

8 Ways To Build Your Brand Using Social Media

INTRODUCTION

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Social media has changed the way our entire world works. Everyone has an equal voice and immediate access to vast networks of friends and followers. Customers are vocal—sometimes passionate—about the brands, products and services they use, and what they like and dislike. For marketers and PR professionals, this isn’t news. According to a 2011 study, 84 percent of global brand executives feel their brand’s sociability is not up to world-class brand standards.¹ More companies, whether they are B2B or B2C, start-up or enterprise, are integrating social media into

their overall marketing plans and dedicating a line in their budgets for resources like monitoring tools and community managers. Their goal is to take advantage of the incredible opportunities available in the social space, like lead and sales generation, real-time customer service and the opportunity to identify and work with brand evangelists. Here are 8 tips that Sysomos recommends to help build your brand with social media.

1. *Socializing Your Brand: A Brand's Guide to Sociability, Weber Shandwick and Forbes Insights*



TIP #1

Determine Goals for Your Social Media Engagement

Hopping on-line without a focused plan is troublesome at best and disastrous at worst. Think about the goals you want to achieve by engaging in social media. Do you want to have conversations and provide customer service? Are you a retailer looking to drive sales? Is your business highly visual? Are you looking for brand advocates and influencers to help you extend your brand? All of these should be considered when setting goals. Once you have them in place, you can plan your social media strategy.

TIP #2

Determine Your Online Brand Persona

Before you get online, figure out how to translate your brand in the social world. Your company already has a brand, so it's important to establish a "social media voice" that matches your brand's personality. If you sell monitors, here's a tweet ripe for response...

What to consider:

- Your values or mission: what is the focus of your company; what do you do differently than the competition?
- Your visual style and brand identity: your social media presence should be consistent with your offline and traditional media presence.
- Your tone of voice: how you will be communicating online. Different social channels lend themselves to different tones; LinkedIn is more formal than Twitter, for example.

Once you've decided how your brand is going to live online, consider creating a handbook or reference document. This will help create consistency between your online and offline presence and will be a valuable resource for customer service, influencer outreach and crisis communications.

TIP #3



Decide On Your Platforms

Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, and Pinterest are some of the most popular social platforms, but with hundreds to choose from and new ones popping up almost every day, how do you determine which ones are best for you?

Remember the time you took to decide your social media goals (see Tip 1)? Apply the same practice here. If you're a retailer, Pinterest or Facebook might be for you because of the ability to share sales-related images and videos. Customer service-oriented companies may prefer the immediacy of Twitter.

Whatever your platform of choice, maintaining a social media presence takes a lot of time; the more platforms you're on, the more time it takes. Not all platforms will be suited to your needs, so it's worth taking the time to figure out what channels suit your company's product and message and best address the needs of your customers and stakeholders.

Social media monitoring tools like Sysomos Heartbeat can help you locate where your customers are talking and who's sharing information, whether they're on blogs, Facebook, Twitter or Pinterest. Once you're armed with this information, you can focus your social media efforts and build your brand on the specific platforms that are best suited to your company.

TIP #4

Get a Social Media Community Manager

Just because your intern is young and is constantly “connected” doesn’t make him or her the best choice for handling your social media strategy. To succeed in social media, you need a dedicated social media community manager who knows your company and your business well.

A successful community manager has excellent communication skills, the ability to build rapport and connections, and a keen awareness of your brand. He or she is essentially the “voice” of your company and plays a critical role in creating, growing and managing your organization’s online presence.

A community manager is vital to the success of your social media strategy. Whether your organization has been at it a while or is just starting its social media initiatives, knowing what to expect can help you avoid some of the more common mistakes—and help ensure your own success.

Social community managers have been described as “A Jack of All Trades”. They’re brand ambassadors, crisis managers, customer service representatives, they handle budgets, develop and write content. They do it all—online.

