on the other hand, is a specific action within a strategy intended to help reach the designated goal.

Now that you know the distinction, here's a step by step guide to ensure your social media efforts form an actual strategy:

1. Set your social media objectives

What do you ultimately want your business to achieve from social media? Some ideas include: brand awareness, thought leadership, networking opportunities and SEO benefits. While it's tempting to set your strategic objective to "all of the above," you need to pick one and stick with it – other positive results will coincide with your growing social presence.

2. Choose the right channels to meet your objectives

Next, take a holistic approach of integrating various social media channels to achieve your set objective. This means that you need to carefully select which tactics to use within your campaign – you can't be everywhere at once, so choose the channels that will best help reach your goal.

Here's some aspects of various social tactics to help guide your pairings:

Blog

- Serves as premier outlet for offering fresh content that's pertinent to your defined audience
- Lays foundation for spreading unique content across the web

Facebook

- Establishes a "face" for your brand via addition of photos and personal information
- Facilitates an interactive community with wall posts, discussion boards, fan photos and likes

Twitter

- Presents chance to expand social network and find influencers in specific industries
- Lets users share your content, including blog posts, articles, etc.

LinkedIn

- Provides location to establish business credibility and share business information
- Offers place to join relevant groups and make connections with other thought leaders

YouTube

- Allows for repurposing of customer videos, product tutorials, testimonials, etc.
- Supplies vehicle to comment on others' videos and reach out to those with similar interests

As an example, if the objective of my social media strategy is to establish thought leadership within my industry, I would start with my blog to create unique, relevant content and use Facebook and Twitter to spread that content. I'd also use YouTube to create educational videos related to my blog. As you can see, by purposefully mixing various tactics, I've put together a comprehensive strategy to achieve my thought leadership objective.

3. Establish a timeline for completion

Another integral part of any strategy is creating a timeline to reach your goal. By setting monthly or quarterly benchmarks, you can objectively gauge your progress. The key to this step is establishing smaller goals within each tactic for measurement against your deadline.

Going back to our thought leadership example, you could set benchmarks of establishing 5 blog relationships and posting 8 articles on your blog by the end of July. And by the end of August you could set a benchmark of making 3 guest blog appearances and posting 2 educational videos on YouTube.

Of course the numbers will vary on a case by case basis, but you get the idea.

While creating your benchmarks, it's advised to dedicate a certain amount of time to executing your strategy. Far too many small online business owners strongly launch a social campaign, only to drop off the face of the earth 6 weeks later. Just like any strategy, social media takes time, so make sure you're ready to make the long-term investment before diving in the pool.

4. Put together your metrics

To provide a legitimate strategy, you must establish metrics to gauge your progress. The easiest way to do so is creating key performance indicators, or KPIs, for each of your tactics. Some KPIs include: number of Twitter followers, number of YouTube views, number of blog subscribers and growth patterns for each metric.

It's easy to fall into a trap of setting arbitrary numbers for your KPIs. Hitting 500 Twitter followers sounds nice, but what does that really mean? Instead, it's best to base your KPIs on your objectives, so perhaps setting a KPI of adding 50 influential Twitter followers is better aligned with a thought leadership goal.

Whatever the case, be sure to track results against your metrics to see how you're performing in each of your channels – this will allow you to make proper adjustments.

5. Deploy, measure, adjust

The entire point of setting objectives and benchmarking them is to make sure that your strategy stays on course. If you're exceeding your KPIs in one channel and are way behind in another, you have an opportunity to evaluate your execution and make alterations as necessary.

It's okay to shift course if things aren't working as planned – the beauty of a true strategy is that you can

make changes along the way to better achieve social media success.

And there you have it – a five step plan to legitimize your social media efforts! If you haven't gone through this process or you identified with the "everybody else is doing it" mentality, it's a good bet that your social media strategy isn't really a strategy after all.

Fortunately, in this ever-evolving medium, your online business can quickly adjust to better maximize the bountiful benefits social media has to offer.

About Volusion

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