



How to develop a social media strategy

Why do you need a strategy?

Many people and organisations will kick off social media activity without a clear vision of what they hope to achieve, this typically generates mediocre results. Social media needs to be approached in the same way as all other communication methods. Social media is a free tool however it requires a significant investment of your time; therefore, a strategy will help you use it most effectively.

Social media is more than just about updating posts online. For every major business function of every organisation, there is an equivalent social media function:

- Research - Listening to the conversations people have with each other to understand their wants and needs.
- Marketing - Talking in the conversations people have with each other to spread messages about you and your organisation.
- Sales - Energising customers to promote you by finding your most enthusiastic customers employees and supercharging them online
- Support - Supporting service users to help each other by setting up groups/tools that help them share experiences
- Development - Embracing service users and their wider support network to work with each other by integrating them into the way your organisation works.

To create your strategy, follow these five steps:

1. Research
2. Find your audience
3. Set your objectives
4. Develop content, capabilities and management
5. Measure and evaluate

1. Do your research

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT)

Do a SWOT analysis against the above business functions and below questions to identify your strengths and weaknesses online and the opportunities and threats social media activity present for you. If you are already using social media, use SWOT to analysis the current success of your activity.

Some of the questions you should consider:

- Where you are now?
- What direction are you going in?
- What does success look like?

- What are your strengths and weaknesses online?
- How capable are you or your team online?
- How big is your team?
- What online resources or communities do you currently have?
- Do you have content that works online, such as videos or pictures?
- What are your counterparts doing?
- How do people feel about you, and them, online?

Counterpart/competitor analysis

Carry out a competitor analysis to consider how well your counterparts are doing online and identify what type of content audiences are responding to. Use the example of the table below.

	Website	Social media	Common keywords	Blogs	Notes on strengths & weaknesses
COMPETITOR 1					
COMPETITOR 2					
COMPETITOR 3					
COMPETITOR 4					
COMPETITOR 5					
YOU					

2. Identify your audience and relevant platforms

The biggest mistake people make is to create a profile/page on social media just because other organisations are. Before you start you need to carry out an audit to discover which platform the audience you want to talk to are most active on. Facebook may be the biggest social media platform, but it doesn't mean it is the most appropriate for you.

You need to identify the most influential players in your sector and consider how your audience consumes content and behaves online. Influencers are vital for getting your message seen and you should look at developing brand ambassadors to spread your message for you, for example influential mummy bloggers, local MPs or councillors, well established organisations with a similar mission etc.

3. Set your objectives

Make sure you develop online objectives that are SMART:

- Specific – objectives should specify what they want to achieve

- Measurable – you should be able to measure whether you are meeting the objectives or not
- Achievable – are the objectives you set, achievable and attainable?
- Realistic – can you realistically achieve the objectives with the resources you have?
- Timely – when do you want to achieve the set objectives?

Examples of objectives could be:

- Increase brand awareness
- Improve online sentiment
- Increase traffic to website

Your overall objectives will inform what you do in social media in terms of:

- Who you want to connect with
- What content you share
- How you interact with people
- How often you need to interact with people
- How you want to influence people to act

4. Develop great content

Social media policy

It is vital that you develop a social media policy for your organisation especially if there are multiple people managing the accounts to ensure brand consistency, adherence to company policy etc. It will also provide a point of reference for all members of the team to check and give directors peace of mind about how the channels are being managed.

Your social media policy should include the following:

- Your vision
- Aims and objectives
- Social media values
- Transparency
- Protection of privacy
- Respect of rights
- Responsibility in use of technology
- Use of best practice

Guidelines covering points such as:

- Keeping records
- Giving credit
- How to respond
- Frequency and quality of tweets
- Out of hours protocol
- Timings
- FAQs

- Bilingualism
- Managing criticism/negativity

The type of appropriate content:

- News
- Events
- Images/video/infographics
- Listicles
- Industry news
- User generated content
- Conversational
- Topical
- Partner engagement

This will vary according to the channels you are using and delivering content relevant to the audience using that platform. Don't broadcast everything to everyone.

Remember social media is about **telling a story** and it is your opportunity to develop brand ambassadors to tell your story and share it with their wider online community. Using real people is the most powerful tool, however ensure you have permission. Ideally the piece would be written in the first person, so it is coming directly from the case study.

Use a content calendar to help manage relevant content, drive deadline dates, schedule resources and avoid clashes. Creating quarterly content plans will help repurpose content and ensure consistent of message while ensuring you plan for a variety of content each month. It will also help you prepare for those all-important moments on social media by being aware of events and dates coming up that your audience are going to be interested in. The calendar will drive deadline dates, schedule resources, and avoid clashes

5. Revisit and revise

Set a time to measure your progress against your counterparts and your objectives and assess your strategy. Measurement is important. If you don't measure against counterparts, you're not measuring within your market. If you don't measure against your objectives, you don't know what success looks like. Revisit and revise regularly to identify what is working and what isn't to help maintain momentum and make your social activity successful.

Make use of social media monitoring tools to:

- Track mentions
- Analyse mentions
- Segment data by geography, demographic etc.
- Influence and authority

The beauty of social media is that if things are not working and you are not getting the results you expected you can change your tactic and revise your approach. Test things out and repeat the five steps outlined in this document to make your social media a success.

GOOD LUCK!