



20

WAYS TO
**Succeed
at Social Media
Engagement**

Introduction

As a marketer, your ability to adapt and listen to how customers are communicating with you on social media is essential. Now more than ever, the social media climate requires fast-paced focus on effective engagement and helpful interactions. In our recent 2014 **State of Marketing** research, we found that marketers are planning to focus on the following three areas in 2014:



Driving increased
conversion rates



Increasing and improving
brand awareness



Collecting, measuring, and
using behavior-based data

All these goals directly correspond with effective social media engagement techniques. If you are engaging, how do you know if you're doing it successfully? It's not about the number of likes or followers, but who is actively responding. There's a whole range of responses you may be seeking — after all, social media engagement can have many different goals, including:



Humanizing your brand



Managing your brand's reputation



Creating brand advocates



Generating leads and sales



Resolving customer service issues



Handling crises

No matter where the conversations happen, there are many ways to jump in and say hello. Good conversations solidify customer relationships and help people establish a direct connection with your brand. Before you dive in, check out our 20 ways to succeed at social media engagement.

01.

Be transparent.

It may be tough to convince your execs to share your secret sauce, a beta product, or even a conflict resolution story with customers. But, openness can go a long way in social media.

Your community will feel involved in your company and appreciate the trust you show toward them. They may become interested in your story, want to get involved in your product trials, or stay in touch with updates. That hook may be what you need to generate new, long-term customers. Here are a few ways to be more transparent:



Build trust.

02.

Building trust within your social community is critical in online discussions.

During the last ten years, the value of trust has emerged as a hot topic for brands. The 2013 Edelman Trust Barometer showed CEO credibility dropped below a 50% rating, showing a major gap between consumer trust in institutions and their leadership. Building trust via social media is one way to build this credibility.

Here are a few thoughts to get you started:

- Communicate with your customers, stakeholders, and community via social. This goes for leaders in the c-suite, as well. Help your CEO or CMO by giving them a content calendar with suggestions of topics to post about on social media. Allowing them to use their unique voice will humanize both them and your brand.
- Answer and use questions to become a helpful resource to your community. This establishes credibility, which can deepen trust and relationships.
- Show empathy toward and interest in your community. The more you do, the more likely they'll respond to your brand and appreciate your presence.
- Start with employees. Create an internal blog where you can share key thoughts, relay ideas, and give your employees a first view of major announcements and news. Giving your employees the heads-up builds trust.



03.

Create awareness.

If you don't have a highly paid PR team or a big-budget marketing plan, you can still create strong brand awareness. Social media platforms offer the potential to increase your public profile, create awareness, and measure your success. Here are some key awareness metrics:



Potential reach

The number of likes, followers, or total views (in other words, total eyeballs with the potential to see your content). Reach is more accurately understood as potential reach, as not everyone within your potential reach will definitely see your content.



Mentions per time period

How many times people talk about your brand on social media during a given time period. This can give you a sense of overall awareness and chatter.



Inbound links

A solid indicator of the people that are aware of you and tell others about you. Look at the sites and media types where the inbound links live to get a sense of the types of media that drive consistent attention to your brand.



Share of conversation

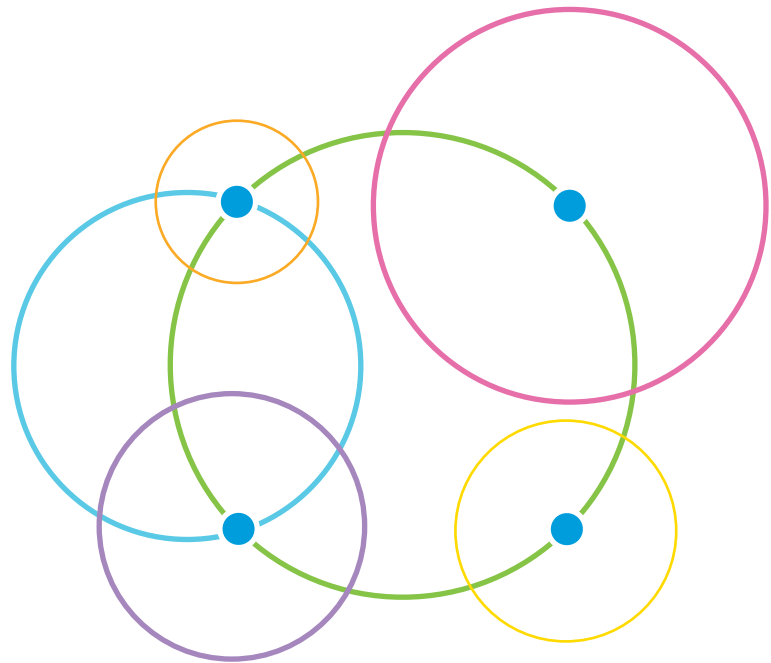
How often you are mentioned in context of the conversations most relevant to you. **Learn more about your share.**

Be mindful of oversharing.

