17

Social media strategy

In this chapter, you will learn:

» The strategic uses of social media

» The steps involved in creating a social media strategy

» To design documents and protocols you should have in place for social media success.

17.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we covered some of the major social media channels and platforms and the three phases involved in using them to reach your customers. These included strategy, implementation and analytics. Strategy is by far the most important, as it informs what and how often you post and how you choose to engage and relate to your audience. Strategy also informs how and what you will analyse. It is important that all these parameters are clearly established in your strategy and that your strategy is in turn informed by the analytics you receive on your content and style of engagement.

Social media can be used to solve business, marketing and communication challenges and is an important part of digital marketing. With so many platforms and choices available in social media, this chapter will show you how to use these spaces strategically to address these challenges. The last few years have seen a shift in social media strategy. The space is becoming a more traditional medium for advertising, but with a far better ability to target consumers. While it is still recommended to build a community on Facebook, there are brands using the platform for effective advertising, without actually having any followers.

Despite these changes, effective community and reputation management should remain key considerations in your social media strategy. Planning and thinking strategically, while leaving room to be flexible and respond to analytics and tactical opportunities is your key to making the most of social media marketing.

Consumers spend more and more time online and that time is increasingly being spent on social media sites. In 2016 over 67% of Internet users were active social media users, equating to 2.3 billion people, 10% more than in January 2015 (Chaffey, 2016). Users spend an average of 30% of their time online, on social media (Mander, 2016).

The largest demographic of social media users is still young adults, aged 18 to 29, but the largest growing demographic is the over 65 year olds, who have tripled in number since 2010. Mobile is the device of choice when accessing social media, eclipsing desktop. In fact, 80% of Facebook's audience access the platform via mobile (PewResearchCenter, 2015).

17.2 Key terms and concepts

Term	Definition
Community guidelines	The rules and principles that community members must adhere to when communicating on a social media platform.
Community management	Community management is the building and monitoring of online communities generated from your brand's blogs, forums, social network pages, etc.
Key performance indicator (KPI)	A metric that shows whether an objective is being achieved.
Lead	A person who has shown interest in a brand, product or service and could be converted into a customer.
Objective	A desired outcome of a digital marketing campaign.

Online reputation management (ORM)	Understanding and influencing the perception of an entity online.
Search engine optimisation (SEO)	The process of improving website rankings in search engines.
Social media dashboard	A service that allows you to centralise management of your social media properties.
Social network	In an online context, a type of website model where individual members become part of a broader virtual community.
URL Shortener	A web tool that creates a shorter version of a full URL.

Table 1.

17.3 Using social media to solve business challenges

Strategy is an important aspect of social media planning. Part of that strategy is identifying which business challenges, marketing and communication challenges in particular, your social media will address. These can include:

- Communication and outreach
- Community management
- Support and customer service
- Reputation management
- Advertising and awareness
- Sales and lead generation
- Search engine optimisation
- Insights and research.

Figure 1. Social media marketing can help with a number of business challenges.

17.3.1 Communication and outreach

Social media offers brands an effective two-way communication and real-time broadcast channels. This bi-directional communication is what makes social communities so exciting (and challenging). Just as consumers can communicate with each other and send messages to businesses and brands, so businesses and brands can use this medium to communicate with and reach out to the public. Social media is a highly effective public communications tool.

Businesses, governments and other organisations use Twitter and Facebook to broadcast timely messages, allowing interested parties to keep informed in real time. This has become a vital aspect of newsworthy and breaking news events such as elections, disasters and global sports. Many organisations also use social media tools to broadcast service updates.

17.3.2 Community management

Social media platforms are built around communities and are sometimes virtual representations of real-world networks and communities. This feature of social media can be used to build and maintain a supportive community around your organisation.

Community manager is a role that has risen to prominence as more organisations start using social media, but it has always been an important role in any community, from groups that thrive on forums, to communities run on Facebook.

Creating, building and nurturing a community means that organisations don't just participate in conversations that are happening around and about them, but also actively lead and guide those conversations. These communities are generally made up of the organisation's biggest fans, often called brand evangelists, who feel as if they have a big stake in that organisation. This creates an environment where those fans can interact directly with the organisation and where the organisation can send messages directly to those fans and solicit their feedback. See some great tips on successful social media management at: www.toprankblog.com/2016/10/7-helpful-hacks-successful-social-media-community-management

Figure 2. Example of good community management: Chipotle providing awareness of their product and then responding to customers in a brand appropriate tone and encouraging engagement and sharing of the post.

Building and maintaining a community is a long-term project. It starts with determining what the best platform is for that community; something that already exists (such as Facebook), or developing a customised new community platform created for the specific brand's purpose (either from scratch or using a service such as Ning – www.ning.com).

