

Social media is simple, but not easy. I think that's the best way to explain it. To that end, one of the best ways to drill down on what the best strategy is for your organization is to ask the right questions. It's that simple!

In the absence of decades of best practices that are well known, universally understood and (hopefully) applied across industries, we have a set of questions that can help anyone, in any industry, get to the core of what their social media strategy should be and how they should proceed in making the most of social media.

It's not about whether or not you should be on Facebook or have a YouTube channel - it all depends on the "answers to the questions". If you ask me whether or not you should be on Twitter or whether you should be blogging or producing a podcast, it's tough to say. However, I'm confident that by going through a process, asking the right questions and being confident in the outcomes, you'll be on the right path to creating a best in class social media strategy.

The other thing to know about social media is that it's changing. Fast. Just as someone once said about sports records, "today's records are tomorrow's averages", you need to stay tuned to the changes afoot in social media because today's breakthroughs are either going to be, at best, tomorrow's best practices or at worst, lessons of what not to do.

All that having been said, let's look at some questions:

#### **Industry Impact & Feasibility**

- How are social media impacting our industry's customers and other stakeholders?
- Where are our competitors in social media? (conduct a competitive social media inventory analysis)
- What is the technology usage profile of our typical customer? How well/much do they use our website, email newsletter, etc?
- Do we believe social media will have an impact on our customers? In what way(s)? Why?
- Why is social media of interest to us?
- Is our industry ahead of the curve, behind it, or in the middle?
- Is discussion about our brand and our industry positive, negative, or neutral? Are we being talked about at all?
- Have we learned anything about our company or industry from listening to social media?

#### **Assessing Our Corporate Social Media Readiness**

- What is our company's tolerance for risk (e.g., initiating new or untested marketing tactics, launching bold corporate initiatives, etc.)?
- How does our company normally react to negative commentary from the media, customers, competitors and other stakeholders?
- How uncomfortable would our company be advertising in a publication or on a web site that often contained editorial content critical of our company or industry yet whose readers very closely matched our target audience?
- Please rank your knowledge of social media in general – i.e., how familiar are you with various forms of social media and how they are used?
- How do you feel as a company about engaging in a public dialogue with your customers?
- What do you perceive as the biggest obstacles to our adoption of social media practices?
- What approaches can we take that are evolutions of our current practices (vs. complete overhauls)?
- Who on our staff is most enthusiastic and passionate about talking to customers?
- Who on our staff is most enthusiastic and passionate about social media?

- Can we first use social media to improve how we communicate internally, cross departmentally?

### Setting Your Goals and Expectations for Social Media

- How do we plan to measure the success of our social media efforts? (Qualitative and quantitative metrics)
- Who do you want to reach and why?
- What other benefits can you derive, such as creating a community with suppliers, vendors, and partners?
- What do we expect people to do with the social media tools that we roll out?
- What are we prepared to share with our audience in social media that doesn't directly benefit the bottom line?
- What are our data gathering objectives? (email, address, downloads only)
- Are we ok with not seeing an immediate and direct return on our social media investment?
- What are our short term and long term investment expectations?

### Determining Resources Needed for a Social Media Effort

- How much time and money are we expecting to dedicate to social media?
- What are we willing to spend for technology, development and social media tools?
- What level of human resources are we willing to dedicate to our social media plan?
- Who are the point people, and what are their roles? Who are the "faces" of the organization online, and where?
- Can we afford to keep part of our allocated \$ budget flexible to respond to evolving needs?
- If we're successful with social media, can we scale our interactions to continue to meet higher expectations? How?
- Are we flexible enough within roles/responsibilities to shift them as needed to accommodate what we learn from social media?

### Social Media Specific Education and Training

- Are our employees using social networks in their personal lives?
- What level of familiarity can/should we expect from our employees and what gaps do we need to fill with training?
- Does our internal audience understand the business potential of social media?
- What are the biggest fears/hesitations that we have as a company about using social media?
- Are we empowering our employees to respond at the point of need, regardless of their role? Is there a "chain of command"?
- How are we going to structure the flow of information so that necessary learnings get back to the right people?

### Participating and Engaging in Social Media

- What is our "unique voice" and "point of view" that we want to take to the social media conversation?
- What practices do we see from our peers/competitors that we'd like to emulate?
- What do we see from them that we'd like to avoid at all costs?
- What unique voice can we contribute to the conversation in the industry?
- What is it that we want to convey to our community through our participation in social media?
  
- Are we going to encourage community generated content?
- Do we plan to heavily moderate or edit community contributed content or let it stand & play out?
- How are we ensuring that we're providing a two-way channel for dialogue?

**Social Media Policy & Crisis Communication Planning**

- What is our policy for handling social media feedback?
- What is our policy for our employee engagement in social media? Are we covered by our ethics, computer usage, code of conduct of HR policies or do we need a specific social media policy?
- How will we respond to negative feedback/criticism when we discover it?
- Are we ready to empower our team to resolve customer issues in social media channels?
- How detailed do we need to be with our communication policies?

**Following-up On Our Social Media Strategy Implementation**

- What social sites are working for us, based on the objectives we've stated?
- Which social sites and channels are easy to interact in and responsive to our message and which ones do we have to "force"?
- What has emerged from our social media interaction and conversations that we hadn't anticipated?
- What are we doing with the information we learn?
- How are we distributing it internally and acting on it?
- What new metrics should we be tracking based on what we've learned?
- Were our original assumptions about social media correct? If not, what do we need to adjust as a result?
- What have we learned from our customers and competitors that we didn't know before?
- What's next?

***Remember, none of us has all of the answers, all of us are smarter than any of us and our job here is not to deliver all of the right answers on social media but rather to ensure that we're asking the right questions.***