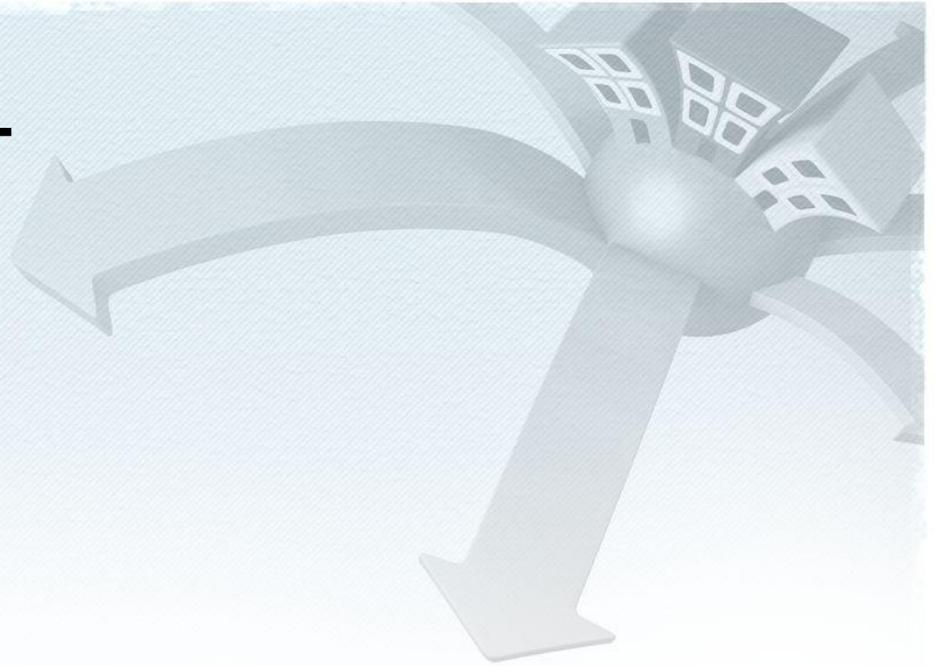


SmartForceNL



your social media marketing plan

part 3: social media marketing tactics

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1 Introduction

1.1 How should you use this document?

There are literally millions of organizations either entering or already active in social media. Every one of them is at a different level of comfort and expertise. Because of this diversity, any document trying to help people get started in social media will seem too simple to some, and too advanced to others. Rather than trying to be all things to all people, this document focuses on the absolute beginner to social media, but assumes a basic level of comfort with computers and with commonly used browsers such as Internet Explorer, Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari, or Opera. It is also assumed that your focus is on using social media to assist your business or organization in its marketing, customer service, public relations, or employee recruitment activities.

This document is Part 3 in a three part series that will help you come up with a social media marketing plan that works for you and your business.

As the flow chart below demonstrates, this first document focuses on helping you get to know and understand social media. Part 2 delves into planning and implementing your social media, and finally **Part 3 provides some valuable social media marketing tactics.**

Flowchart: Breakdown of 3 parts of series



2 Employing Social Media Marketing Tactics

Getting your social media profile up and running is a huge accomplishment. However, it is just the starting point. In this section we offer some suggested tactics to help you make the most of your time online. While these suggestions are grouped by platform, many of them can actually be adapted for use within any of the other platforms as well.



The one tactic that stands above all the rest is simply to engage or interact with your social media audiences on a regular basis. Nurture relationships by genuinely listening and learning about the people you want to serve. Talk to them sincerely, understand their needs related to your products or services, and then do your best to address those needs.

Other general tactics include carrying stories or photos on your company's community work, or that of your employees, customers, or community members. Draw attention to people who deserve to be recognized, especially, but not necessarily, for things they do related to your type of business.

Proactively ask for feedback on your products or customer service. Ask for ways to improve things, and be sure to act on any improvements that you hear. Become known as a company that responds to its audiences, and you'll have gained a level of trust that most companies can only dream of.

