

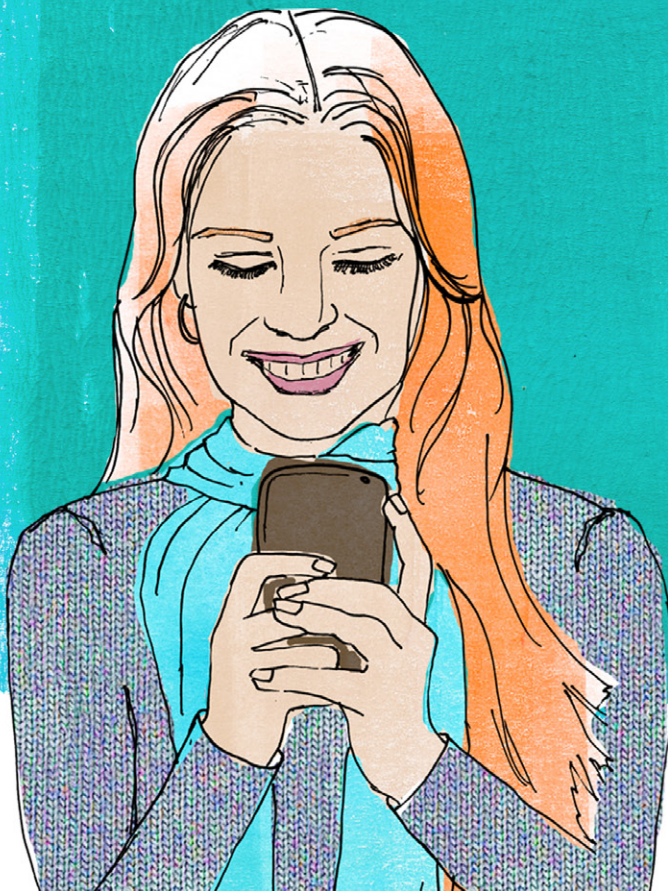


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social media
monitoring +
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Building Stronger Customer Relationships: Making Your Brand More Personal with Social Media



Community Ebook

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Highlights

- There is no social media strategy good enough to save an organization that doesn't care deeply about its customers.
- Don't make your audience work to find you. Learn where they hang out and visit them there.
- The best social media policies give team members a great deal of freedom within clear boundaries.
- People will form a stronger connection with your brand if they have a connection with your team members.
- Become a site people bookmark and return to because of all their fantastic resources.
- Focus on what your community cares about, not pet topics you enjoy ranting on.
- A big part of being a delightful brand means showing that it's not all about you. Share other's content.

Introduction

THE BEGINNING OF A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP

Having a great product is not enough. Your customers are also looking for a great experience — and that comes from you cultivating a great relationship with them.

Social media is perfect for this. Don't be distracted by all the tools, tactics and techniques out there. There's a reason it's called *social* media: it's about people relating with other people.

If you only use social media as a machine for blasting sales pitches and PR releases, your community will never warm to you.

But if the people behind your brand act like decent and authentic human beings, your community will reward your brand with their trust and yes — even love. You'll attract and retain more paying customers, and have fun doing so.

This isn't about putting on a fake smile and reciting focus-group tested platitudes. ("Your call is important to us.") *There is no social media strategy good enough to save an organization that doesn't care deeply about its customers.*

You, on the other hand, are passionate about delighting and serving your customers via social media. Our intensive 30-day plan will get you started on a lifetime of cultivating warm relationships with your community on social media.

Chapter 1

FIND AND LISTEN TO YOUR COMMUNITY

Social media monitoring involves searching for online conversations about your organization using key words and phrases. You can uncover the location of these discussions and set up camp on those platforms. Then your audience doesn't need to find you — because you've already come to them.

Day 1: Pick a social media monitoring tool.

Social media monitoring tools can uncover the conversations happening about your brand. Select a paid or free option based on your needs. If you're a small organization in a very niche industry with minimal social media activity, a free tool, even Google Alerts, could be a good start. If you have a prominent brand with a large community, investigate a premium platform like [Radian6](#).

Day 2: Start broad with your listening approach.