17.3.3 Support and customer service

Social media is also an additional customer service channel. As consumers are increasingly comfortable transacting online, they expect the businesses with which they transact to respond to customer queries in the social space, as they would do through a call centre or email. Some customers have found that problems or questions on social media tend to be resolved more quickly, as brands are wary of having unresolved issues left out in public. For any organisation that runs a social community, customer service is often one of its primary functions.
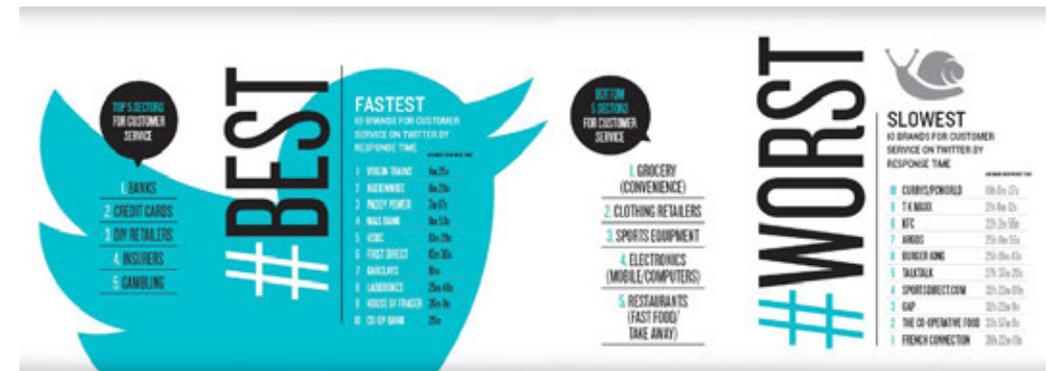

Figure 3. Best and worst industries and brands at customer service on Twitter.

It is important that brands do respond to customer complaints or queries, as platforms can keep track of response times, rates and tone of responses. Every year Twitter publishes the best and worst brands for customer service on their platform. It does not help with brand image to appear on the ten worst list.

Interestingly, social media customer service becomes collaborative, with customers assisting each other and, in doing so, reducing the reliance on the organisation for support. Collaborative support tools such as Get Satisfaction (www.getsatisfaction.com), a customer community platform, are used to great effect. According to Get Satisfaction's website, over 70 000 communities use their service, including Microsoft and Intuit's Mint (Get Satisfaction, 2016). Even businesses that use social media channels such as Facebook for customer support can see other community members helping each other.

17.3.4 Reputation management

Social media is a very effective tool for crisis communication and management. In certain instances, it is the place where some crises start. This can be due to offensive content, an employee saying something stupid or inappropriate, or even just angry customers sharing their complaints and getting reactions. It is important that you do not delete angry post, but acknowledge them.

Social media is also great for monitoring what is being said about your brand and to spot a potential crisis long before it becomes one. Tools like Brandseye can be really effective for online monitoring. Such a 'heads up' allows your brand to mediate the crisis by being proactive and ameliorating the crisis before it takes hold. And when a crisis does hit, social media is a great space for managing your communication as it enables you to get your side of the story out.

17.3.5 Advertising and awareness

Where there is an audience, there is advertising. The more time users spend in social media, the more brands want to advertise there. It's not just the large numbers or users and the time users spend on social networks that make them appealing to advertisers, it's also the rich demographic and psychographic targeting opportunities. Adverts can be targeted based on the profile information that individuals provide, either overtly or through their actions on the social network. Most social networks offer a number of advertising options that are accessible to both small advertisers and big spenders. Social advertising is dynamic, with new advertising options released regularly. Brands should experiment with the different formats and models offered by the various platforms to find the platform and ad type or format that works the best for their audience.

17.3.6 Sales and lead generation

Adding a social layer to a commercial transaction can create a richer experience for online consumers. These can be based overtly on social connections, or on inferred connections based on behaviour.

An excellent example of the layer based on inferred connections is Amazon's collaborative filtering. If you've browsed on Amazon.com, you will no doubt have seen product information such as 'People who bought this also bought that'. In real time, based on consumer purchase behaviour, Amazon presents products that you are likely to have an interest in, based on users who browsed and purchased products that you like. Although you may not realise it, this is a social layer on the online shopping experience. Users benefit as they are exposed to new items they may not have thought about looking for and the shopping experience is made easier and is tailored towards them. The brand benefits from additional sales on items that the user may not have considered purchasing until they were shown it.

Social communities can also be lead generation or sales generation assets. Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest already have, or are looking to include, direct shopping channels within the platform.

17.3.7 Search engine optimisation (SEO)

Social media plays an important role in SEO. It provides additional assets that can be optimised so that a brand 'owns' the results page for searches for their brand.

A savvy SEO strategy will also make use of social media assets, links and likes for strengthening the position of other web assets in the search engine results pages.
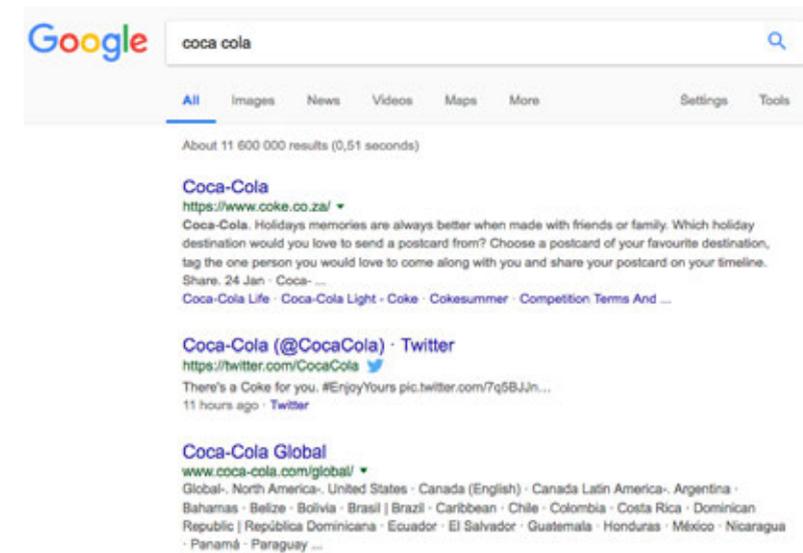
Figure 4. Coca-Cola's branded social media platforms appearing in Google search results.