When you receive comments — whether positive or negative — work hard to understand and learn from them. Do not delete or dispute criticisms; view them as opportunities to learn, and to show others your determination to continually get better. When properly handled, many exchanges that start negatively grow into very positive experiences for everyone concerned.

Making these and similar activities the baseline for your online behavior will make everything that follows considerably easier and remarkably more effective and profitable... for you and your customers.

2.1 For Facebook (or adapt for other platforms!)

One of the most effective yet easiest ways to build connections on Facebook is to share and comment on other people's content. Facebook makes it exceptionally easy to do this. Just choose your company's "voice" rather than your own, by clicking on the little arrow next to your name in the upper right corner of Facebook. Then choose your business page from the dropdown menu. You can then leave interesting or fun comments on others' posts, and they will show as being from your company rather than you personally.

Regularly "share" what other people post when you feel it would be of interest to your audiences. As you become more known as someone who is happy to share good information and help others, you will find your audience grows automatically.

Several opportunities to grow your brand are built right into your business page. At the top of your page, click on "Build Audience." The drop-down menu will present options for inviting your email contacts and Facebook friends, or "sharing" your page through your personal profile. These actions can all grow your fan base, but people will tire of such tactics quickly, so be sure not to do them too often.

The last item in the drop-down menu — [Create an Ad](#) — takes you to a page where you can create a Facebook ad that will then be visible to whatever audiences you choose. You can be extremely precise in selecting who will see the ad, but keep in mind that the click-through rates for ads on Facebook is extremely low. So if you narrow the field too much, you will make it unlikely that you will gain many or any new fans at all.

Facebook [Events](#) allow you to create a temporary group to promote and deliver information about any event from a birthday party to a group holiday. While people can grow tired of these events if overused, they do present a great opportunity to promote job fairs, sales, customer appreciation nights, and virtually any other special event your company might have.

2.2 For Twitter (or adapt for other platforms!)

Twitter has a very powerful and incredibly fast search engine. Use it regularly to find people from your area, or people talking about looking for work similar to what you offer, or your products. This can open up tremendous customer service opportunities for you. But do not use those times to jump in with a sales pitch. Instead, monitor and answer any questions or concerns on relevant topics. Be the trusted resource. Similar to the idea in Facebook of becoming known for how helpful you are, tweet helpful tips or links, because being genuinely helpful is a very nice — and ultimately profitable — way to operate your business.

Hashtags — words that have a number sign followed by the keyword, such as #nl or #socialmedia — are used to make it easier to follow or take part in conversations about that word. Hashtags can be confusing at first, but can be very helpful once you get used to them. Check out Tweetchat.com to learn more.

Host “tweet-ups” to invite people who are on Twitter to come to your company for a get-together. This can be a great way to meet people and bring your online friends into your offline world, but be careful to keep things under control. You might be surprised how quickly word can spread, and how many people in your area are on Twitter!

Consider organizing a “Flash mob” to have some fun and quite possibly get some media coverage. Such events can be a lot of fun and are also a good way to bridge your online and offline worlds. As with tweet-ups though, if you’re not careful they can sometimes bring in more people than you expect, and they can take a lot of work to do well.

2.3 For LinkedIn

LinkedIn has an exceptionally powerful search capability, allowing you to find people who match the criteria you specify in such fields as company name, industry, location, language, seniority level, or some keyword that they may have used in their LinkedIn profile. Once you find people who match your query, you can message them directly to introduce yourself. Be careful not to spam or be pushy though; LinkedIn can quickly remove your privileges or ability, to contact people if they receive complaints about you.

To build your reputation and to connect with people in your target industries, search LinkedIn’s [Answers](#) section for keywords related to your business. You can then answer relevant questions to demonstrate your expertise, or ask questions to either gain knowledge or simply to engage in some interesting conversations.

