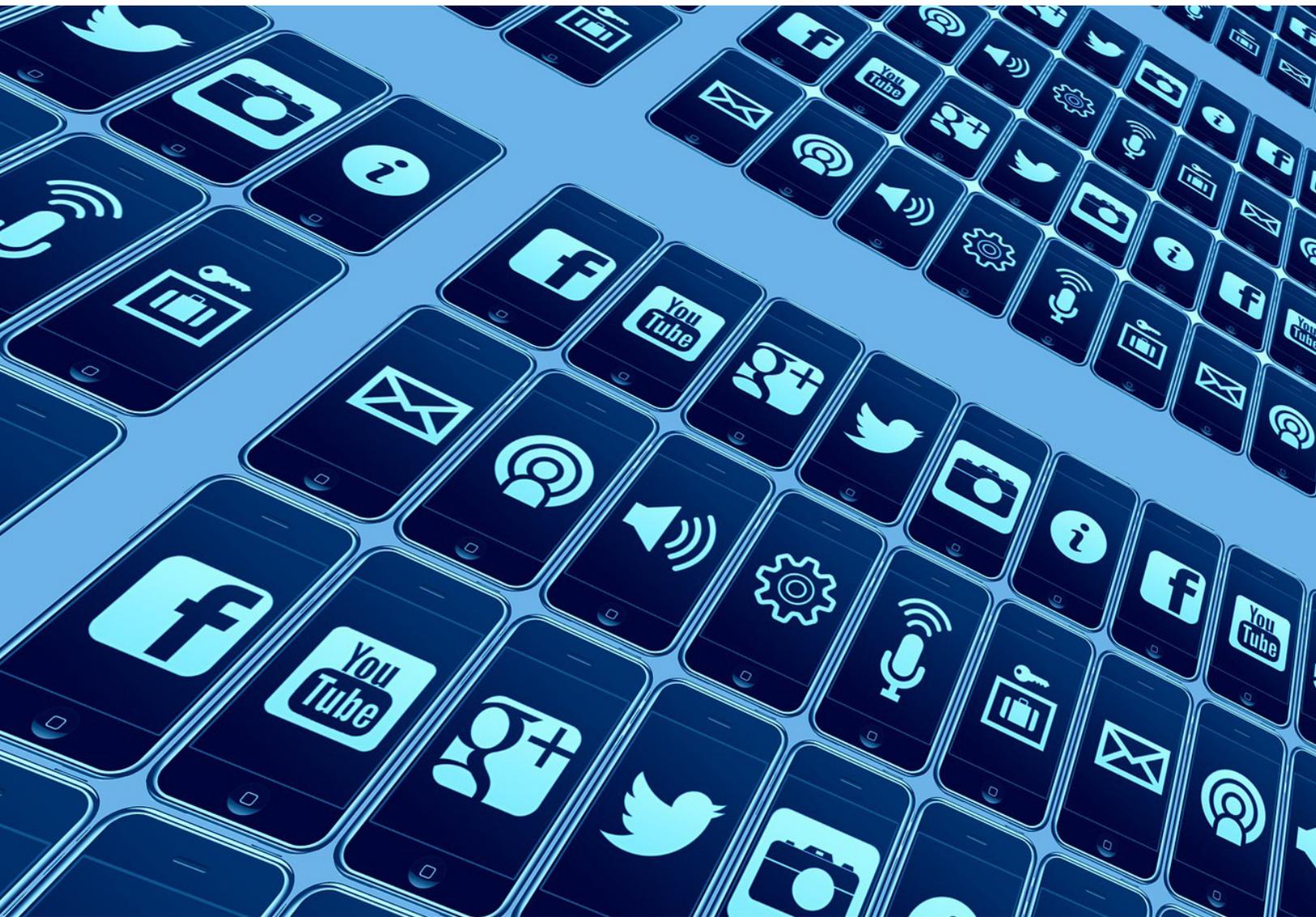

7 Keys To Social Media Success

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Deluxe Corp. recently conducted a survey that found only 21% of small business owners think social media is an important customer engagement tool. But, according to a CNET survey, 72% of U.S. adults use social media, and according to a Static Brain survey, social media usage skyrockets to 98% among 18- to 24-year-olds.