With a little bit of planning and keyword research, a brand can use social assets effectively to own searches on their brand name. This ties back neatly to managing their online reputation, too.

17.3.8 Insight and research

Social media can be a very powerful insight and research asset, but the information needs to be judged in its proper context. When you are planning a campaign, social media can provide a rich source of data, both demographic and preference based. You can use the information users share freely to understand more about your market, brand or product. ORM tools help you to track mentions and sentiment, giving you insight into how you are perceived by consumers.

Using social network ad planners, such as Facebook's Ads manager or Google Display Planner (Google discontinued Ad Planner in November 2016), can give you rich information about the size of your market and things that consumers like. You can measure sentiment and the changing number of mentions to help you understand the impact of other campaigns. These can be offline or online campaigns.

Building your online community also gives you a group you can reach out to for information and feedback, creating an always-on online focus group. However, bear in mind that these users are inherently biased just by the fact that they would join your social community.

Social data can be very valuable, but must be treated correctly. It is qualitative and quantitative information and is in many ways secondary research. For research purposes, it can and should be used to help form research questions for further evaluation.

17.4 Step-by-step guide to creating a social media strategy

Social media is fast-moving, which means proper planning is vital to success. Effective social media strategies come from embracing the fact that social media is a two-way communication tool. Organisations need the resources not only to push messages out, but to deal quickly with the messages coming in, too.

Planning is the foundation of success. Here is one method to approaching social media strategically.

17.4.1 Step 1. Get buy-in

Getting buy-in for using social media is essential. It may be seen as a free resource, but even if you are not paying for exposure, there is a time and resource investment required. A number of stakeholders will need to be aware of your social media plans and these may be both internal and external. And, of course, you will need sign-off for any budgeting or additional resourcing requirements.

Addressing the various stakeholders will also force you to do the necessary research and planning to take the next steps.

17.4.2 Step 2. Listen and understand the landscape

Social media is more than the social spaces you may interact with in your personal capacity. A good first step to understanding the full social media landscape is to listen well to conversations your target market is already having around your brand or industry.

Some important questions to answer include:

- What conversation already exists around your brand, your industry and your competitors?
- Do they have the facts?
- Where does it take place?
- Who is doing most of the talking?
- What are the emotions involved in conversations about your brand?
- What are the motivations of those that comment on your brand online?
- What can you, as a brand, add to this conversation? Is it valuable?

Online monitoring tools such as BrandsEye (www.brandseye.com) can help you with the listening part of your planning, but in the early stages you may want to start with free tools such as Google Alerts (www.google.com/alerts).

17.4.3 Step 3. Analyse

Using all the data you have been gathering, analyse! Think critically about social media and your brand, as well as your brand's broader marketing, communication and business challenges. All of this should be looked at within the context of the information that you already know about your local marketing and business environment.

Your outcomes here should include:

- A list of the social channels and platforms your brand should be on. This is based on who your customers are, where they interact and where they expect to interact with you.
- Non-official groups or communities that already exist, which may have been created by fans.
- An overview of the existing conversation (volume, frequency and sentiment), as well as any content or conversation themes that occur.
- An overview of what your competitors are doing in this space.
- A list of potential brand evangelists and influencers in your industry.

17.4.4 Step 4. Set objectives

Your objectives are the desired outcome of your social media strategy. Your ultimate objective, as to what social media should achieve for your business, should be established upfront and be based within the context of your marketing and business challenges. After listening and analysing you can now set specific social media objectives that will feed into your overall outcome. You need to identify exactly how you will use social media to reach the business objectives for your organisation and then set SMART objectives that will help you to achieve these.

To make them tangible and measurable, establish key performance indicators (KPIs) for your objectives, with benchmarks and targets where appropriate. Determine SMART objectives shown below.

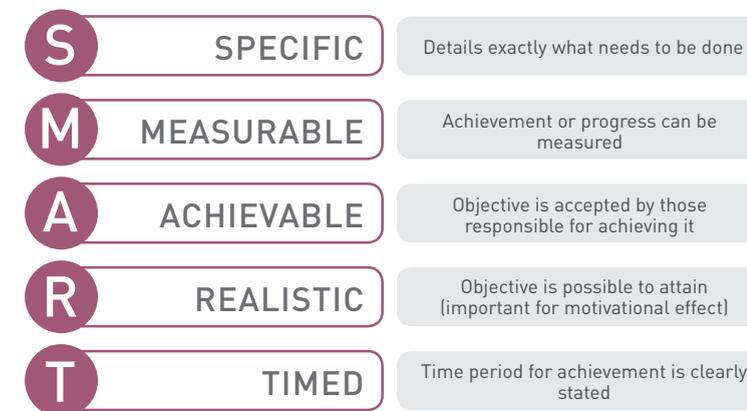|		
S	SPECIFIC	Details exactly what needs to be done
M	MEASURABLE	Achievement or progress can be measured
A	ACHIEVABLE	Objective is accepted by those responsible for achieving it
R	REALISTIC	Objective is possible to attain (important for motivational effect)
T	TIMED	Time period for achievement is clearly stated

Figure 5. The various elements of a SMART objective.

For example, your objective could be to grow a community of fans around your brand in a particular country. Your KPI might therefore be fan numbers and you could set a target of 5 000 Facebook fans over six months.