Start by casting the net wide. You'll begin to see where people are talking. Social media is bigger than Twitter and Facebook. For your organization, it's wherever people are creating and sharing content — on blogs, forums, message boards, LinkedIn, or niche online communities.

Day 3: Use the right search terms.

Concentrate your organization searches around terms, words, and phrases that are directly related to your brand. These might include names, products, services, campaigns, key stakeholders and any nicknames, abbreviations or misspellings. These terms will reveal whether they're talking about you — and if they're not, that's intelligence in itself, isn't it?

Day 4: Think like your audience to find conversations.

If you were looking for your company, product or service, what would you search for? What terms would you use? Try that in Google. You will be surprised how quickly you'll find blogs, communities, influencers, etc. on those topics. Look into your analytics to see how visitors are coming to your site.

Day 5: Pinpoint your listening.

GNC learned that many health and wellness conversations were happening on forums. So they listened in and engaged where appropriate, receiving feedback and answering questions. Their community has grown as a result. (Learn more in this [case study](#).)

Listening will help you understand how the public perceives you. You'll also find where you can meet new people, share helpful expertise and establish your online presence as a resource and authority.

Now that you're listening, it's time to interact in a way that's human.

Chapter 2:

ENGAGE WITH PERSONALITY

“Engagement” simply means having direct conversations with members of your community. Good conversations solidify the relationship, and your fans will feel a more direct connection with the brand.

Day 6: Start writing an engagement playbook.

Leaping in without a plan may feel more authentic, but you’ll either be overwhelmed by the volume of conversations, frozen by situations you hadn’t anticipated, or, worst of all, ignite a social media controversy with an ill-considered response.

You need an engagement playbook to adequately care for your community. ([We’ve published our own](#); please borrow whatever’s useful.) Your playbook should cover:

- How to classify conversations and posts you encounter
- Which ones to respond to — and which ones to ignore
- How team members get assigned posts
- The escalation process for critical posts

Day 7: Cultivate a little personality.

Mind you, don’t get all stiff and corporate. You’re having a conversation, not publishing a news release. The simple act of responding like a normal human being will delight your community.

And don’t be merely human — have some personality. What could be duller than a generic human being? Red Bull, Cisco and Burberry should feel different, and so should you. Your unique presence will separate you from your competitors. What do you want people to remember about your brand?

The best social media policies give team members a great deal of freedom within clear boundaries. Encourage them to respond with enthusiasm, empathy, creativity and warmth.

Day 8: Respond promptly.

It's not enough to engage, though. You've got to be quick about it. Gone are the days of getting back to your clients in 24 hours. We're all impatient and have short attention spans.

Today you've got to make every effort to get back to them within the hour — even if that reply can only be, "We're working on a solution for you right now." Never let your community feel ignored.

Day 9: Engage with many people.

Interact and engage with as many people as you can, treating them all as equals. Treat the new name reaching out to you as kindly and expeditiously as you would the well-known influencer. Remember how you felt the first time a big brand took you seriously. Make everybody feel valued.

Day 10: Set times that you'll be available.

Publish the regular hours you're active on each of your channels. Your community will be pleased to know that they can count on you to be there when they reach out.

Day 11: Go beyond text with your outreach.

There are at [least seven different learning styles](#). Think about how to incorporate them into your social strategy. Text alone isn't going to cut it for everyone.

Create videos on YouTube, conduct live chats on Google+, host webinars and create podcasts so that everyone in your community can get to know your brand (and your team) in the way that feels the most comfortable to them. Plus, there's something about chatting with people face-to-face (even if it's via a computer) that connects on a deeper level than tweeting or emailing.

Day 12: Showcase your employees.

Your employees are the heart and soul of your brand. Many of them spend hours communicating with clients and prospects they've never seen. People will form a stronger connection with your brand if they have a connection with your team members.

Feature them on your "About Us" page. You may choose to showcase just your top-level executives, your community team or the company as a whole. Regardless of which you choose, your "About Us" page should show off your company's culture and personality. If your team feels valued, they'll be more likely to show that same respect to your customers.

With a tagline “We are the Flannel to your Lumberjack”, you know **Fixel** is going to be different. The folks at Fixel took headshots to the next level and included sliders so you can have a little fun mixing and matching their faces. There’s even a neat feature to give them all moustaches.

