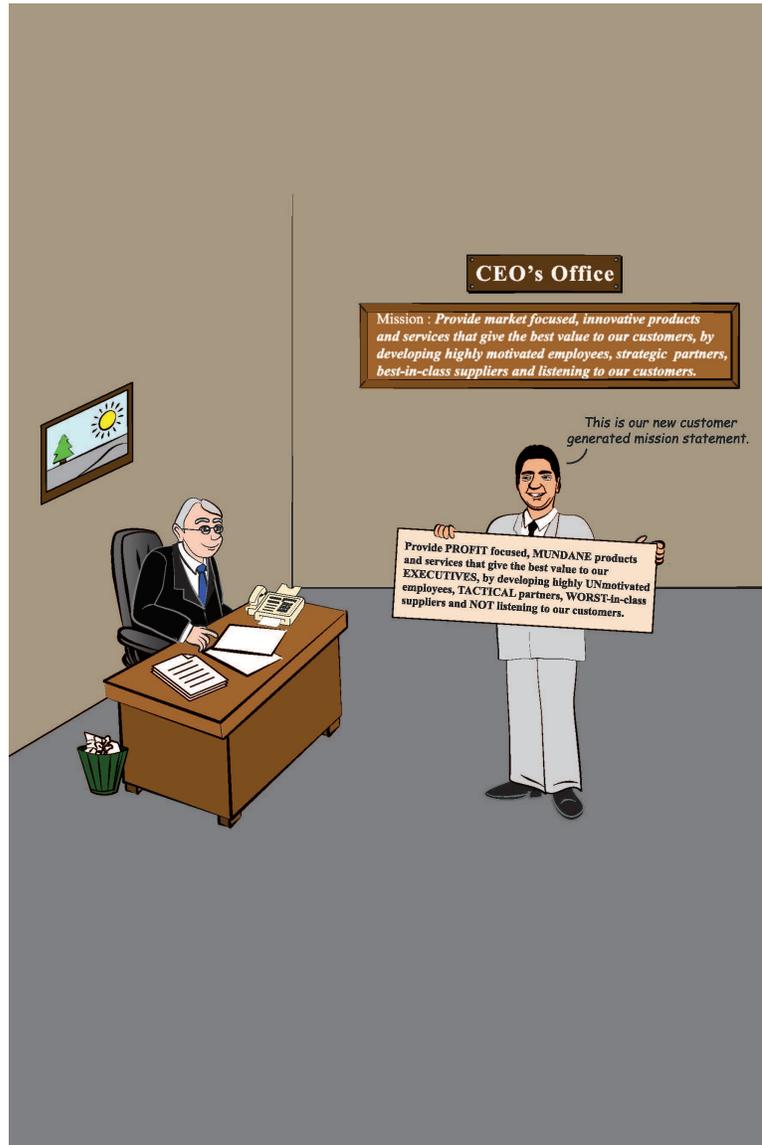


CHAPTER 5:

I am Convinced. How
Do I Start?

The Social Media Action Plan



Now you're convinced that social media is here to stay and you need to get on the bandwagon. But at this very stage a grave mistake is waiting to happen on the part of the planners, especially if they go in with a traditional corporate approach toward using social media. So, when you, too, are ready to make social media a communication tool for your business, you need to make sure that you do not try to cram social media into the mold of conventional corporate messaging.

SOCIAL STRATEGY

The foundation for creating a successful social media strategy lies in aligning it with the enterprise-wide, long-term strategy of your organization. Of course, you can set the broad parameters for this conversation by clever use of social media releases. Simply start the conversation. The buzz is created on its own, but only if the discussion heads where you want it to, or else the big bang you planned may end up a small whimper.

Here is what closed loop strategy would look like:



DEFINE STRATEGY

Strategy: a plan, method, or series of actions designed to achieve a specific goal or effect (Words myth Dictionary)

As management guru Michael Porter states, strategy is about differentiating yourself from your competitors and answering two basic questions (<http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/2165.html>):

- Where to compete?
- How to compete?