17.4.5 Step 5. Create an action plan

Once you have a clear idea of what you want, you can begin compiling an action plan to get there.

This is where you need to make sure that you have created the necessary documents and processes that form the foundation of your plan. Remember to keep your and chosen platform in mind when making these plans. You will need to:

- Decide on the roles and responsibilities of the project team and other stakeholders.
- Determine what social media tools you will use.
- Commit to a frequency and volume of activity and how quickly you will respond.
- Develop a conversation plan.
- Create tone of voice guidelines, frequently asked questions, community guidelines and content plans.
- Determine your paid media targeting.

17.4.6 Step 6. Implement

This is the fun part! It's time for your plans to kick off and put all that research and thought into action. Set up your platforms according to the specific guidelines for the platform. Most platforms have helpful and informative guidance for businesses wanting to be on their site. They also provide brand packs and assistance in establishing yourself on the site. Pinterest, for example, offers detailed guidance on their platform, see: business.pinterest.com/en.

Alert stakeholders that you are starting your engagement plans and make sure you have tracking in place. Continue to monitor for mentions of your organisation and responses to your messages. Keep to your general plan, but be prepared to adapt.

17.4.7 Step 7. Track, analyse, optimise

The beautiful thing about digital marketing is that you can track every single user interaction and use this information to learn from and improve your efforts continually. You should track the success of your social media campaigns on an ongoing basis and set milestones for your team at less frequent intervals (every couple of months or so), when you will sit down and do an in-depth review.

There are several tools you can use for tracking social media. You will need to build a suite of tools to suit your measurement and reporting requirements.

Platform insights

From the previous chapter you saw how each major platform offers its own analytics to businesses and brands that sign up for business pages or profiles. These are a useful starting point for reporting on your social media efforts, from numbers of followers or fans, to interactions with the content you share.

Web analytics

If you are using social media channels to send traffic to your own website, you should tag the links so that you can segment that traffic in your website reports.

In Google Analytics (www.google.com/analytics), you would use campaign tracking parameters.

NOTE

Read more about this in the **Data analytics** chapter.

URL Shorteners

URL shortening services such as bit.ly, goo.gl and ow.ly offer usage data that will tell you how many users click on links you share, when they click on them and where in the world they are from.

UTM parameters

UTM parameters are short text codes that you add to a URL to track data about users and traffic sources. UTM parameters are also known as UTM codes or UTM tags. UTM parameters do not modify any content on the site, but are simply for tracking purposes (Hootsuite, 2017).

NOTE

UTM stands for Urchin Tracking Module because Urchin Tracking was one of the original web analytics software developers who came up with these tags.

UTM parameters help you to analyse how each of the marketing channels you have invested in, such as search, display, or social, have contributed to your campaign. You will be able to see which channel sent the most number of users to your site, what the conversion rate of the various channels are and which channel offers the best return on investment. You can also organise your data so that you can compare different campaigns to assess content, timing, distribution platforms and so on. They are invaluable tools (Kissmetrics, 2017).

Here is an example that you saw in **Social media platforms**. Note the UTM tag at the end of the URL.

www.redandyellow.co.za/5-ways-design-can-used-empower-women/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=AugNewsletter

You can read more on how to use UTM parameters at blog.kissmetrics.com/utm-parameters-video which also includes a video on how to use UTM tags on Google Analytics.

Online monitoring software

Online monitoring software, also known as sentiment analysis or opinion mining software, is an important measurement investment that you will need to make. It helps you to keep track of all mentions of your brand and to understand the sentiment and influence of those mentions. You should be tracking your reputation for trends and changes over time. Some popular choices are: BrandsEye (www.brandseye.com), Brandwatch (www.brandwatch.com), SEM Rush (www.semrush.com) and Hootsuite (www.hootsuite.com) (Ganot, 2016).

Social media dashboards

There are a number of services that make it easier for you to centralise management of your social media properties, as well as making collaborative management easier. They also integrate analytics data from a number of sources, making reporting easier.

Figure 6. Twitter profile overview on Hootsuite.

Some services include:

- Everypost (everypost.me)
- Buffer (buffer.com)
- Hootsuite (www.hootsuite.com)
- Nuvi (www.nuvi.com)
- Sprout Social (www.sproutsocial.com)
- Socialbakers (www.socialbakers.com)
- Tweetstats (www.tweetstats.com)

17.5 Documents and processes

Good documentation and processes are the foundations of social media success and your social strategy is likely to involve many stakeholders from across your organisation. Processes and guidelines ensure consistency across the various channels. These should be created, agreed on and approved before you take any action on social media.

Start with the documentation and processes you already have in place for marketing and communication, for example, brand and tone of voice guidelines, or PR policies. Build on these to create a robust foundation that suits this spontaneous, dynamic space.

A social media checklist is a good starting point to make sure that you have everything in place. Examples of the checklist, conversation calendars and escalation protocols are also included for you.

Figure 7. The social media checklist.

17.5.1 Community guidelines

As well as a privacy policy and terms and conditions, it's a good idea to establish community guidelines for the communities you manage, especially when the community is on behalf of a brand. Community guidelines help to set the tone for the community and are useful to refer to should members behave in a way that is undesirable. Guidelines indicate what will and will not be tolerated, such as hate speech, profanity, discrimination, or other inappropriate content. Of course, community guidelines don't prevent such behaviour, but are useful to fall back on should you need to remove comments or community members.

Guidelines should be friendly, with the tone in keeping with your community or brand.

