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IDEAS

for your

2012

SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN

30 Ideas for your 2012 Social Media Plan

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Introduction

Wondering how to delegate your people, time and resources on social media in 2012, but weren't able to read every blog post, attend every conference, or dial into every webinar about the topic?

Our archivists have fired up the microfiche readers in the library basement to research our most useful and popular recommendations from 2011.

Use some or all of these 30 ideas to ...

- Go beyond a grab-bag of tactics to become a truly social business
- Gain valuable business by listening intelligently to your community, industry and competitors
- Crowdsource fresh ideas from your biggest fans
- Go beyond text to webinars, podcasts, video and other media
- Use a social media crisis to turn frustrated clients into lifelong brand advocates
- Identify which tactics are working using smart analytics

CHAPTER 1:

Ideas for Strategy

In 2011, maturing brands began asking how to go beyond a grab-bag of tactics and craft an integrated plan. The term “social strategy” was heard more and more.

What brought on this shift? More companies wanted to become social enterprises who engaged with their communities across all channels and departments. That kind of full-scale effort requires planning and coordination.

2011 has shifted the conversation from social media strategy to a broader social strategy. Social has implications for your entire business, not just marketing.

In October we published CRM industry analyst Brent Leary’s *Strategically Social: 5 Keys to Becoming a Social Business*. Here are his 5 recommendations. (Download the eBook for the hard data behind them.)

Idea 1: Socialize your culture, not just your technology.

The days when businesses controlled the conversation are over, but most businesses haven’t adapted. They use social media as a megaphone, not a telephone. Your whole organization needs to adapt to the empowered customer.

Idea 2: Write up a plan.

Your social strategy needs just as much forethought as any other business process. Taking the time to plan ahead will pay off. Brent observed, “Strategic users are almost three times more likely to execute activities for engaging prospects than informal users (53% vs. 19%)” — and they were likely to see increased revenues.

Idea 3: Cultivate long-term relationships.

Retaining your current customers is 5 to 10 times cheaper than acquiring new ones. So why are you blowing all your social media efforts on the short-term sale? Use social media to cultivate the long-term customer experience.

Idea 4: Automate the boring stuff.

A more wide-ranging social strategy means you need to get more efficient. Brent noted, “Automating routine operations frees up even more time that could be better spent focusing on finding ways to more meaningfully engage with customers.”

Idea 5: Calculate the value of your social customer.

Real businesses like yours aren’t doing social media for kicks. How can you figure out what your social customers are worth? Brent explained that the basic idea is pretty simple: “Add up all the products and

services they bought, subtract the cost of servicing them (phone calls, emails, chats, site visits, etc.) and you have a pretty fair measure of what a customer adds to the bottom line.”

Dell continues to lead the way with social media. In May, we [interviewed](#) Amy Tennison ([@AmyTennison](#)), who leads Dell’s Social Media and Community University program.

You should steal these four ideas from Dell’s training program.

Idea 6: Require certification.

Three thousand Dell employees have undergone their Social Media Certification Program, [notes Forbes](#). Require every team member (regardless of their function or business unit) who wants to engage on behalf of your brand to complete your certification program. That ensures they not only know what they’re doing, but that they’ve imbibed your core principles.

Idea 7: Require extra certification.

Require additional certification for anyone using social media to communicate to shareholders and media. A misstep at this level could be a disaster that costs your company millions and damages your brand beyond repair. Make sure the people at the controls have enough training. Then train them some more.

Idea 8: Share the vision.

Share and promote your social media strategy, governance and principles, not just low-level tips and orders. Don’t turn your team members into robots: they’ll feel frustrated, and so will your community. Instead, inspire them with the big picture. Then free them up to use their own voice and their own judgment as they engage online.

Idea 9: Double-check for compliance.

Monitor employees’ social media accounts to make sure they are active, brand-compliant and tracked. Don’t wait for an employee to screw up. Watch what they’re saying and how they’re engaging. Correct them when they make a mistake. Encourage them when they excel.

Looking for some more training resources? Check out the eBook we released in April, [Training Your Company for Social Media](#).