TIP #4

The Online Community Manager *“A Jack of all Trades”*

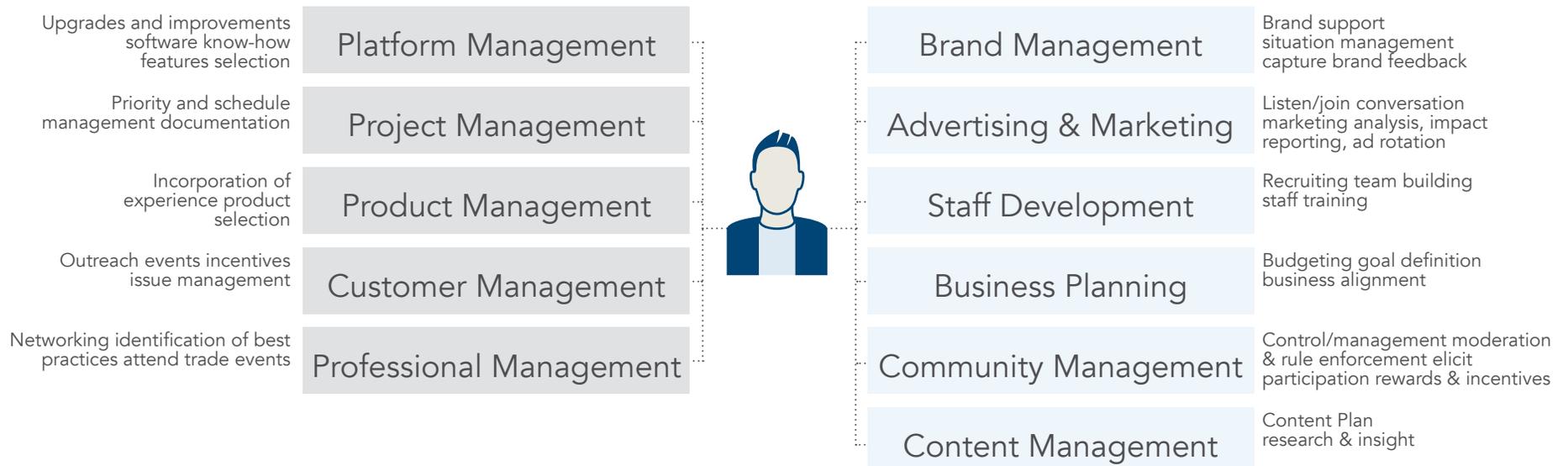


Illustration adapted from blogs.zdnet.com/hinchcliffe

TIP #5

Take Control of Your Customer Service

Customer service is sometimes seen as the “killer app” of social media because it is an effective and immediate way to answer questions, resolve problems, provide solutions and reverse bad customer experiences. Community managers monitor online conversations and keep an eye out for certain positive or negative keywords. That’s just one small way they can provide customer service.

To let a customer’s problem fester and go unanswered on a blog, Twitter or Facebook is asking for trouble because it suggests your company doesn’t care and is not listening to what its customers are saying. The goal of a community manager is to be proactive and reach out to customers. These actions can turn a customer who merely likes a product into a brand advocate.

One key point: Do not delete negative reviews or feedback. Negative feedback is perhaps the single most underrated opportunity for reputation management the

social web has to offer. Publishing and responding to negative reviews opens the door for several online marketing opportunities, and by deleting them, you might miss the chance to turn negatives into positives, gain valuable feedback from a free focus group and even improve your brand’s reputation by being willing to acknowledge mistakes and learn from them.

Do not delete negative reviews or feedback.

TIP #6



Have a Predetermined Crisis Management Plan

When something unexpected happens that could damage your company or brand, social media monitoring can be a crucial tool to handle the crisis. It could be a matter of becoming aware of a situation as it is developing as opposed to learning about it when there is a full-blown problem. Social media monitoring also lets you provide valuable and relevant information to mitigate the situation in a proactive and engaged way.

Here's what you need to do to have your brand ready for a crisis:

1. Get real-time insight. Often crises can be managed effectively or even defused by having real-time insight into what's happening, knowing the key issues and discovering who is leading the conversations. Social media monitoring tools let you keep track of potential negative words that are popping up around your brand. This real-time information allows you to take charge of a potential crisis and control the outgoing message.
2. Make sure you're listening. A properly configured social media monitoring platform lets you stay on top of positive and negative conversations about your company.
3. Stay alert. Ensure your community manager is notified when keywords pop up in conversations.
4. Empower your people. Your community manager needs to be able to take action without waiting for permission. The reference guide in Tip 2 will be important.
5. Be proactive. Don't wait for customers to reach out if you see a crisis. Reach out to them and offer solutions. This can turn them into brand advocates and extend your brand's reputation.

TIP #7



Build Relationships with the Media

You can't build your brand without building relationships. People use social media to share ideas and conversations and you have to participate to get the most for your brand. Where to start finding the people to build relationships? It's not just your customers who are important in your brand-building efforts; the media plays a critical role in helping you shape your social media brand.

Journalists and bloggers use Twitter to find trends and sources. Follow the journalists and bloggers you would like to pitch—their tweet stream will be a wealth of information about their activity. Retweet them and answer questions should they put out any

queries. Comment on any pertinent tweets they post, offer expert sources for their stories should they ask. Talk to them even when you don't have an announcement. Journalists like knowing what's going on.

It's not just your customers who are important in your brand-building efforts. The media plays a critical role too.