Many social media platforms provide their own guidelines that all users, including brands, have to adhere to. Failure to adhere to any of the guidelines could get you removed from the platform.
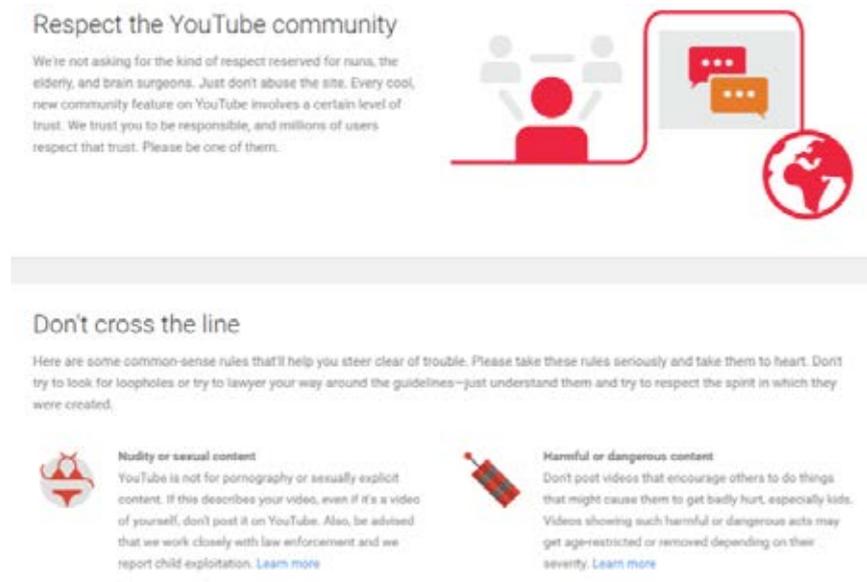
Figure 8. Part of the community guidelines of YouTube, 2016.

As well as recommendations for members' conduct and the types of material that can and cannot be shared, guidelines should include information about how and who to report violations to. Methods for members to protect their personal information and intellectual property are also important things to include.

17.5.2 Content plan

Content plans help you to plan your community conversations and the messages you send. We suggest weighting your content to your objectives. Decide on what you want to achieve with each objective, by when and what level of priority it is for your business. Map these objectives weekly and monthly as necessary. Then create weekly or monthly content plans around these objectives, based on each objective's relative priority for your business per week.

For example, if your objectives are brand awareness, sales and app installs, you need to weight them according to their importance. If your main objective on social media is brand awareness, make this 50% of your content plan. This means that 50% of all content you post will be aimed at increasing brand awareness. If the other two objectives are equivalent, then content driving sales and content driving app installs should each make up 25% of your content plan. If this changes over time, so that in week three, you want app installs to be your most important objective, then content driving app installs becomes 50% of your content plan, with content promoting brand awareness dropping down to making up only 25% of your content plan.

Content plans are useful, centralised planning documents that ensure that various teams are all aware of each other's efforts and that communications are integrated. For any kind of content and communication strategy, content plans are invaluable. Be sure your content plan speaks to your objective, your brand identity, your chosen target audience and the themes or topics you have selected.

As you learnt in the **Content marketing strategy** chapter, reaching social audiences requires that you create content that truly resonates with them. Successful social content must be interesting, relevant, shareable and remarkable. It is especially useful to plan and create social content around your content pillars, since this gives you a solid structure and starting point to follow.

To start creating a conversation calendar, you should plot everything that is relevant to your community. This could include public events, dates and anniversaries, or events and communications already planned by your organisation.

You should also use your conversation calendar for reporting. Keeping track of interactions and responses to your planned posts will help you to determine what kind of posts your community responds to, what days are best for posting and what frequency works best for your community.

CoSchedule, a content marketing editorial calendar software, provides some guidance on how often to post on each platform. Some platforms like Twitter and Pinterest require frequents posts each day, while Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn require less posts (Neidlinger, 2016). However, with platform algorithms changing all the time, the frequency of posts is becoming less important. A great post will circulate and appear in newsfeeds for much longer because it has good relevant content.

Brands should only post content relevant to their objectives and not to fill spaces on a content calendar. Posting poor content to meet a prescribed number of posts, may end up negatively impacting on your brand. Because of the algorithms, competition for brands to create good content is becoming intense, but ultimately the user will get to experience better organic content. Some brands may have to resort to paid media to get their posts seen at all. Ultimately the content you choose to create and the frequency of your posts, should be informed by your community on each platform.

Planning the conversation helps to keep momentum, especially in the early days of building a community. However, it should not replace spontaneity, this is a conversation, after all!

Date	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Theme							
Image							
Facebook							
Twitter							

Figure 9. An example of a conversation calendar.