We’d bet you have great insights and ideas to share with your customers, colleagues and community. Turn that wisdom into great content in 2012 by following our [Four Steps to Creating Content for a Social Media Community](#).

Idea 10: Craft a content strategy.

Don’t blog and write willy-nilly. Ask yourself why and for whom you’re creating content.

Nail down the Big Idea that will play out in everything you write and all the tactics you execute. It’s a big decision and it should be broad enough to work for a long time. That could be years.

Your brand has an established target audience whom you reach out to via traditional media, business

contacts and even the social web. Take a deeper look at this group and determine who would be interested in your content. Consider why and how they would be engaged as well. What is keeping them awake at night? What problems can you solve that will help them do their jobs better or make their lives easier?

Your personality is one great way to break through. Establishing a voice moves you away from “corporate speak” and into a place that’s more distinct to your brand. This is more appealing to your community because it speaks to them in terms they understand. If you have an existing, overarching brand personality, extend it into your content.

Idea 11: Go beyond text.

Blog posts, eBooks, case studies and white papers may form the heart of your content, but work in some variety by considering other media.

An audio podcast is like having your very own radio show your audience can tune into while at the office, during their morning commute or while working out at the gym.

Photos add a little variety and freshness to your content. They personalize and humanize your business. [Adding an image to your blog post will double your page views.](#)

Use video as a way to spotlight a product or people in your organization. Rather than waiting for the media to interview your company spokesperson, tape your own interviews and upload them to YouTube or Vimeo.

Webinars, unlike many conferences and events, can be both convenient and affordable. Participants have the ability to ask specific questions and chat with the guests and moderator, and there are no geographical hindrances. Webinars are a great opportunity to gather names and email addresses for followup.

If you want to convey information that contains numbers, dates, locations, measurements or comparisons, present it as an infographic.

Idea 12: Fill in the topic gaps.

Ask these questions as you figure out what to write about:

- Is the topic interesting right now?
- Is it popular right now?
- Is it timely?
- What is the competition doing or writing about?
- Will you have enough content for the month?

The sweet spot? A topic that you love, that’s timely, and no one else is writing about.

Idea 13: Build community relationships through your content.

You can learn a lot from your community if you take the time to listen. Though the members of your community can give you a good indication of whether or not they find your content valuable, through various social options, sharing your posts, comments, tweets and quoting your content, direct feedback is always best.

You can collect feedback from your community in a number of ways. Consider periodic online surveys, feedback forms, attendee surveys at your next webinar or conference, or even a questionnaire into your next email newsletter.

If you plan on measuring and analyzing this information (and why wouldn't you?) just be sure you are consistent and ask the same questions across your selected time period so you can measure any changes in awareness and sentiment.

CHAPTER 2:

Ideas for Listening

Our most popular 2011 blog post — by far — was our Social Strategist Jeff Cohen's October list of *"100 Uses of Social Media Monitoring"*. Smart organizations understand that social media has a ton of intelligence value.

Here are some ideas from Jeff's list you can use to listen well in 2012.

Idea 14: Pay attention to people talking about your brand.

Be aware every time someone mentions your brand online. That includes all the names by which you're known, any branded products and services, and members of the executive team.

Positive mentions boost your team's morale, highlight what you're doing well, and uncover your fans. But negative mentions, painful as they are to hear, are even more valuable. They give you a chance to turn a vocal critic into a vocal fan. And they'll show you what you need to change.

Listen and tag brand advocates and detractors. That will help you respond intelligently to questions and complaints. Make special note of influencers in your industry: people who can shape the attitudes of hundreds or thousands of followers for or against you.

Learn where customers are talking about your brand. It may be Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn. But every industry has its own forums and venues where folks hang out and talk shop. This knowledge will keep you from wasting resources on the wrong networks.

Listen for the most popular topics about your brand. What people call your product or concepts within the industry may be completely different from your internal corporate-speak. Note what words and language people use, and adapt your own accordingly.

Idea 15: Gather competitive intelligence.

Social media is for the most part a public and open venue. Anything you can learn about your own brand, you can learn about your competitors' brands.