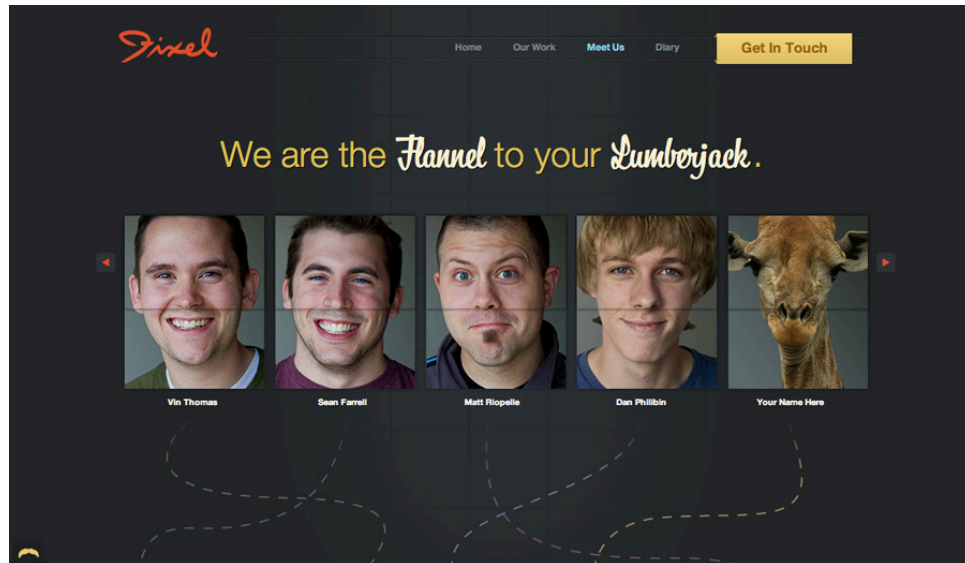


Image source: <http://wearefixel.com/about>

Show off your company culture and the personalities your employees bring to the table.

Day 13: Be a knowledge broker.

Showcase your knowledgeable and educational nature as a brand. **Innocent Drinks** openly shares the ingredients of their drinks and heavily engages in social media to answer their community’s questions.

Their unique and quirky brand (visitors are invited to “call the bananaphone” at “Fruit Towers”) combined with their knowledge-broker mindset makes their community engaged and trusting. That’s a good recipe!

Image Source: http://innocentdrinks.co.uk/things_we_make/orange_juice



Day 14: Ask your audience what they want.

Social media has shifted the balance of power from the brand to the customer. So give them a turn at the wheel. The more empathy and interest you show to your community, the more likely they'll respond and appreciate you.



Day 15: Gather knowledge from your community.

You want to know the kinds of information your community finds most helpful. Remember how GNC asked forum questions to find how their products were being used? Conduct your own research. Since your audience may not tell you everything on their minds after asking them, follow up with deeper social media monitoring.

Day 16: Offer to help offline.

Help when and where you can. Yes, you can use social media to be helpful by answering questions about your industry on Twitter, Google+, Facebook, etc. but you can also take your online efforts to help offline, too. Host local or regional networking events and invite your online community to attend.

This gives your online connections an opportunity to meet and mingle with others and possibly find new people they can collaborate with. If you can't host events yourself, try sponsoring and supporting local events within your industry and even those that may have nothing to do with your industry but are aligned with your core values.

Day 17: Turn transactions into relationships.

Chicago cab driver [Rashid Temuri](#) has turned his transactional business into a relational one with social media. Temuri posts when he's available on Twitter ([@ChicagoCabbie](#)), Google Latitude and Find My Friends so that people know where he is and can contact him for a ride.

Temuri generously offers free WiFi and discounts for his social media followers.

Now instead of calling the dispatcher for a taxi, Temuri's new friends ping him directly.



Day 18: Have empathetic responses at the ready.

Concerns and complaints will arise as you listen to conversations. One of the reasons you went into social media was to resolve these. Always be understanding of their situation and seek to learn more. Thank them for letting you know, apologize when required, and ask how you can help.

Day 19: Respond to positive and negative feedback.