You can also search LinkedIn’s [Groups](#) to find people who share your interests, whether it’s a geographic area, type of business, your college, your favorite sports team, or almost any other topic you can imagine. You can even start your own group, although you are often better off joining an existing group unless you have lots of time to spare to set up, promote, and manage your new group.

[LinkedIn Ads](#) may also be a great way to put your company or personal profile in front of the right people. You can target your ad very precisely, but the very low click-through rates on LinkedIn will prove to be a problem if you choose too small an audience. Refine your ad message and targets on an ongoing basis, and you may eventually find LinkedIn Ads to be a valuable marketing channel.

2.4 For Google+

Google+ is seen by many people as the most promising and innovative of all the social media platforms, while others see it as a complete failure and waste of time. Despite the wide range of opinions, most social media and search engine optimization consultants agree it is well worth considering as part of your marketing mix, and so we include it here. You will need to determine for yourself whether or not Google+ holds potential for you and your company.

Assuming you do set up an account on Google+, as with all the other platforms, be sure to complete your profile with text that captures the attention of your target audiences. Use the terms and phrases that match what they are looking for, but keep the tone friendly and real. Simply stuffing a profile with keywords is never cool or effective.

Google+ has a more open news feed and search function than Facebook, allowing you to more easily find new people. So search for your most important keywords, and then join in the conversations you find. Do not sell while you're there; simply look to engage, learn, and be of value.

Do not be afraid to jump into some [Hangouts](#) on Google+. These video chats allow you to leapfrog ahead, getting to know people on a deeper level more quickly than you could ever do through the normal social media posts and comments. It can be a powerful way to build relationships when done with a friendly smile and some strategic thinking.

As you grow your circles in Google+, consider sharing the circles related to your target audiences, and keep an eye open for shared circles that others have created. They can be a great way to quickly connect with whole new groups of people you otherwise would have taken months to meet. By strategically sharing the circles you build, you can establish yourself as a person who knows "everyone" in your industry, and a valuable person for others to know as well.

2.5 For FourSquare, Yelp, TripAdvisor, etc.

FourSquare has recently made several changes that have made it a more valuable marketing vehicle. Businesses can send updates to their local customers, letting them know about any special events or new reasons to drop in.

Be sure to claim your business on [FourSquare](#), [Yelp](#), [TripAdvisor](#), and other geo-location platforms, and make sure your information is accurate and up to date. Use your merchant dashboard on each site to create specials and send updates. In FourSquare you can even check out their analytics to assess the amount of in-store traffic you are getting.

Encourage customers to check in or post reviews and photos. You can do this by displaying “Love Us on Yelp!” or “Review Us on FourSquare!” signs in your lobby. Add a QR code so that anyone with a QR Reader on their cell phone can just point their phone at your sign and be taken straight to your review page.

Have fun with this and show some personality, like the restaurant that posted a sign outside its entrance that read, “Come in and try the worst meatball sandwich that one guy on Yelp ever had in his life.”

Offer specials to your location’s “Mayor” on FourSquare or “Duke” on Yelp, or at the very least display their names prominently on your premises. Consider a FourSquare or Yelp night from time to time, encouraging people to try a dish and write a review.

2.6 For Flickr, Pinterest, Facebook, etc.

These social media platforms — and many more— have each built up loyal followings among photographers both amateur and professional, and just people enjoy looking at great images. Does your business have any element at all that lends itself well to photography, whether it is your view, neighbourhood, food presentations, or simply the photos or artwork that you like to display? If so, there is a good chance you will find several groups on Flickr, or boards on Pinterest, or groups or business pages on Facebook, that will be filled with lots of people who would be interested in what you can share.

Join and become an active supporter, but as mentioned with every other platform, do not try to sell. Establish yourself as a valuable and well-liked member of the community. Make it a better place. You may want to consider starting your own group or board or page. If you do, make sure you continue to be a part of those other groups. Promote the great images you find in those places by sharing them on your Facebook page. Be sure to give proper credit and respect copyrights. Consider hosting a gallery of images in your physical location, and promote it to your various social media contacts. Become known as someone who is happy to share and give credit; you will find the good will coming back to you and your business.