Monitor your competitors' feeds for recent company news and their latest product releases. Mine their blogs for company insight. What market segment are they pursuing? What competitive advantages are they pushing? How are they comparing themselves to you?

How well are your competitors engaging their customers? If they're doing it better than you, learn from them. If they're doing it worse than you, you've just found a competitive advantage.

Listen to your competitors' customers. What questions are they asking? What issues do they have? Why do they prefer the competition? Keep your ears perked for negative mentions of your competitors.

Competitive intelligence is one of the most-overlooked opportunities in social media. Leverage it by digging into our June eBook, *Getting the Competitive Edge with Social Media*.

Idea 16: Monitor industry chatter.

You need to be aware of what's going on in your industry. Are your brand or your competitors' being discussed in industry chatter? What's your "share of voice"? In other words, how much are people talking about you instead of them?

Listen for industry trends, issues, and news. As you do so, you'll [discover the key influencers in your industry](#). Find out what they care about and seek to influence them in turn. As you widen the net, you'll discover how the larger business community perceives your industry. You might find ideas that had never occurred to any insiders.

Finally, monitor changes in social media adoption in your industry. Adjust your own use of social media to stay ahead of the pack.

Idea 17: Lead the conversation.

You want to be a thought leader — that fresh thinker who stimulates everybody else in the industry. It's easy to sell when everyone looks to you for guidance.

Great leaders listen. Social media can help. Start off by determining perception of your company and its employees. Is anyone paying attention to your ideas?

Find out who the influencers are in your industry. Who are people retweeting? Which blogs does everyone subscribe to? Get your own subject-matter experts to comment on those posts and join the discussion. Influencers have the ability to mobilize others around a particular topic so get to know them.

Listen for opportunities to lead the way yourselves. Identify online opportunities, like group blogs and forums, where you can start new conversations. Listen for how those conversations are spread and what people are saying about them.

And don't forget to use social media to find offline conferences and events where your subject-matter experts can speak or take part in panels.

Idea 18: Generate leads and sales.

Your sales team should be listening for leads in social media. Monitor buying indication terms, questions, discussions, and recommendation requests within your product category. Jump in and answer questions when appropriate.

As you monitor your prospects, you'll discover topics for remarkable content — content that will be directly relevant to your prospects' needs. That targeted content will move them along in the buying cycle, and also widen your pool of prospects as your content gets passes along.

Idea 19: Listen for customer-service opportunities.

Listening doesn't stop when you make the sale. Social media is ideal for customer service. Identify customer service issues as they emerge, and respond to customers in real-time. You don't need advanced monitoring software to be aware of direct customer questions; listen to and answer them.

Chris James is the Director of Social Media for GNC, the world's largest vitamin and supplement retailer. In November [he told us about how they nurture their online community](#).

GNC uses the Radian6 platform to listen for - among other things - customers who are having problems with their products. James wants such customers to give them a second and third look before approaching the competition. So his team offers store credit (via a gift card) to try a more suitable product.

Respond gratefully to positive feedback. If the customer is willing, take complaints and issues offline. Monitor ongoing customer concerns to make sure issues really have been resolved.

Regularly collect the highlights (and volume) of customer feedback and share them with other teams. It will help them understand what the big issues are.

Listening for customer service lets you build relationships with customers. If your efforts turn frustration into delight, they're worthwhile.

Idea 20: Take the heat off in a crisis.

You don't want to be caught flat-footed when a crisis comes. How often has a botched response damaged a brand more than the original crisis itself? Social media monitoring can help you respond faster and better.

Social media can alert you to potential issues before they escalate. For example, community news sites around your facilities could help you prepare for the windstorm that could knock out a server farm.

Before a crisis hits, look for channels to use for crisis outreach, as well as key influencers who can amplify your response.

During a crisis, listen actively to relevant conversations. What kind of volume and sentiment are you dealing with? Which people and which sites are critical of your brand? Knowing about the 5,000 angry posts to your Facebook wall will help you respond quickly and sensitively.