04.

While it's important to stay in the loop and maintain social relationships, posting too often — whether it's photos, status updates, or frequent tweets — can turn off your audience. Here are some ideas to keep you on track:

- Look at what your competitors are doing. If you're spending your days fighting for time with your customers and trying to out-share your competitors, you are doing it wrong. Remember, your network will appreciate quality over quantity.
- Develop a content calendar to organize what, when, and where you're posting.
- Seek internal information and pre-schedule important posts such as event reminders, news from the CEO, or sales. This will eliminate having to squeeze in one more message.
- Simplify your messages. Because everyone is on a schedule, social consumers appreciate clear and concise communication.



05.

Tell a story.

Are you an underdog? A hometown hero? A comeback story? Perhaps the story is something as simple as how a mom solved a household cleaning problem with your new product. Whatever the case, the power of a good story can't be denied.

Engagement is focused on the micro level. It's the follow-up to a story that was shared, including absorbing and responding to the reactions. It's the action of connecting with someone that was affected by your story in one way or another and nurturing the beginning of a relationship with that person. Because of this, engagement can often unearth new stories or add to old ones, providing you with even more content.



Reach out to influencers.

06.

Influencers have long been part of marketing, and they need to be part of your outreach process. An influencer isn't simply someone with a large Twitter following, but someone who can influence others to take actions like clicking your link, sharing your post, or signing up for your product demo.

Here is an example of the influencer marketing process:

- Identify influencers in relevant social networks.
- Once you have identified the influencers, start reading and sharing their social media content from your social media accounts. When you reach out to them and introduce yourself, you'll already be familiar with what interests them.
- If the influencer is in your industry, he or she may or may not already be familiar with your company. Either way, there should be plenty of common points of discussion.
- After establishing an online connection, look to further it in person at industry events.
- As this relationship is established, ask them if they would do a webinar for your company or agree to be interviewed for your company blog.
- After you can create valuable content they will share with their network, it will drive awareness of your company that can be converted to actions.



07.

Respond to positive feedback.

Positive feedback offers your brand a chance to turn casual fans and admirers into full-blown fanatics — the people we refer to as brand evangelists.

These superfans aren't simply sharing your latest blog post or video; they're actively touting your organization both online and off, advocating for you, and sending new business your way. Four good rules of thumb for responding to positive feedback:



Thank them. Thank your audience for the kind words they leave on your blog post, Twitter, or Facebook wall.

Return the favor. Is someone sharing your original content on Twitter? Take note of their latest post and share it with your network.

Add them as a guest contributor. Take note of those individuals who really have the voice and passion to contribute something of value your community will relish.

Reward them. Create a VIP club with rewards, first-come product demos, and thank you gifts.

Respond to negative feedback.

08.

In the social media realm, negative commentary around your brand will definitely fall to your ears, whether you like it or not.

By listening carefully to your online community, you'll easily spot customer complaints as they arise and quickly defuse those situations. Consider these approaches when addressing negative feedback:



Respond quickly. Social consumers live in a world of instant gratification and have come to expect rapid response.

Don't delete. Your customers may view this as a sign that your brand is dishonest and trying to hide the truth. Remember, if you delete feedback, it can be posted other places and this will reflect poorly on your brand.

Don't feed the trolls. Stay focused on constructive criticism and answer negative feedback with respect and humility.

09.

Keep a clear focus.

Focus your engagement on good audience research and a clear vision of how you are going to improve customer experience. Then, only take to the social media channels and conversations that make sense for your brand. For instance, look for conversations that include:

- **Someone searching for a recommendation.**
- **Phrases that imply your product or service has room for improvement to find why people aren't buying. If everyone's hung up on the same thing, you'll know exactly what to fix.**
- **Preference of your brand or brand loyalty. These conversations are likely spearheaded by your advocates.**
- **Conversations surrounding a recent campaign or promotion from your company.**

After you find these relevant conversations, provide great experiences and optimize every touchpoint.

Show your personality.

10.

While maintaining your corporate identity is important, don't become stuffy or boring. Remember, you're having a conversation, not publishing a press release. The simple act of responding like a human being will delight your community.

And don't be merely human — have some personality. Your unique presence will separate you from your competitors. Respond with enthusiasm, empathy, creativity, and warmth. People like to talk to other people. If your brand was a person, what would you want people to say about him or her? How does your online presence reflect your answer?



11.

Share throughout the day.

You know social media as a marketing and engagement channel should target the right audience with the right message, but don't forget it also needs to target the right time.