There are many fields that can go into a conversation calendar (such as suggested copy, links and more). Take the basic calendar provided in Figure 9. and adapt it to your needs and preferences.
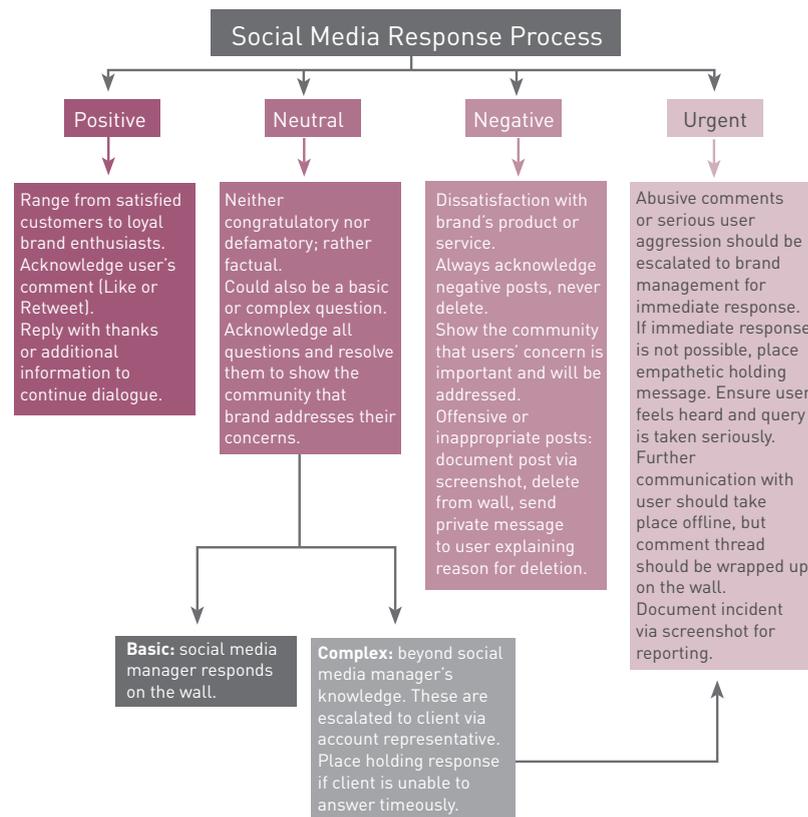
17.5.3 Communication and escalation protocol

An established communication and escalation protocol helps to ensure that all parties are aware of procedures for handling social messages and can respond as appropriate. This is especially important for large organisations where several users might be interacting in social media on behalf of a brand, or where several departments or agencies have a stake in the organisation's social media presence.

A communication and escalation protocol should include:

- Anticipated messages, frequently asked questions and appropriate, standard responses (for both positive and negative situations).
- Guidelines for determining the sentiment and risk of messages, which includes a flagging system for comments that need more senior attention.
- The crisis management process to follow if a brand crisis erupts on social media.
- An escalation plan for messages that need signoff or further consideration.
- Contact details of relevant stakeholders.
- Guidelines for responding, including response rate, standard messages, brand voice and tone.

Social Media Response Process

Positive	Neutral	Negative	Urgent
Range from satisfied customers to loyal brand enthusiasts. Acknowledge user's comment (Like or Retweet). Reply with thanks or additional information to continue dialogue.	Neither congratulatory nor defamatory; rather factual. Could also be a basic or complex question. Acknowledge all questions and resolve them to show the community that brand addresses their concerns.	Dissatisfaction with brand's product or service. Always acknowledge negative posts, never delete. Show the community that users' concern is important and will be addressed. Offensive or inappropriate posts: document post via screenshot, delete from wall, send private message to user explaining reason for deletion.	Abusive comments or serious user aggression should be escalated to brand management for immediate response. If immediate response is not possible, place empathetic holding message. Ensure user feels heard and query is taken seriously. Further communication with user should take place offline, but comment thread should be wrapped up on the wall. Document incident via screenshot for reporting.

Basic: social media manager responds on the wall.

Complex: beyond social media manager's knowledge. These are escalated to client via account representative. Place holding response if client is unable to answer timeously.

* Note: this process was created predominantly for Facebook, but these basic principles apply to most social media networking platforms.

Figure 10. A decision flowchart is a useful way of disseminating information.

17.6 Dealing with opportunities and threats

The use of social media has equipped consumers with a voice and a platform and the ability to amplify their views and truly inform their decision making. The connected nature of the Internet makes these views easy to share and the accessibility of social media tools makes it easy for other consumers to find these views, respond and build on them. All of this contributes to the perception of the brand.

The best way to show that you are listening to customer comments, complaints and questions online is the same as with a normal conversation. Comment when it's appropriate, listen with interest, be polite, be respectful and add value wherever possible. Brands should become active participants in the conversation.

Brands that are successful in communicating with their audiences are constantly on the lookout for opportunities to propel their brand forward and are keeping their eyes peeled for risks that may threaten their reputation. In both situations, the power sits in how the brand responds. This response can range from a direct engagement to a full new marketing campaign. Ultimately it depends on how powerful the opportunity or risk is.

An extreme example of successfully grabbing a social media opportunity, is Morton's, an American steak restaurant chain. One weary business traveller jokingly tweeted Morton's asking them to deliver him a porterhouse steak at the airport when he landed. The Morton's social media team were listening and responded by ensuring that the customer was met at the airport with a steak. This social media stunt garnered enormous media attention, a very loyal brand advocate and a hefty increase in sales for the following weeks (Herrman, 2016).

@petershankman
Peter Shankman

Hey @Mortons - can you meet me at newark airport with a porterhouse when I land in two hours? K, thanks. :)

17 Aug via TwidroydPRO   Favorite Retweet Reply

@petershankman
Peter Shankman

Oh. My. God. I don't believe it. @mortons showed up at EWR WITH A PORTERHOUSE!
lockerz.com/s/130578715 # OMFG!

Figure 11. Morton's restaurant responding to a customer tweet and earning themselves great media publicity.

17.6.1 When to talk (and when not to)

When everything being said is nice

A fantastic position to be in is that every possible mention is overwhelmingly positive. Well done. However, that does not mean that there is nothing to do. During this time, the brand must do everything in its power to drive high volumes of conversation.