On July 13, a massive hailstorm hit Denver, taking 22 of Frontier Airline's planes out of commission. [Our case study](#) described how frustrated customers idled in long lines at the Frontier counters and even longer wait times on their toll-free reservation lines.

Marco Toscano, Frontier Senior Manager of Social Media, saw this as the perfect chance for his department to assist the reservations group by providing information and flight re-accommodations.

The team tracked down mentions of Frontier across the social web and reached out to re-book flights, spread updates, and let their customers know they were there to help.

One of the 4,000 thankful customers they helped tweeted, "Another reason to fly [@flyfrontier](#) their [@FrontierCare](#) booked me a new ticket in 10 min rather than the insane line at airport. Awesome!"

Monitoring social media will help you see the crisis from your customers' perspective, shaping your language and adjusting your priorities.

Idea 21: Tweak your advertising campaigns.

Spending a pile of cash on advertising, with no feedback on how well it's doing? Social media can help.

Listen for social response to your campaigns. You can track:

- Advertising-specific keywords
- Unique URLs and phone numbers on your ads
- Conversations from trade shows
- Campaign- or brand-specific hashtags
- User-generated content you've solicited

Use this data to gauge consumer sentiment and learn the language of your prospects.

As you've seen, social media listening has value for every facet of your organization. Make 2012 the year you take advantage.

CHAPTER 3: Ideas for Engaging

It's not enough to listen in the shadows. Your fans expect you to respond and start conversation.

Idea 22: Surprise and delight your fans.

In November, we published [a case study about Pizza Hut](#). Pizza Hut realized it wasn't only retailers who could take advantage of Cyber Monday. Their digital team used social media to share a special 20% off promotion for online shoppers.

"It's important to surprise and delight our online community so they're happy to be a part of it. There are going to be so many people online already, we just want them to order food online also," explained Tressie Lieberman, Senior Manager of Digital Marketing.

Spend some time dreaming up ways to surprise and delight your community this year.

Idea 23: Crowdfund fresh ideas.

In December we posted "[4 Simple Steps to Do-It-Yourself Social Media Crowdfunding](#)." Your community cares about your product — maybe more than you do. After all, you're being paid to sell it, but they've bought and used it. How might their passion and intelligence inspire you?

Crowdsourcing needn't be a multi-million dollar formal process. At its heart are four easy steps.

1. Ask for input
2. Listen respectfully
3. Pick the best ideas
4. Reward generously

Our Director of Community and Social Strategy, [David B. Thomas](#), did a little crowdsourcing himself for his popular July post, "[Top Ten Enterprise Social Media Etiquette Fails.](#)"

David used Twitter, Facebook and Google+ and asked his friends and followers to share their examples of the worst violations of social media etiquette they saw perpetrated by companies. He then incorporated their answers into a top ten list and included it in his post. Participants had a vested interest in seeing if their responses made it into the post and shared the post with their friends and followers.

Idea 24: Avoid common etiquette pitfalls.

Here are David's Top 10 Fails.

10. Not following back
9. Being faceless
8. Clueless cross-post
7. Being a robot
6. Not keeping your comment house in order
5. Acting like you know me
4. Inconsistency
3. Engaging and ignoring
2. Talking like a marketroid
1. Being pushy

We covered the topic more fully in our July eBook [Social Media Etiquette - Minding Your Manners on the Social Web](#).

In it we explained the difference between personal and professional etiquette and shared the benefits you reap by displaying proper social etiquette. Suggestions included:

- Saying "hello" and "goodbye" every day
- Introducing yourself and others

- Saying “please” and “thank you”
- Reaching outside your clique
- Avoiding disclosure of sensitive information, defamation and discrimination

Idea 25: Deal graciously with detractors.

No one enjoys conflict. Getting up close and personal with your critics is one of the hardest parts of maintaining a presence in social media.

In January, we offered “[10 Tips for Dealing With Detractors](#)”:

1. Decide whether or not the item warrants a response
2. Acknowledge the issue
3. Find out what went wrong
4. If there’s misinformation, correct it
5. If you have a solution at the ready, offer it
6. Realize that not everything needs fixing
7. Don’t be terse or defensive
8. Respond in public whenever possible, and bring the right person to the conversation
9. Be creative about what’s next
10. Say thank you

Idea 26: Stir up a little controversy.