TIP: Strategy is about making the right choices that will grow the organization in the long term.

Let's look at Coca Cola's strategy by looking at their mission, vision, and values (http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/ourcompany/mission_vision_values.html):

Our Mission

Our Roadmap starts with our mission, which is enduring. It declares our purpose as a company and serves as the standard against which we weigh our actions and decisions.

To refresh the world...

To inspire moments of optimism and happiness...

To create value and make a difference.

Our Vision

Our vision serves as the framework for our Roadmap and guides every aspect of our business by describing what we need to accomplish in order to continue achieving sustainable, quality growth.

People: Be a great place to work where people are inspired to be the best they can be.

The Social Media Action Plan

Portfolio: Bring to the world a portfolio of quality beverage brands that anticipate and satisfy people's desires and needs.

Partners: Nurture a winning network of customers and suppliers, together we create mutual, enduring value.

Planet: Be a responsible citizen that makes a difference by helping build and support sustainable communities.

Profit: Maximize long-term return to shareowners while being mindful of our overall responsibilities.

Productivity: Be a highly effective, lean and fast-moving organization.

Our Winning Culture

Our Winning Culture defines the attitudes and behaviors that will be required of us to make our 2020 Vision a reality.

Live Our Values

Our values serve as a compass for our actions and describe how we behave in the world.

Leadership: The courage to shape a better future

Collaboration: Leverage collective genius

Integrity: Be real

Accountability: If it is to be, it's up to me

Passion: Committed in heart and mind

Diversity: As inclusive as our brands

Quality: What we do, we do well

The strategy for small and medium-sized businesses mostly resides in the minds of the company founder or top management. It should be written down and shared with every employee so they can better understand the future of the company. This way the intended strategy by the management can be realized with help from employees and other stakeholders.

The company's mission statement defines its purpose, and in turn defines its enterprise strategy. The social strategy needs to be aligned with the enterprise strategy. For example, if you want to grow by 100% in the next three years, then social strategy needs to be geared toward getting more visibility with your customers and prospects. On the other hand, if your strategy is sustainment for the next few years, then use social channels to serve your customers better and streamline your backend processes. Use a social media plan that aligns with your strategy.

Any strategy needs to be based on internal factors—your company's culture, your employees and stakeholders—and external factors—political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal (P.E.S.T.E.L).

You will have to evaluate your company's strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis), maybe adjusting the current organizational structure to include social media as a team responsibility, not the job of just one person.

Hope this gives you an overview on how to develop a strategy for your organization.

DEFINE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Your goals serve as determinants of future courses of action and so must be rationalized to perfection. To make it easier for you to set some pretty sharp goals for your social media efforts, you can run them through the SMART-check. Each goal should be:

- **Specific**, which means that it should only relate to social media and be very well-defined for all to understand.
- **Measurable**, so that you can make periodic assessments that determine success or failure to achieve the goals.
- **Attainable** or practical enough to pursue, which means you need to involve all stakeholders and consider the resources you can employ before you decide whether a goal is attainable or not.
- **Relevant**, or how far the attainment of the goals can positively influence your business, which is important because social media holds different benefits for different businesses. Do a serious cost-benefit analysis to determine the degree of relevance a particular goal has for your long-term business growth.
- **Time-bound**, which means that you have deadlines for successful achievement of goals. You should allow enough time for pursuing goals, but also be prepared to modify or abandon goals that are simply not materializing even after a considerable amount of time has passed.

If your social media goals are SMART, chances are that you will be able to achieve them successfully.