Stakeholders are being positive about the brand because their expectations are being exceeded. Unfortunately, expectations change. Brands need to stay on their toes and constantly be on the lookout for new and innovative ways to meet and develop their brand promise.

When everything being said is neutral

If this is the case, it sounds as if the company is very boring and is not a good way to get attention. As Seth Godin puts it, "Safe is risky" (Godin, 2010). If a company is playing it so safe that no one can be bothered to send either praise or criticism its way, it's in danger of being forgotten. The next step is no one talking about the company at all.

When negative things are being said

Negative statements can often be understood as broken brand promises. There is underperformance on expectation and it must be dealt with as a matter of high priority. During this period, brands need to be very careful not to stir up any more conversation than is absolutely necessary. That said, it's certainly not all doom and gloom. If the conversation is broadly negative, it is normally because there is some underlying problem and this information provides the business with focus to resolve it.

Complaints are from stakeholders who have had dealings with a company that hasn't met their expectations. By complaining, this customer is, often unwittingly, giving the company the opportunity to make things right and is probably indicating where the company can improve. Usually, the skilled customer service department of a company should deal with these. They should also share resulting insights with the business strategy department so that the underlying problems can be prioritised and resolved.

If a complaint is online, the resolution should be there as well, although you can try to have it taken offline first. Even though the customer service will likely take place either over email or by phone, posting a personalised comment in a blog post, for example, will demonstrate to the community that the company listens, responds and serves the critical objective of actually resolving the underlying issues. Criticism need not necessarily come from customers, but it is important to be aware of it. If a criticism involves false information, it should be corrected. And if the criticism is true, then it should be dealt with as such.

17.6.2 Responding

Responding involves recognising that consumers hold the upper hand in the relationship. They are better trusted, there are more of them and, in most cases, the barriers to exit from a brand are relatively low.

Customers dictate the channels of communication. An organisation needs to go to the consumer, not the other way around. Ignoring this will result in the business losing customers because they not willing to truly engage. This is why it is so important to research your audience and tailor your strategy to them and not vice versa.

> **NOTE**
>
> In fact, resolving a serious complaint to the customer's satisfaction can gain you a loyal brand advocate; someone who has first-hand experience that your brand cares and goes the extra mile.

Responses to customers on social media should be personalised for each individual. Do not use blanket responses.

When responding, be transparent, be honest and treat the person as you would like to be treated. At all times, remember that you are engaged in conversation, not a dictation.

> **NOTE**
>
> Read more about this in the **Market research** chapter.

17.7 Step-by-step guide for recovering from an online brand attack

These rules to recovery provide a practical approach for brands facing an online threat.

17.7.1 Step 1. Be prepared

No brand is immune from an online brand attack. The best brands have strategies in place to identify a reputation crisis immediately and respond to it quickly enough to stop the negative word of mouth from spreading.

Keep your brand in front of consumers by engaging in the conversation. This can be done by making use of blogs, communicating with customers and being as open and honest as possible. Engaging in and leading, the conversation allows you to build an authentic voice. If a crisis hits, you will be well placed to respond in a way that is authentic.

17.7.2 Step 2. Act immediately!

The easiest way to solve most brand attacks is to respond quickly. A brand that shows it is listening and does indeed care will go far when it comes to ensuring a solid online reputation. Acknowledge what has been said and react accordingly.

17.7.3 Step 3. If what they're saying is false

If the attack on your brand is factually incorrect, send the person evidence that they are wrong and in a friendly tone, ask them to remove or retract the entry and offer to keep them informed of future news. If the person doesn't react or respond, add a comment to the post that it has been addressed.

> **NOTE**
>
> Cultivating a loyal community of fans can help immensely when clearing up false information. You will look much more credible if your fans back up your statements.

17.7.4 Step 4. If what they're saying is true…

If the mention is negative but true, send your side of the story and try as hard as you can to take the conversation offline. If appropriate, apologise quickly and sincerely and offer to make amends.

17.7.5 Step 5. Keep the negative pages out of the search engines

Keeping more users from reading negative things about your brand is imperative. Knock them off the first page of the results with basic SEO and some social media pages, such as Facebook, Twitter or blog posts. Keep adding pages and links until you've forced the offending pages out of sight.

> **NOTE**
>
> Read more about this in the **Search engine optimisation (SEO)** chapter.

17.8 Social media strategy risks and challenges

Any social media strategy should account for the risks and challenges of interacting in this environment and should incorporate a protocol for dealing with these risks. Mistakes on the web can take a long time to recover from.

Some of the common risks and challenges are listed below.

No one cares. Especially when building a community from scratch, it can be difficult in the beginning to get the traction you want. This is why understanding the landscape in the context of your organisation's market is so important. Make sure you are interacting in the spaces where your customers are and where they are happy to hear from you.

The social media space is used by unhappy customers (who are free to post detractive comments). Even if the only feedback you are getting is negative, this is good feedback! Now you have an opportunity to do something about it.

It requires ongoing attention and monitoring. Social media channels may be free, but there is still a time and resource investment required to make your strategy a success. Understand what your objectives are for using social media and budget the time required to meet those.

It can be difficult to measure the impact of the campaign. Social media can be difficult to measure, but that does not mean your campaigns are not successful. Don't expect to find a solution (or success) overnight. Start with measuring things that can be measured easily and watch for case studies in this space that will help you to turn your social media investment into revenue for your organisation.