Erika Napoletano ([@RedheadWriting](#)) stirred up a lot of comments on her July post, “[What are the Bleeping Rules? Profanity and the Social Web.](#)”

It’s all about knowing your community, Erika stressed. “No matter whether you use profanity or not, people are going to take offense at something you have to say. What brands have to understand is that not everyone is their target customer and if you tick a few people off along the way, that’s okay!”

Controversial subjects can provoke strong emotions in your community and inspire discussion. Don’t be afraid to discuss topics relating to your brand or industry just because they’re hot-button topics. Passion invites interaction and engagement.

CHAPTER 4:

Ideas for Measuring

Remember when businesses first dipped their toes in the newly-discovered ocean of social media? They knew it was the place to swim because their competitors and customers were wading in it. Measurement wasn't top of mind. It was more about staying afloat and making a splash.

In 2011, social media started to prove that it was not a place to play around. It's an effective business strategy. As more and more executives and management saw the potential of social media, they increasingly wanted the demonstration of KPIs and ROI as well.

Welcome to the world of measurement.

According to eMarketer, [the top metrics used by CMOs to track social media results in the past two years](#) shows that more than content and web traffic, the most critical measure is what users are doing on the social web. Perhaps this ties into the question, "If I change my social media campaign, how will consumers react and engage as a result?"

Social media metrics will be on more CMOs' radar in 2012 and the selection of metrics and KPIs will continue to grow. Measurement, statistics and analytics will be required skills. Are you or your employees trained in these areas?

Idea 27: Measure Share of Conversation.

We meditated on [The Future of Analytics](#) in our August eBook. Standardization is coming, and we recommended two metrics in particular.

Share of Conversation, [a metric defined by Radian6's CEO Marcel Lebrun](#), measures how much of your industry's online conversation is about your brand.

Idea 28: Measure Adjusted Engagement Level.

Adjusted Engagement Level scores how well you're engaging. While the fast-track approach is to simply look at mentions you have marked as completed, you also need to factor for comments your playbook dictates do not require engagement. These items should not be counted against you, which is why you should adjust your engagement to represent these changes.

Idea 29: Measure your level of influence.

Early in the year we published [Defining and Measuring Influence](#). Influence is simply the ability to impact a person or thing in ways that inspire action. Online influence can drive business, so you'd do well to cultivate it this year.

To influence anyone, you must build trust, establish authority, deliver value, and form a mutual connection with them. Remember, influence does not necessarily depend on the size of someone's network.

Measuring influence will be a hot topic in 2012. Automated influence graders like Klout may help, but you'll need human intervention to find people who are influential in your network.

Idea 30: Make your data memorable.

"Not Everyone is a Numbers Person," we reminded our readers in August. How do you share your measurements without people's eyes glazing over?

We offered 6 principles for making your data memorable.

1. **Simplicity.** Become a master at exclusion. Find the essential core of what you are presenting.
2. **Unexpectedness.** Keep your audience's attention by presenting the data in a striking way.
3. **Concreteness.** Cut the vague corporate-speak. Use concrete language and data, examples and images.
4. **Credibility.** Back up your arguments with carefully-chosen numbers.
5. **Emotions.** Your community is a group of real people with real experiences and feelings.
6. **Stories.** We never forget stories. Don't just measure relationships; describe them.

Whether it's the number of Facebook likes, the number of retweets or how many comments you get on your blog, social media is trackable. And it is with this tracked data that we can analyze results and determine what's working and not working. Are you measuring your results?

CONCLUSION:

Wrapping it All Up

With this eBook, you are now geared up for a great social strategy in 2012. You can delegate your time and resources, go beyond the grab-bag of tactics and craft a smart, integrated plan.

If you apply these ideas — whether you're just starting out, working on your strategy, trying to listen harder, increasing your engagement or turning up the tracking — 2012 could be your best year yet.

For More Information:

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