These survey results make it very clear that with each passing day, social media is playing a larger part in the lives of U.S. consumers.

While many small business leaders are reluctant to start the social media journey, countering that 73% of their business comes from word-of-mouth, these entrepreneurs are failing to realize an increasing number of consumers are using social media to facilitate their word-of-mouth recommendations.

In addition, many consumers who hear about a business via word-of-mouth often turn to the social media platforms they use most to learn more about the business. Without an active social media presence, these businesses are missing out on great opportunities to connect with potential customers.

So, how do businesses get started with social media? The very first step should be to create a comprehensive social media strategy. While this may sound like a daunting task, by breaking the work up into smaller, clearly defined tasks, creating a social media strategy can be painless.

The best place to start creating a social media strategy is to create a strategy overview document that addresses how the company will implement these seven keys to social media success:

- Clearly-defined target audience
- Strong internal social media team
- In-depth industry and competitor social media analysis
- Comprehensive sales team social media training
- Written policies and procedures
- Broad employee involvement
- Continual review and training

Clearly Defined Target Audience

The first key to social media success is to clearly define the company's target audience. The types of content, language style, social channels, and even the time of day posts are made should all be geared towards the target audience. Clearly define the age group, location and socioeconomic status of the audience and gain an understanding of the motivations behind why they purchase products and services.

For example, if the target audience is young and entrepreneurial, content should be quick hitting, to the point, filled with lots of open space and have as little copy as necessary to get the message across. The language should be informal and written for the audience's shorter attention span, but still have a professional tone. The social platforms used should be the newer social platforms that are geared toward younger users.

In-depth analysis of the target audience's socioeconomic status and the motivation behind why they buy gives great insight into how to target them.

Remember to be as concise and in-depth as possible when conducting target audience analysis. In many cases, a lot of this information may already have been gathered in either the early planning stages of the business, or in ongoing customer analysis.

Target audience analysis should delve into these areas as deeply as possible:

Priority Initiatives – Why do buyers invest in our product? Beyond just pain points, what really motivates buyers to spend money on what we have to offer?

Success Factors – What do buyers plan to get out of our product?

Perceived Barriers – What stops a buyer from believing our product is their best option?

Buyer's Journey – What resources does the buyer trust as they make their journey from evaluation of our product to their actual decision to buy?

Decision Criteria – Which aspects of our product does the buyer consider the most critical to achieving the goal they perceive as the reason for buying? How do similar aspects of our competitor's products fair against ours?

Strong Internal Social Media Team

The second key to social media success is to create a strong social media team with clearly defined roles. Start by seeking out employees who are already social media advocates, strongly believe in your company, and have a strong understanding of your products and services. While employees can be trained and still be successful, finding team members who already have these traits will make a much stronger social media team. Clearly define the roles below in the context of your enterprise and make them official through internal announcements. Everyone should know their roles and the measure of their success.

A strong social media team includes:

- Plan & Strategy Manager
- Communicator(s)
- Product/Service Expert(s)
- Social Media Analyst
- Lead Content Creator & Strategist
- Content Creators
- Social Media Philes

Plan & Strategy Manager

A single team member must be responsible for managing the creation and implementation of the plan. This person should manage all of the company's social media efforts and have a strong understanding of how those efforts fit into the company's business strategy. This person will also serve as the biggest internal advocate of the company's social media plan. This should be someone who is comfortable interacting with employees at all levels of the organization and can answer employee social media questions. This person should know exactly who to forward inquiries to when responses are needed and be able to not only track issues, but make sure those issues get resolved.

Communicator(s)

One or more individuals can be responsible for actually posting to social media sites. Determine the number of posters and which platforms they post to based on individual interest and expertise in current social media platforms. If resources are limited, allow one individual to post to all social media platforms, but be sure to take advantage of social media experts by allowing team members to post to the social media platforms they use most.