Here are some goals that you can set during the initial phase of social media strategy:

The Social Media Action Plan

Increasing brand awareness and recognition. NOT SO SMART

Ninety-five percent of our customers need to know about our entire service offerings by the end of 2011. SMART

We will get customer inputs for new product development. NOT SO SMART

At least 50% of our online community members will give us feedback for our new products within 6 months of launch. SMART

Improving internal communications and bringing about transparency in our business. NOT SO SMART

90% of employees should pass the social media training by the end of the year 2012. SMART

Improved search engine rankings. NOT SO SMART

Our company's website should be on page 1 of Bing, Yahoo, and Google search results for the following keywords: bamboo flooring, cork flooring, hardwood flooring. SMART

Our social media should be successful. NOT SO SMART

Our branded community should have 200 users by the end of year 2011. We will have an enterprise dashboard by the end of the year that shows our social media program success metrics and results. SMART

You may be pursuing one or more of these SMART goals, but once you get your hands into social media you will find that these goals are more closely tied to each other than you think. In fact, it is quite impossible to make progress with just one or two of these goals without making headway with the others.

Another important fact that you must understand is that all the above-mentioned goals are related to the most important objective of your social media efforts, which is to create engagement via dialogue. This alone helps you remain at the top of your (potential or current) customers' minds and lets you pursue all other goals. Thus, without a shade of doubt, this goal should be the crux of your social media strategy.

EXECUTE STRATEGY, INCLUDING CHANGE MANAGEMENT

You will need to create your change management plan—see the next chapter for more details. The next step is to allocate resources from various teams that will help you execute the plan. In an organization, teams that might be involved include the marketing team, the website management team, the legal team, the IT team, the communications team, the operations team, and perhaps others. Or in some small companies, one person could wear many of these hats.

The execution is where the rubber meets the road, and many companies fail or succeed based on their execution plan. Here are the things to keep in mind when creating your execution plan:

- Process Improvements
- Budgeting

- Resource Planning
- Marketing/Communications Planning

TIP: A change management plan is crucial for successful execution. So ensure that all the relevant stakeholders, shareholders, and employees are on board for execution.

EMPLOYEES: YOUR FACE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The key element in the execution plan is your employees. They help you achieve one of the key goals of social media marketing, that of humanizing your brand, by employee-customer interactions on various social media platforms. Having said this, however useful this may be, recent studies also show that the number of problems being caused by mishandling of social media by employees is on the rise.

For example, a recent study by Proofpoint (<http://www.proofpoint.com/news-and-events/press-releases/proofpoint-survey-says-state-of-economy-leads-to-increased-data-loss-risk-for-large-companies?PressReleaseID=245>) shows that out of several companies (that are avid users of social media) surveyed:

- Seventeen percent disciplined an employee violating blog policies, while 9% went as far as terminating the services of an employee for the same reason.
- Up to 17% of the companies are facing exposure incidents on sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn.
- Thirteen percent of companies surveyed have admitted to similar mishaps involving microblogging sites such as Twitter.

These bits of data point to the fact that while employees are into social media big time, many of them may not be doing it right. Thus, you need

a framework to guide your employees on the correct usage of social media. In the absence of a proper structure, you cannot blame your employees for minor transgressions. However, if you have a set of well-defined guidelines in place, you can easily demarcate the rights and wrongs of social media usage for your employees to use as reference.

On January 25, 2012, NLRB (National Labor Relations Board) Acting General Counsel Lafe Solomon released a second report describing social media cases reviewed by his office. Download the report here: <http://bit.ly/nlrbjan>.

The report represents the Acting General Counsel's interpretation of the National Labor Relations Act as it applies to forms of communication that did not exist when the Act was written.

It is very crucial for your employees to have good knowledge of policies and procedures related to social media. Of course, your employees may already be on social media platforms and what they say online does not have to reflect the views of your company. Or does it? A workplace is usually a part of an individual's identity, except perhaps for the most intimate of conversations. In all other forums, blogs, chats, articles, etc., your employee does represent you in the eyes of your customers.

Therefore, you should make the rules of engagement pretty clear to every employee of your organization. Here are things you should consider while framing social media guidelines for employees:

How will it affect their productivity, if all are given freedom to participate in social media at work?

What level of restrictions are you looking at? You need to understand that completely curbing social media freedom can lead to lower employee morale and unwillingness to participate in your social media efforts.