17.9 Case study: Fjordland's 2015 Christmas campaign

17.9.1 One-line summary

Fjordland decided to run their Christmas marketing campaign exclusively on Facebook. The results showed a rise in sales, improved engagement and a substantial decrease in cost per click. All of this was achieved on a third of the usual campaign budget.

Figure 12. Fjordland's Christmas elves.

17.9.2 The challenge

Fjordland, a Norwegian food manufacturer, produces easy-to-make dinners and dessert dairy products. For its last three Christmas campaigns, the company offered a quiz on its website to introduce users to its Christmas products. In 2012 and 2013 the brand had used TV and banner ads to direct traffic to their site. In 2014 they included social media, in the form of Facebook. The results for Facebook were very promising.

The aim of the 2015 Christmas campaign was to focus the brand's attention and budget on one channel, maximise the number of website visitors and increase sales.

17.9.3 The solution

Fjordland chose Facebook as their single channel of focus for their 2015 Christmas campaign, because of its high levels of reach and engagement.

Fjordland researched its target audience and identified that they liked polls, product related promotions and meal suggestions. The brand strategically used this information to create content using these elements featuring a pair of Christmas elves. The Facebook campaign, which was optimised for desktop and mobile, included video, photo ads and link ads. The Facebook ads and posts directed customers to the Fjordland quiz website, for the chance to win a holiday.

Figure 13. Fjordland's posts and ads on Facebook.

17.9.4 The results

Having a Facebook only campaign proved highly profitable for Fjordland. Their website traffic doubled, they saw a 14% uplift in year-on-year sales and experienced a 90% decrease in cost per click. All this was achieved on a third of the budget of previous years, providing an incredible ROI.

The power of social media is evident. Social media and Facebook in this instance in particular, are more efficient than traditional banner ads with regard to reach, engagement and cost per click. For Fjordland, Facebook had even beaten TV advertising.

The Digital Manager at Fjordland noted the 'always on' nature of Facebook and its incredible segmentation possibilities made it a powerful and efficient channel. They were exceptionally pleased at the results of choosing to focus on Facebook as an exclusive channel for this campaign (Digital training academy, 2016). To read more about this, look here: www.digitaltrainingacademy. com/casestudies/2016/06/switch_from_tv_and_banners_to_facebook_boosts_sales_for_ fjordland.php#more

17.10 Summary

Social media can be used strategically in a number of marketing and communication challenges:

- Community management
- Support and customer service
- Reputation management
- Search engine optimisation
- Communication and outreach
- Advertising and awareness
- Sales and lead generation
- Insights and research.

Creating a social media strategy requires careful planning and a strong foundation that will allow you to be dynamic.

The steps to creating a social media strategy include:

- Get buy-in
- Understand the landscape
- Analyse
- Set objectives
- Create an action plan
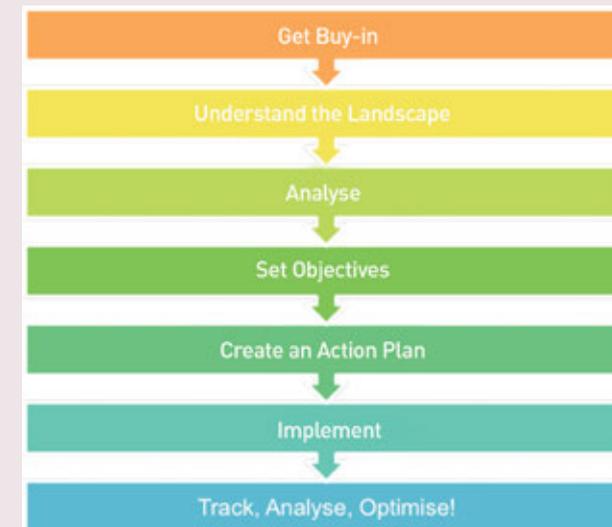- Implement
- Track, analyse, optimise!

Figure 14. The steps involved in a social media strategy.

Social media is a vital strategic consideration for any brand. Whether your organisation is actively involved in social media or not, your consumers are. If nothing else, this means that there is market data available to you, if you just take a little time to find it.

Organisations that make a considered move in the social media sphere will find it both challenging and rewarding. The rapid feedback loop can often change preconceptions or even marketing plans, as the voice of the customer is amplified through social media. In addition, the collaboration with passionate customer stakeholders is extremely rewarding.

17.11 Case study questions

1. What strategic aspects of social media did Fjordland consider when electing to focus solely on social media?

2. What other aspects of social media would you have included in your campaign strategy?

3. Would you recommend using an exclusive channel as part of your marketing strategy? Why or why not?

17.12 Chapter questions

1. What are some of the pitfalls of engaging difficult customers on social media platforms?

2. What skills do you think are important for a great community manager to have?

3. Should all brands be active in social media spaces? What brands have less to gain from trying to create an online community?

17.13 Further reading

www.socialmediaexaminer.com – Social Media Examiner offers practical advice, tips and strategies for engaging on social media.

www.socialmediatoday.com – Social Media Today offers news, insights and analysis of social media trends.

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Figure 4. Screenshot, Google, 2017.

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Figure 7. Own image.

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Figure 9. Own image.

Figure 10. Stokes, 2013.

Figure 11. Gizmodo, 2011. gizmodo.com/5832514/mortons-steakhouse-met-a-man-at-the-airport-with-a-steak-after-he-tweeted-about-it

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Figure 14. Own image.