Positive feedback deserves a positive response. Thank them — or even reward them. Find out why and with whom they were pleased. If you hear negative feedback, ask more details. This shows that you value their opinion and want to take the time to learn.

Back in 2007 when [Frank Eliason](#) worked at Comcast, he answered upset customers on Twitter by asking the question, “How can I help?” behind the [@comcastcares](#) Twitter handle. That simple question turned the power of the conversation over to the customer. There’s a reason Bloomberg Businessweek dubbed him “[the most famous customer service manager in the U.S.](#)”.

Day 20: Escalate critical conversations.

If they’re customers, contact them offline. Include one of your executives so they too can hear the customers’ concerns. Once you fix the problem, let the customer know. Keeping them in the loop can go a long way.

Day 21: Serve as an advisor in your industry.

Whatever your industry, you can be a thought leader. You’re good at what you do and people look to you for advice. Rather than waiting for them to come to you, take some time to participate in conferences and industry events. You can do this by keynoting, creating or volunteering your time to be a part of these types of industry events. The knowledge you share gives people the opportunity to see things from your point of view and gives them direct access to you.

Day 22: Be social outside the web.

Make time on your social calendar for industry-related events. Use them to connect with your community, reconnect with clients and meet new prospects. If you can’t find events specific to your industry, don’t dismay. There are plenty of social media events throughout the year and across the globe that cover a wide variety of topics. You’re sure to find something of value.

Platforms like [Eventbrite](#) and [Plancast](#) can help you find and share events to attend. Don't stop there though. Let your community know where and when they can find you by sharing this information on your website and in your blog.

Day 23: Serve as an open forum.

Why are sites like the [The Consumerist](#), [TripAdvisor](#), and [Angie's List](#) so successful? They thrive on honest opinions and feedback from everyday people like you and me who want to share their experiences and knowledge for the benefit of others.

How can you apply this to your brand? Consider these tactics:

- Develop a forum or comments area on your website and enable feedback to be published publicly
- Enable commenting on your Facebook page and ask questions about your product or service
- Create new discussions on LinkedIn or relevant forums to gather feedback

Now you're listening and engaging. Great! Now it's time to make your community fall head-over-heels for you by becoming a stellar content resource.

Chapter 3:

LAVISH CONTENT GENEROUSLY

One of the most generous things you can do as a brand is give away tons of useful content. No doubt you have sites you bookmark and come back to frequently because of all their fantastic resources. That's who you need to become.

Day 24: Make it Easy to Be Found

You can have a beautiful logo, profound content and a slick website — but it's all a waste if no one visits. That's where search engine optimization (SEO) comes in. That's the science of drawing people who are searching for keywords relevant to your industry, brands and products. There's no black magic involved — it's mostly about creating fresh, compelling and relevant content that search engines have an easy time indexing. And remember that SEO is an ongoing venture that doesn't start and end in one day.

Day 25: Get content and social media working together with SEO.

In addition to a keyword-rich website and content, use the same keywords in your Facebook posts and tweets. Also, link your content to your social media posts. The more ways your community can find you, the better. Make it easy for them.

Day 26: Share content your community cares about.

Be the brand people look to for great finds. Focus on what your community cares about, which may not be your pet topics.

Share things your community will find thoughtful and thought-provoking. Ask questions. Get their minds racing and show them that their opinions matter.

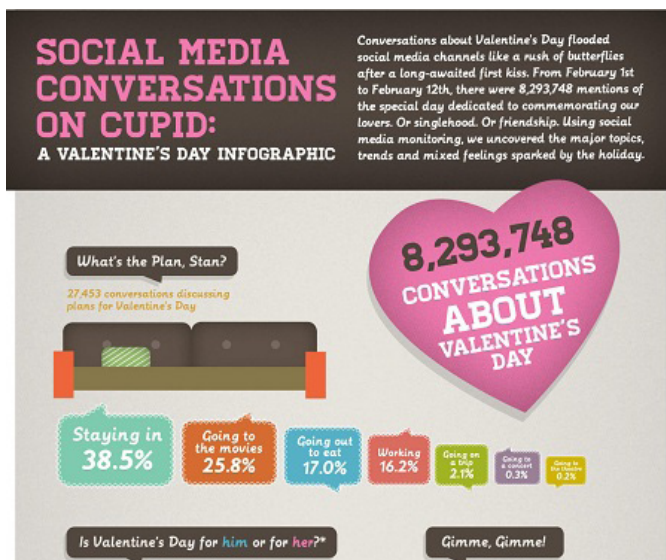
Share items that your community will find helpful based on your industry.