Share at various times of day to determine the best times for your content. Consider a global audience, too. Posting content at times when your primary audience is asleep won't generate any traction for your messages. If you're using social media for customer service and conflict resolution, timing is imperative. We recommend you have someone monitoring your social networks 24/7 and responding to customers who need help. Additionally, only post public-facing content when you have the staff available to monitor activity around that content and answer any questions or comments. In other words, don't schedule a public tweet for 9:00 pm if you don't have staffing to answer the response to that tweet.



Go beyond Facebook and Twitter.

12.

Though Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn are still among the most popular, marketers can benefit from using social networks beyond these three.

According to our most recent **research**, 72% of marketers are using Youtube and another 15% plan to introduce it in 2014. Additionally, Google+, SlideShare, and Pinterest are among the most popular channels marketers are planning to adopt this year. You have to choose which will work best for your brand and your goals. For example, a B2B company might experience great results with Twitter and Slideshare, but have very few Facebook likes. Comparatively, a retail brand might lock in killer results with a Vine or Instagram promotion and have few followers on LinkedIn.



13.

Be proactive.

Traditionally, the PR and customer service fields have dominated social media, giving it a predominantly reactive orientation. Today, it's imperative to look at actionable, goal-oriented, proactive social marketing.

Here are a few tips to proactively enhance your brand perception online:

- Lead conversations with original content.
- Determine what you want to influence your audience to say.
- Monitor general feeds in your industry for posts that don't mention your brand but are still valuable. This will reveal new conversations and enable you to establish new relationships.

What are some of the positive adjectives that customers have used to describe your brand in the past? Innovative, edgy, reliable, useful, or something else? Focus on bringing those overall customer experience labels into your social media.



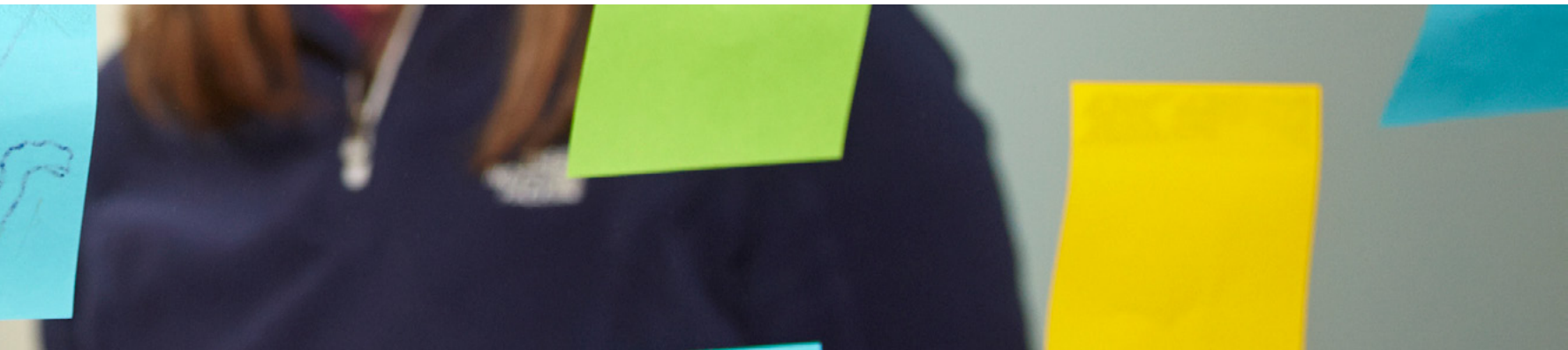
Find a unique voice.

14.

Say “thank you” or “how can we help?”, but say it in your own words. A human tone and emphasis on individuality is important. Finding your social media voice is a critical step to establishing your position in the marketplace. This is an inside-out branding process. Here are few questions to ask yourself:

- Have you established your company’s internal personality?
- What is your company’s communication style, and have you shared this with your social team?
- What is your brand differentiator within the social marketplace?
- What is your competition saying and how are they saying it?

The simple act of communicating in a non-robotic way can surprise and further engage your community. Find your voice among the crowd and you’ll be well on your way.



15.

Find, create, and share content.

Find, create, and share content that is relevant to your industry and engages your audience.

Doing this helps you stay up-to-date on industry trends and keeps you top of mind as a resource. Sharing and learning with your audience sparks conversations and generates leads in the process. Producing and sharing your own content is a great way to add your voice to the conversations about your industry. This demonstrates increased commitment to your industry and showcases why people should pay attention to your brand. Whether you write a corporate blog, engage in industry-specific Twitter chats or forums, or create video content, here are some things to keep in mind when sharing and creating content:

- Be the brand people look to for great finds.
- Be thoughtful and thought-provoking.
- Ask questions.
- Get your audience's mind racing.
- Show your audience that their opinions matter.
- Share industry-specific information.
- Be interesting and innovative.
- You don't always have to write brand-related content.
- Have fun. A Friday video will make them smile.
- Share content they need. Don't know what they need? Ask them.
- Consider discount codes, coupons, or other benefits.
- Share your knowledge. Even if it's the best way to make chicken Cordon bleu.
- Use different media types — e-books, whitepapers, infographics, videos, interactive photo albums, blog posts, downloadable worksheets, and so on.