How can you ensure that the guidelines are actually followed and not blatantly violated due to lack of understanding? For this, the best solution is to involve your employees, or at least the opinion leaders, in the process of creating guidelines and making them feel that a dictate is not being thrust upon them.

What are the penalties for violation you state in your social media guidelines? You must be able to enforce the penalty for a particular wrongdoing and make an example out of employees who abuse social media on purpose.

Social media guidelines are different for each company and reflect the company's general way of doing business. Nevertheless, you can go through the social media guidelines of companies such as Intel (http://www.intel.com/sites/sitewide/en_US/social-media.htm), Dell (<http://content.dell.com/us/en/corp/d/press-releases/2006-11-09-00-policy.aspx>), Wells Fargo (<http://blog.wellsfargo.com/community-guidelines.html>), and Best Buy (<http://forums.bestbuy.com/t5/Welcome-News/Best-Buy-Social-Media-Policy/td-p/20492>), to find out how the champions are doing it.

Finally, you should remember that if your employees are well educated about how the proper use of social media can lead to growth of the business and thus the betterment of their own careers, chances are much less likely that they'll misuse social media on purpose.

SOCIAL MEDIA MEASUREMENT

You will never know the true impact of your social media efforts without actually measuring the change brought about by using social media marketing. So, the question is, what can you measure in social media? This is a difficult question to answer when people usually think that the broader goal of social media is to build goodwill and nurture relationships with stakeholders. We will talk more about that in the subsequent chapter, but it is critical to measure success in social media and show the results to management, employees, and stakeholders.

USE THE FEEDBACK TO IMPROVE THE STRATEGY

MANAGING FEEDBACK

Your social media strategy should also answer one of the most important questions of all: how will you handle feedback? Feedback is the sum of what you get from your social media presence. You may find it in the form of response, criticism, praise, debate, argument, complaint, or even detached observations. However, the way you use feedback defines your success or failure with social media marketing.

If you accept the fact that your presence in various social media channels is because you want to be a better listener than your competitors and improve through whatever your customers have to say, then you should take all types of feedback in stride. You will find that you can broadly classify feedback into negative and positive.

Positive feedback is of course very encouraging and makes you feel that you have done a good job with your products and services. The fact that users have actually taken the effort to write a line or two of compliment for all to see speaks volumes about your success.

Positive feedback may also include queries regarding your product or service, which reflects interest from potential customers. It is critical to get back to these queries as soon as possible so that you can create a connection with the inquirer.

You may also receive mixed comments from users or fence-sitters, i.e. the first step in handling negative feedback is to determine the actual nature of it.

And, of course, you may receive feedback that is not positive. The following is a list of the different kinds of negative feedback you may receive:

Complaints: When a customer has a problem with your product or service, they lay it bare for all to know. It may be a specific and isolated problem, but it shows your business in poor light.

Critical analysis: This is perhaps the best type of negative feedback you can wish to receive. The aggrieved customer takes time out to give suggestions for improvement along with the actual problem. You can expect this from your loyal customers or those who expect high standards from your products. They will analyze the problem on their own and not just tear into you.

Personal/emotional attacks: You or your business has to cross someone very badly to receive this type of feedback. The problem is that you may not even know what the real issue underlying such a hostile response is. But, in most cases, there may be small but potentially serious issues for you to take care of.

Spam: These are off-hand comments about you or your brand, which are made by people paid by your competitors, to stain your reputation and hamper your social media progress. Other than being motivated by monetary incentives, some people may also tarnish your image in order

to promote your competitor's product toward which they may have developed a great loyalty over time.

Once you have determined the type of negative feedback you have received, you should plan and deliver a suitable, timely response. The golden rule for responding to negative feedback of any type is to maintain a positive stance in your reaction. If you try to fight fire with fire, you may end up in a war of words with your customers that can take you miles away from the professional image you want to portray at all times.