Share content that is interesting and/or innovative. It doesn't always have to be brand-related; maybe it's a Friday video that will make them smile.

Share your knowledge. Whether it's ebooks, whitepapers or the best way to make Chicken Cordon Bleu, share your brand-related and industry knowledge with your community. They'll love you for it.

Day 27: Share content in many media.

Don't limit what you share to just articles; keep those 7 learning styles in mind here too. Share items that play on the 5 senses. Try [infographics](#), [presentations](#) and [videos](#).



[Radian6 Infographic](#)

Day 28: Pass along other people's content.

Remember, you don't have to create it in order to share it. There's plenty of great content being shared across social networks like Twitter, Google+ and Facebook that could be of value to your online community and sharing it makes sense. In fact, a big part of being a helpful brand means showing that it's not all about you.

Day 29: Openly share information about your brand.

It may be tough to convince your execs to share your secret sauce or a beta product 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 put in them. They may become interested in your story, want to get involved in your product trials and stay in touch when it comes to updates. That hook may be what you need to generate new customers and keep them for the long term.

[In 2008, Starbucks closed all of its stores for barista retraining](#) and they told everyone about it. They put signs on doors and sent out press releases about how they were retraining

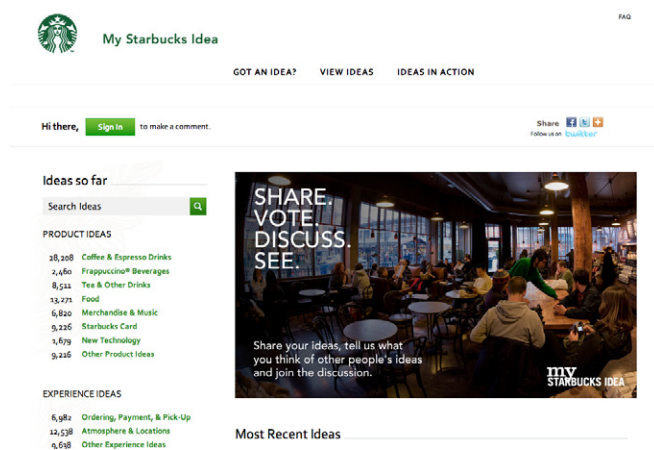
staff that day to make their coffee better. Starbucks also spoke openly about the waste from its cups and what they're doing about it in their [2011 Starbucks Cup Summit](#).

Panelists at 2011 Starbucks Cup Summit.

Image source: <http://www.starbucks.com/promo/cup-summit>



Day 30: Crowdsourced content.



Source: <http://mystarbucksidea.force.com/apex/ideaHome>

Let's take the story of Starbucks a bit further. To involve, excite and perhaps surprise their audience, Starbucks involved customers in their decisions. Their submission tool, [My Starbucks Idea](#), gets customer input and when Starbucks implements the ideas, they tell the world about these customer concepts via the [Ideas in Action blog](#). Guess what? Starbucks customers feel more strongly connected to their brand than ever.

By spending these days creating and sharing content, you're well on your way to building and enhancing relationships. That human element helps empowers your community to converse and share your content even more.

Chapter 4:

WRAP IT ALL UP AND GO!

Your friends, family and coworkers appreciate when you're accessible, delightful, resourceful and engaging. These traits keep your personal relationships strong. The same holds true on the professional side for your brand.

It may take more than 30 days to get your brand to a more personable and transparent place. Or perhaps you're already taking on some of these ideas and you don't need all these steps. No matter where you are in your journey, think about your audience first, and how speaking and interacting with them on a person-to-person level can shift the relationship. No matter how many days it takes, this shift is important and can only make your business better.

With this ebook, we've shared several ways to help you step out from behind the company logo and let your social media connections get to know the human side to your brand. Following these 30 steps will make your brand more relatable, transparent and appealing.

Your community will love you for it!

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