As you write and share, see what gets the most traffic, and ask your community what they like.



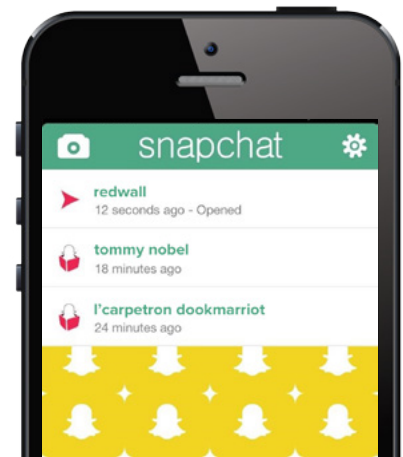
16. Be innovative.

*Look at where your network is moving, find what excites them, and beat them there. For example, we recently wrote about the New Orleans Saints' **innovative use of SnapChat**.*

SnapChat is a photo messaging application that's currently popular with the under-20 subset. Using the app's stories feature, the Saints are giving their Snapchat audience a behind-the-scenes look at the team, playing on their branded "Who Dat" stadium chant. The WhoDat SnapChat has given the Saints a low-commitment, highly engaging way to produce exclusive content for their fans.

Test your boundaries

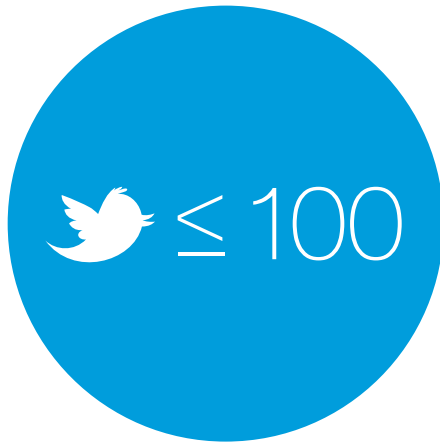
Don't limit yourself to what everyone else is doing or where you feel safe. Do the research, stay ahead of the game, and have confidence in your brand. Innovation doesn't have to be ground-breaking, it just needs to keep you on your toes, in front of your audience, and on top of your industry.



Keep it short.

17.

We live in a world of consumers with increasingly short attention spans.



Don't be long-winded. Say what you have to say to get your point across and nothing more. Tweets that contain less than 100 characters receive higher engagement than longer tweets. Additionally, consider that a shorter message lets followers add their own thoughts in front of a retweet. Even though Facebook, Google+, and others don't have character limits, you should still keep your messages brief and simple.

18.

Follow back.

Following back is one of the **8 Reasons High Schoolers Have a Stronger Following Than You**. Remember, not only is following those that follow you a kind gesture, but it will also help grow your overall following by showing potential new followers that you're the type of brand who engages, not only broadcasts. Keep your audience happy and show you care about what they have to say — not just that they are listening to you. Additionally, when you follow back, you might get some public tweets back from those whom you've just followed, giving you extra exposure.



Share what you learn.

19.

You might not think of yourself as a social media expert, but you can share what you learn with your customers and community.

It's easy to start a blog and let your customers know about it through your regular channels, like your email newsletter or Facebook page. Here are a few approaches:

- You don't have to sound like an expert, but always sound helpful.
- Lead by example. Do case studies, post successes and learning on your blog, lead your customers to your conversation spaces by adding only relevant share buttons.
- Make an effort to answer every question. Pay attention to the questions your customers are asking, and start putting them on the FAQs section of your website. If a customer asks a question and it's not part of your FAQ section, use it as an opportunity for you to add the question and assist future customers in self-serving themselves.

20.

Act quickly.

Spending time waiting in a contact center queue is no longer acceptable to many consumers, who are used to receiving instantaneous help powered by digital tools. The speed of our ability to communicate has increased, and today's customers expect faster response times.

As consumers become more and more social, their need for instant gratification also increases. Customer service and crisis management tactics must reflect this change in consumer mindset. Gone are the days of getting back to your clients in 24 hours. Today, you've got to make every effort to get back to them as soon as possible — and then do it. Remember, social media offers efficient ways to resolve customer issues, if you're prepared to effectively handle them.



Conclusion.

You have a plethora of options to engage your social audience with your brand. The right type of engagement for you is defined by the goals you set for your social media program.

Establish guidelines for engagement that give those on the frontlines enough freedom to be themselves while still properly representing your brand. Then, measure and tweak your methods as needed. Social media is always on the move — establish your continued relevance by creating and maintaining a brand people want to keep watching.



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