Keep in mind that a Communicator will interact with customers and the general public on a daily basis. A communicator must be well versed in company messaging and can demonstrate tact and grace under

Strong Internal Social Media Team

pressure. Assign this task to team members who have experience interacting with customers and the general public if at all possible.

Product/Service Expert(s)

This role may also be filled by a single team member or by a number of individuals based on company size and the number of products and services the company offers. If there is a single person who knows every product inside and out and can speak to every feature, then feel free to let that person handle the job. But, if there are a lot of products or if certain team members are well versed in certain parts of the product or service offerings, but not others, use a combination of individuals. Be sure to cover the company's entire line of products and services with an expert and make them available to support social media efforts, especially when responding to customer inquiries.

Social Media Analyst

A single individual who is as well versed in social media analytics as possible should fill the role of social media analyst. As with any business endeavor, the only way to know if efforts are successful is to track and analyze as much data surrounding that endeavor as possible. Social media is no different. Set specific

metrics that will deem the company's social media efforts worthwhile and make sure you have the tools in place to measure those metrics. Be sure to not only report results up the chain of command, but to share them with the entire social media team so that everyone can learn from successes and failures. Be sure this person has access to all of the company's web analytics, as social media campaigns usually focus on driving traffic to the company's web assets.

Lead Content Creator & Strategist

While it is important to share relevant tweets and images to demonstrate the company's culture across social media channels, it is also important to create content that is of interest to the target audience – things like whitepapers, thought leadership-focused articles, blog posts, press releases and other interesting company news. A single team member should serve as lead content creator, not only generating interesting content personally, but also seeking the help of others within the company to create content. All content created should use similar terms, syntax, and have a unified company voice.

Content Creators

Having one person create all content is not only impractical; it also limits

Strong Internal Social Media Team

the company's entire social media landscape to the perspective of one person. Ideas for content should come from a larger base of employees, even if one person is actually writing out all of those ideas. As social media and content campaigns mature, new content creation ideas are hard to come by for just one person. Be sure to involve other idea people and other content creators. Again, everything should run through a single content creator to unify the voice and messaging of the pieces.

Social Media Philes

Involve as many employees in social media efforts as possible. While only a few employees should manage your official company pages and profiles on social media platforms, every employee should be encouraged to share posts from these official pages out to their followers, friends and connections. Be sure to reach out to any social media philes within the company to take advantage of their broad follower networks.



In-Depth Industry & Competitor Analysis

The third key to social media success is to learn what others in the industry are doing. Mimic their success, differentiate the company by doing something different, or do a combination of both. Let this industry and competitor analysis guide the company's social media strategy. Remember that no plan will be perfect right out of the gate and will require continual refinement.

Competitors

Make a list of direct competitors and determine which ones have a social media presence. These are the competitors to research.

Voice

Read competitor posts and comments and note the voice of their pieces. Read comments and note engagement of the pieces to determine if their voice is well received by their audience. Compare their voice to your company's voice.

Activity

See how active competitors are on social media pages. Note how often they post quality content and how people react to it. Note the number of followers, fans and connections they have and track that number over time. Determine the ratio of followers they have to how many pages they are following. This gives great insight into whether they are just following everyone who comes along, or are targeting certain important pages.

Engagement Rate

Dig a little deeper and note how often people engage with competitor posts. This gives insight into what content is engaging to customers.

Content Types

Conduct a comprehensive analysis of the types of content competitors post and how people engage with it. Are they posting a lot of pictures of company or trade show events? Are they getting a lot of likes and comments on those pictures? Do they post articles, blog posts and whitepapers? Do you think their engagement would be better or worse if they posted more or less of those materials? Are they properly using hashtags? Which hashtags are they using? Do they repost content from other sources? Note how people are engaging with the content competitors are posting and be sure to gain a solid understanding of what is working for your competitors and what is not.