With some imagination, these platforms can be a great place to promote virtually any business. This can be obvious if you sell wedding dresses or cake designs, but there are virtually no limits to what you can do with this. Selling tires? Ask for great shots that show grueling driving conditions or extreme locations. Have fun, and while there is nothing wrong with promoting your products, be sure to feature and promote your social media community as well!

2.7 For blogging

Blogging is such a broad element of social media that we could easily write an entire strategy on just that aspect of social media. In fact, countless strategies and courses already have been written, and millions of dollars spent by companies each year to either learn how to blog as a marketing vehicle, or hire consultants or employees who can do it for them.

Yet, there are a few basic strategies and tactics that should help any company start marketing through a blog. As with social media in general, the vital first step is to know why you're doing it. What do you want your blog to achieve? Exactly what benefits will it deliver?

Once you know that, keep your focus with each post you write. Typically these might include:

- A list of posts to cover upcoming events throughout the year.
- Posts that guide your readers through the steps people usually need to take before becoming customers or supporters.
- Key questions people often have about your products or services.
- Testimonials or case studies that show how you solved a client's problems.
- Helpful topics on keywords people might search to find you. Be of value!
- Posts about your job openings, employee profiles, or reasons people would want to work at your organization.
- Posts about your products and reasons why your product is best.
- Posts that highlight your customers and good things they're doing, just to be nice!

Some companies shy away from being too focused on trying to sales in their blog posts, but still find interesting ways to talk about their products. More than any other social media platform, this one is your territory, so you can be as sales-oriented as you want. Just keep in mind that people are seldom looking for sales pitches to read. The more educational or entertaining your posts are as you write about things related to your business, the more likely you are to build an active audience.

WordPress is widely seen as the best blogging platform for most individuals or small businesses, due to its [ease of use](#) and ability to help you rank well with search engines. You can [host it on your own Website](#), which is highly recommended since it drives traffic to your site. Or, if you don't have a Website, you can [have WordPress host your blog for you](#) for free. Again though, it's best to build your own presence online through your own blog and Website.

There are many templates available to help you quickly and easily give your blog a format you feel will work well for you. Some are free, others just a few dollars, and some can be very expensive. Asking around or searching for a

template that suits your organization's personality is well worth the few minutes or hours it may take. For more complex Websites and blogs, there is also great value in having a professional designer create and set things up for you. The right touch here and there can sometimes yield surprising improvements in performance and marketing effectiveness.

Develop a blogging schedule of at least one or two posts per week if at all possible, and stick to it. Some bloggers write several posts a day, although most find that schedule is simply too time consuming and impossible to maintain. As a general rule, the more often you blog, the more likely you are to see some real benefits coming from your posts.

Spend time looking at other blogs related to your field. Give intelligent feedback on their posts. Add to the conversations with thoughtful input that lets people see you have something valuable to offer and know what you are talking about. Wherever possible, use the option that most blogs offer to include a link to your own blog as your signature. People will often check out the people who leave interesting comments. And *never* leave spammy comments like, "Great post. You should check out my blog!" They do far more harm to your reputation than you can imagine, and will sometimes even get you blocked from leaving comments.

As you come across other blogs that are relevant to yours, make it a point to connect with the authors and build mutually beneficial relationships. Bloggers are often very social and appreciate having new connections. You may eventually find some you would like to invite to write a guest post on your blog, or to ask if you can write a guest post on theirs. This can help introduce you both to new audiences, and bring new ideas to yours.

When people leave comments on your blog posts, be sure to respond quickly and always be genuinely thankful for their input. Develop conversations and avoid the temptation to shut down or delete criticisms. Instead, use them to learn more about the issues some people may face with your products or industry, and show that you are a business that listens to and learns from your customers.