Therefore, here are a few ways you should try to handle the different types of negative feedback:

Complaints: Provide an appropriate response, aimed at the specific problem or perhaps as a broader message if you feel that such problems may be faced by others too. If more than one person has the same complaint, you must answer with a public message. If a real problem (like a technical error or design glitch) exists, you must make your social media audience aware of the fact that steps are being taken to sort out the issue.

Critical analysis: Your response in this case should start off with a word of thanks for the suggestions, particularly if you do not plan to implement them any time soon, which will usually be the case. However, this may be a great way to increase customer loyalty and encourage your customers to keep providing rational feedback, especially for those who are of two minds about using your product or service. It is also important to communicate the facts to this group of people so that they can make up their minds and clear up any confusion they have.

Personal/emotional attack: The best way to placate a furious customer is to admit your fault, if there is any, for the issue that led to such a reaction in the first place. The customer might be venting and a little understanding will go a long way. The initial response can be along these lines: “You obviously feel our salesperson was rude to you. I understand you would be distressed about being treated disrespectfully. I will get to the bottom of this and get it straightened out for you.”

After doing due diligence on the incident, you should clearly state how you plan to make up for the wrongdoing on your part. So, if you are offering a partial refund, be specific about this olive branch that you are extending towards an aggrieved customer.

Spam: If you fail to find logic behind a scathing attack on your product, service, or business policies, you should simply ignore it as spam. In fact, you should delete such comments, entries, or posts, which are simply meant to draw you into a fight. If the spam messages keep recurring, respond to the general public only, saying that you have explored the issue but are unable to verify its veracity.

<p>TIP: No feedback is bad feedback. Every response from customers is an opportunity either to know your strengths or to improve on your weaknesses.</p>

The key is to constantly learn and improve—here are a few pointers:

- **Ensure** that mistakes on social media are not repeated.
- **Share** successes, no matter how small, with your employees.
- **Make changes** to your social media efforts gradually and involve all participants of your social media engine.

- **Keep** a keen eye on what the best in your industry are doing. If your competitor is doing better than you in the realm of social media marketing, there is no harm in taking a page out of their book.

You must also ensure that while riding high on the wave of social media success, you don't forget the necessary offline marketing strategies. They are the real breadwinners for your business, and ignoring them can be a serious oversight on your part!

The fact is that 90% of word of mouth is generated offline, so you cannot belittle the importance of conventional marketing activities to make sure that people are talking about you. Don't put all your eggs in the social media basket, or you may miss a bigger opportunity to make some serious profits!

Like radio ads using reviews from your site, email campaigns with actual testimonials from your customers prompt the audience for participation. Billboards and direct mailers should show your social media presence. Naked Pizza is using Twitter and QR codes in their print media and billboards to ensure that there they are able to leverage the power of traditional marketing to connect with their customers on social channels

(<http://bostinnovation.com/2011/02/25/naked-pizza-the-social-media-company-that-sells-pizza-opens-boston-location/>).

Naked Pizza has received 8,000 investment inquiries in the past year and a half via online measures such as Twitter, where the owners post funny, food-industry-related tweets each day. The idea, the owners say, is not to drum up business using their feed. "The intent is more about starting a conversation in which like minds will engage," said co-owner Robbie Vitrano. "Some of those like minds, it turns out, are investors." (Source: <http://on.wsj.com/wsjpg>, August 2011)

The Social Media Action Plan

If you accept that the use of social media is important for augmenting the scope of conventional marketing efforts as well as getting some great intangible benefits, you are on the right track. Having said this, also keep in mind that the importance of engaging customers via social media is growing at a rapid pace.

Finally, you are ready to step into the world of social media marketing. The world is going social, and you simply cannot keep your business aloof. Therefore, it is a good decision to explore the near uncharted realm of social media and maybe accrue benefits way beyond your expectations. Being a global citizen, you need to make sure that you reach out to one and all, without your talking points in tow.

TIP: If you want to succeed in social media, just stick to managing the parameters of conversation and not the conversation itself. It is easy and you can do it!

