

17.3: Using social media to solve business challenges

Strategy is an important aspect of social media planning. Part of that strategy is identifying which business challenges, marketing and communication challenges in particular, your social media will address. These can include:

- Communication and outreach
- Community management
- Support and customer service

Note

Not all businesses face all of these challenges. Which ones are relevant to your brand?

- Reputation management
- Advertising and awareness
- Sales and lead generation
- Search engine optimisation
- Insights and research.



Figure 17.3.1: Social media marketing can help with a number of business challenges

Communication and outreach

Social media offers brands an effective two-way communication and real-time broadcast channels. This bi-directional communication is what makes social communities so exciting (and challenging). Just as consumers can communicate with each other, and send messages to businesses and brands, so businesses and brands can use this medium to communicate with and reach out to the public. Social media is a highly effective public communications tool.

Businesses, governments, and other organisations use Twitter and Facebook to broadcast timely messages, allowing interested parties to keep informed in real time. This has become a vital aspect of newsworthy and breaking news events such as elections, disasters, and global sports. Many organisations also use social media tools to broadcast service updates.

Note

Ideally, you want to be the trusted go-to source of information about your industry

Community management

Social media platforms are built around communities, and are sometimes virtual representations of real-world networks and communities. This feature of social media can be used to build and maintain a supportive community around your organisation.

Community manager' is a role that has risen to prominence as more organisations start using social media, but it has always been an important role in any community, from groups that thrive on forums, to communities run on Facebook.

Creating, building and nurturing a community means that organisations don't just participate in conversations that are happening around and about them, but also actively lead and guide those conversations. These communities are generally made up of the organisation's biggest fans, often called brand evangelists, who feel as if they have a big stake in that organisation. This creates an

environment where those fans can interact directly with the organisation, and where the organisation can send messages directly to those fans and solicit their feedback. See some great tips on successful social media management at: <http://www.toprankblog.com/2016/10/7-helpful-hacks-successful-social-media-community-management/>



Figure 17.3.2: Example of good community management: Chipotle providing awareness of their product and then responding to customers in a brand appropriate tone and encouraging engagement and sharing of the post *Adapted From Digiday, 2015*

Building and maintaining a community is a long-term project. It starts with determining what the best platform is for that community; something that already exists (such as Facebook), or developing a customised new community platform created for the specific brand's purpose (either from scratch or using a service such as Ning – www.ning.com).

Support and customer service

Social media is also an additional customer service channel. As consumers are increasingly comfortable transacting online, they expect the businesses with which they transact to respond to customer queries in the social space, as they would do through a call centre or email. Some customers have found that problems or questions on social media tend to be resolved more quickly, as brands are wary of having unresolved issues left out in public. For any organisation that runs a social community, customer service is often one of its primary functions.



Figure 17.3.3: Best and worst industries and brands at customer service on Twitter *Adapted From Marketing week, 2016*

It is important that brands do respond to customer complaints or queries, as platforms like Twitter keep track of response times, rates and tone of responses. Every year Twitter publishes the best and worst brands for customer service on their platform. It does not help with brand image to appear on the ten worst list.

Interestingly, social media customer service becomes collaborative, with customers assisting each other and, in doing so, reducing the reliance on the organisation for support. Collaborative support tools such as Get Satisfaction (www.getsatisfaction.com), a customer community platform, are used to great effect. According to Get Satisfaction's website, over 70 000 communities use their service, including Microsoft and Intuit's Mint (Get Satisfaction, 2016). Even businesses that use social media channels such as Facebook for customer support can see other community members helping each other.

Reputation management

Social media is a very effective tool for crisis communication and management. In certain instances, it is the place where some crises start. This can be due to offensive content, an employee saying something stupid or inappropriate, or even just angry customers sharing their complaints and getting reactions. It is important that you do not delete angry post, but acknowledge them.

Social media is also a great tool for monitoring what is being said about your brand, and to spot a potential crisis long before it becomes one. Such a 'heads up' allows your brand to mediate the crisis by being proactive and ameliorating the crisis before it takes hold. And when a crisis does hit, social media is a great space for managing your communication as it enables you to get your side of the story out.

Advertising and awareness

Note

Learn more about the advertising options available on social media in the [Social media advertising](#) chapter.

Where there is an audience, there is advertising. The more time users spend in social media, the more brands want to advertise there. It's not just the large numbers or users, and the time users spend on social networks that make them appealing to advertisers, it's also the rich demographic and psychographic targeting opportunities. Adverts can be targeted based on the profile information that individuals provide, either overtly or through their actions on the social network. Most social networks offer a number of advertising options that are accessible to both small advertisers and big spenders. Social advertising is dynamic, with new advertising options released regularly. Brands should experiment with the different formats and models offered by the various platforms to find the platform and ad type or format that works the best for their audience.

Sales and lead generation

Adding a social layer to a commercial transaction can create a richer experience for online consumers. These can be based overtly on social connections, or on inferred connections based on behaviour.

An excellent example of the layer based on inferred connections is Amazon's collaborative filtering. If you've browsed on Amazon.com, you will no doubt have seen product information such as 'People who bought this also bought that'. In real time, based on consumer purchase behaviour, Amazon presents products that you are likely to have an interest in, based on users who browsed and purchased products that you like. Although you may not realise it, this is a social layer on the online shopping experience. Users benefit as they are exposed to new items they may not have thought about looking for and the shopping experience is made easier and is tailored towards them. The brand benefits from additional sales on items that the user may not have considered purchasing until they were shown it.

Social communities can also be lead generation or sales generation assets. Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest already have, or are looking to include, direct shopping channels within the platform.

Search engine optimisation (SEO)

Social media plays an important role in SEO. It provides additional assets that can be optimised so that a brand 'owns' the results page for searches for their brand.

A savvy SEO strategy will also make use of social media assets, links and likes for strengthening the position of other web assets in the search engine results pages.

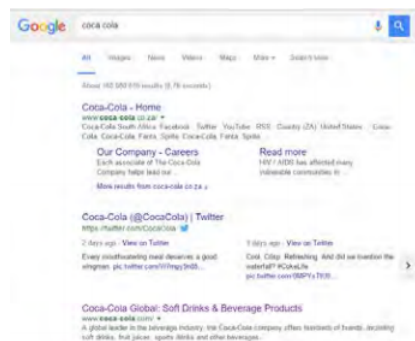


Figure 17.3.4: Coca-Cola's branded social media platforms appearing in Google search results *Adapted From Screenshot, Google, 2017*

With a little bit of planning and keyword research, a brand can use social assets effectively to own searches on their brand name. This ties back neatly to managing their online reputation, too.

Insight and research

Social media can be a very powerful insight and research asset, but the information needs to be judged in its proper context. When you are planning a campaign, social media can provide a rich source of data, both demographic and preference based. You can use the information users share freely to understand more about your market, brand or product. ORM tools help you to track mentions and sentiment, giving you insight into how you are perceived by consumers.

Using social network ad planners, such as Facebook's Ads manager or Google Display Planner (Google discontinued Ad Planner in November 2016), can give you rich information about the size of your market, and things that consumers like. You can measure sentiment and the changing number of mentions to help you understand the impact of other campaigns. These can be offline or online campaigns.

Building your online community also gives you a group you can reach out to for information and feedback, creating an always-on online focus group. However, bear in mind that these users are inherently biased just by the fact that they would join your social community.

Social data can be very valuable, but must be treated correctly. It is qualitative and quantitative information, and is in many ways secondary research. For research purposes, it can and should be used to help form research questions for further evaluation.

This page titled [17.3: Using social media to solve business challenges](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Rob Stokes](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.