TIP #8



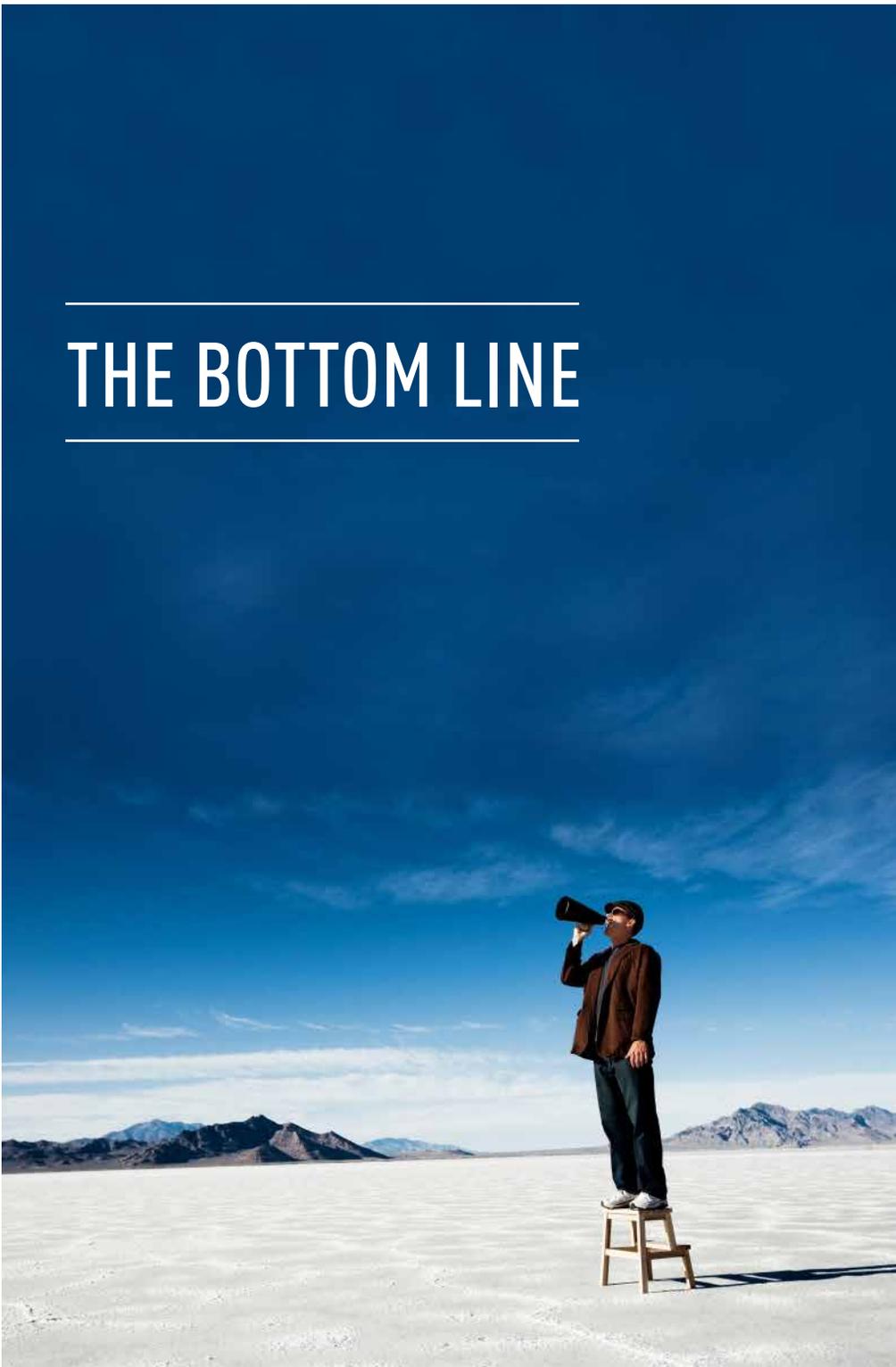
Find Influencers

It's a simple fact: tapping into the vast network of influencers will help you sell more of your products or services. A social media influencer is someone with a lot of online clout who leads conversations and shapes opinions about organizations and brands. You can identify major influencers by how socially active they are, how organically their messages are reposted or re-tweeted, how many followers they have, the influence of their networks and how connected they are in general. Whether you're sitting down with your clients or launching your company's social media marketing initiatives, it's the influencers who you try to target, knowing that if you develop a good relationship with them, their

word-of-mouth recommendations will influence others to buy.

You can learn more about how to find and leverage true social media influencers for your organization from our previous Tip Sheet: Getting Social Influencers Talking About You.

THE BOTTOM LINE



Social media presents an enormous potential for brand building. The vast majority of global executives know it's no longer a question of whether to socialize their brands but how best to do it. They know that the quality of their organizations' online presence is a key contributor to its overall reputation and success. Tapping into the social web's tremendous opportunities takes enterprise-wide commitment. Use these tips as a starting point for developing your own "world-class" practices and creating an authentically social brand.