As mentioned at the start of this section, there are countless blogs, articles, books, courses, and communities about blogging. Get involved and keep learning. Many organizations find blogging to be one of their most profitable business activities, but it does require considerable time and commitment.

Link from your blog to your website and platforms, and from them back to your blog. Use social media share buttons on every post so people can share your ideas with their followers. Make it easy to be found and for your words to spread!

3 Improving Your Social Media Efficiency



By now you have almost certainly been thinking, “I don’t have time for this!” It’s a struggle every business faces. Social media is time consuming, which makes it all the more important for you to identify and focus on the one or two things you can do best and that will generate the best returns for you.

There are some things that many people find helpful in managing their time online. This section highlights a few of these, but we recommend you always watch for ways to do things better, or more in keeping with your own style and comfort zones. New applications and ideas are being developed every day. Keep looking, and you will soon find the ones that help you make the most of your particular situation.

3.1 Create a social media calendar

What are your most important points? When should you make them? What times will be easiest for you to write a post or comment on other blogs? When are the most effective times to tweet? Post on Facebook? Just chat?

These and many other questions can be answered by developing a social media calendar. Schedule the various messages and special events that will be featured in the “real world” as well as in your activities social media, and how they can be organized to best support each other. This could include such elements as:

- Facebook posts
- Blog post topics
- New photo galleries in Flickr, Pinterest, or Facebook
- News releases
- Email newsletters
- Sales or promotions
- Trade shows
- Ad campaigns, brochures, or flyers
- Direct mail campaigns

It's a great step forward to assign each of these to a specific month throughout the year, but do not stop there. Name the actual days that you will work on the various elements, and ideally even block out appointment times on those days for you to work on those elements. Enter these into your appointment calendar, and respect them as if they were important client or doctor meetings. Make sure any team members also have those times blocked out in advance, along with the deadlines for any work that needs to be done in advance.

Make sure the dates tie into the various seasons that are important to your organization, and allow yourself enough time to plan properly. Businesses often need to plan their Christmas specials by the Summer or even Spring, in order to be sure they'll have everything ready. You may need to take the same approach with your social media plans, but you will never think of it if it is not written down ahead of time.

Keep track of what works well and what doesn't, and always be ready to make changes as new trends become apparent. Sometimes news stories, new fashion trends, or whole new technologies will create opportunities that didn't exist when you were preparing your yearly calendar. Be flexible so you can make the most of those opportunities, but be sure to adjust your calendar accordingly, rather than just stop using it.

3.2 Use Hootsuite or TweetDeck

Especially if you are active in more than one social media platform, it is almost impossible to not feel overwhelmed as you strive to regularly get your posts out and keep track of what is being said. Programs such as HootSuite and TweetDeck allow you to monitor and post in several platforms all from one convenient dashboard.

Of the two, HootSuite allows you to post to and monitor the broadest range of platforms, including Facebook personal profiles, Facebook business pages, Twitter, LinkedIn, Foursquare, MySpace, and Ping.fm. It allows other members of your team to work on these accounts, and to schedule your posts in advance. Some of these more advanced features only come with the paid version. However, for less than \$10 per month, the small investment easily pays for itself when you consider the hours you save and the extra reach you gain.



Hootsuite website (hootsuite.com)

3.3 Keep learning

Our world is constantly changing, but very few things are evolving as rapidly as social media. By this time next year, 100 million people could be using a platform that does not even exist this year. It is impossible to stay up to date on tools and techniques without continually watching what's happening and looking for ways to get better. Identify the resources on Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other channels that are most helpful to you, and follow them regularly. Although it may seem confusing at first, RSS is an excellent way to track several of these resources on an ongoing basis while spending as little time as possible.



Perhaps the most important advice to follow is to not get overwhelmed. Those who say it is just too complicated or it takes too much time are losing out on valuable resources for growing their organizations, not to mention personal and professional development. The things you learn and relationships you form are well worth the effort that it takes to get started.

Start quietly and slowly if you need to, but do make sure you start...