Comprehensive Sales Team Social Media Training

The fourth key to social media success is comprehensive sales team training in the use of social media for lead generation and customer acquisition. All sales team members should be aware of the company's social media strategy and actively participate in creating awareness on social channels with their existing clients and prospects.

While it is important to involve as many employees as possible in the company's social strategy, take some extra time to get sales leadership and sales team members on board. Many of them should already be participating heavily in social media, especially LinkedIn. Be sure all sales team members share the content the social media team posts with their customers and prospects as regularly as possible. This will benefit the social strategy, sales and the company as a whole.

Remember that while businesses have a good chance of reaching customers through social media, those chances increase dramatically when the sales team gets involved. Encourage sales team members to share content while on calls and even use a new piece of content as a reason to make a call to a customer or prospect.

Sales team members will also have unique insight into the platforms, blogs and news feeds that the company's customers use on a regular basis.

An OgilvyOne survey found that 65% of top sales performers worldwide consider social media important to their success. Your social media strategy and team should both take advantage of this fact.

Written Policies & Procedures

The fifth key to social media success is to clearly define policies and procedures surrounding the use of social media by employees as representatives of the company. It is imperative that all posts and content are professional and factual.

While most professional companies don't have to worry about some of the same things that fast food restaurants and other base services companies may have challenges with, it is still important to clearly define for employees who may use company-created hashtags and @'s in their posts, what posts are appropriate and what posts may be damaging to the company.

Drafting these policies should be a collaboration of the social media team, human resources and the company's legal team and be made available to employees at their time of hire along with all of the other new-hire documents. While you don't want to harp on these policies, it is always a good idea to remind employees about these policies prior to company off-site events and at regular intervals in the deployment of the ongoing social media plan.

Social media policies should clearly define:

- Forums for employee concerns prior to them being taken to social media channels
- What is considered confidential company information
- The consequences of employee's online actions
- A representative that can answer employee's social media questions
- The proper way to engage with others online
- What is considered illegal when it comes to copyrights
- How company culture relates to social media
- That the company is willing to train employees on social media policies as needed

Beyond these policies, also create written procedures that govern the day-to-day actions and endeavors of the social media team. Followers need to see the company's social media presence as heart-felt, consistent and deliberate. This can easily be achieved by implementing procedures and workflows that are available for everyone in the organization to follow.

These procedures can govern the posting workflow for a brand new piece of collateral or blog post. They can also govern posting styles, such as which hashtags should be used and the proper spelling of industry-specific terms to help with search rankings.

Broad Employee Involvement

The sixth key to social media success is to actively involve as many employees as possible in the execution of the company's social media plan. Beyond selecting a strong social media team and involving the entire sales team, enlist the help of employees who regularly use social media. These employees can greatly help distribute the company's content, especially on LinkedIn.

Broader employee involvement starts with a clear and concise plan of how employees will be incentivized to share the company's social media posts. This does not have to involve actual pay-outs, but can be accomplished by letting employees know their social media efforts on behalf of the company not only assist with marketing efforts, but also establish them as a stronger thought leader in their field. Depending on the culture of the company, especially if it is a very competitive environment, weekly or monthly contests for the most shares or comments received on re-posts can help drive adoption of the social media strategy as well.

Companies may also want to kick off implementation of the social media plan, or individual social media campaigns, with a kick-off event that will help solidify social media as a valid and important part of the company's overall business strategy.

One of the most important aspects of involving employees in the implementation of the company's social media plan is to ensure that all employees know when new content becomes available. This can be accomplished by ensuring the company alerts employees through the most widely used internal communications channels on a regular basis.



About

William L. Savastano is a business professional and two time Society for Technical Communication Award Winner with over two decades of experience in the corporate arena. William trained extensively in advertising and marketing copywriting, technical writing, journalism, and both print and electronic publishing. William's body of work includes a large volume of marketing content, collateral materials, websites, operating manuals, technical manuals, as well as inclusion in national publications and a number of published poems and short stories.

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