Social Media Best Practices

Gone are the days of broadcasting one-way messaging to the masses. Before an organization can fuel its goals with social media, it must be able and willing to embrace open, two-way interaction with its various audiences. Your social presence is an extension of your brand, allowing that brand to reach many more people through networked experiences. This can be both a risk and an opportunity, so it’s important to spend the time it takes to decide and define what your brand will be in the social environment.

MOST COMMON USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY COMPANIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

In general, organizations that only push their own marketing, products, corporate press releases or links to their site without regard to the interests of their audience won't gain much traction in social media, especially on Twitter. Your audience wants a conversation or other value-adds, not one-way, rigid messaging.

JUDICIOUS PRODUCT PUSHING

Avoid being overly self-promotional. Instead, phrase your messaging in terms of your audience. Because your audience has chosen to receive updates from you, you can assume they'll tolerate (and want) some discussion and information about your organization, but the key is to provide value in your posts as well as organization information.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Is there a community that exists around your products or services? What information do they need and want with regard to your organization? Do they need it immediately? Social media is excellent for sending out information quickly. Are they already being adequately served by other sources of information (website, newsletters)?

HOW-TO AND CUSTOMER SERVICE QUESTIONS

Some companies have begun assigning employees to take customer questions on social media sites. This level of communication allows for a level of intimacy absent from corporate websites that offer FAQ sections on their site. Utilize social media to fit the interests of your audience.

HUMANIZING THE ORGANIZATION, STAFF AND SPOKESPEOPLE AND/OR CEO

Social media presents an opportunity to communicate in real-time with employees and customers, bypassing standard corporate coldness. Use social media to add a human element to your organization.
GETTING THE BEST ROI FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

BE HONEST, INTERESTING AND UNSELFISH, TACTFULLY AND INTERMITTENTLY TYING IN ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIC INTERESTS

That means not just promoting links to your own company or website, but also links to the work of others. Adding human feeling or commentary can be a bonus. Don't be afraid to stir debate and define your views.

Avoid making your account an RSS-like stream of your own content, unless you explicitly say that's your intention (organizations like CNN can get away with this).

1. **Be yourself.** Readers can see through marketing talk. Be passionate about what you do and let that show through your personality. Let people see you as a person, not a mouthpiece.

2. **Think of CNN, your mother and your boss.** Don't say anything online that you wouldn't be comfortable seeing quoted on CNN, being asked about by your mother or having to justify to your boss.

3. **When in doubt.** Don't post. Ultimately, what you publish is yours—as is the responsibility. So be sure.

4. **Add value.** Share tips, tricks and insights. Be strategic in what you share. People’s time is precious and they need to get something out of the time they spend with you. Make listening to you worth their time.

5. **Respond.** Answer questions, engage in dialogue and thank people for connecting. Make it a two-way conversation. Listen to what others have to say. Ask questions. Appreciate suggestions and feedback.

6. **Spread the word and connect with your colleagues.** Don't only talk about yourself but also about the successes of your colleagues. Connect with them through social networks and spread their success stories.

7. **Be the first to admit a mistake.** If you have made a mistake, be upfront about it. Admit and correct the mistake.

8. **Be transparent.** Your honesty—or dishonesty—will be quickly noticed in the social media environment. Be clear about who you are, who you work for and, if necessary, that you are referencing a client. You still need to keep confidentiality around proprietary information and content.

9. **It's a conversation.** Talk to your readers like you would talk to real people in professional situations. Don't be afraid to bring in your own personality.
10. **Create excitement.** Share the exciting things you are learning and doing both from a business perspective and in the community—and open up the channels to learn from others.

**HOW TO WRITE GREAT SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT**

**KEEP IT SHORT**

This isn’t an option on Twitter, as it only gives you 140 characters to get your message across, but this spirit of staying concise extends to other platforms as well. The more words you write, the less likely people will read through all of them.

**NO PUNS OR FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE**

Not only are these things easily misunderstood or misinterpreted, but people generally expect to be able to scan looking for postings and keywords of interest to them. Anything that disrupts this process of easy scanning will not help build audience equity.

**FOCUS ON KEYWORDS**

Try to imagine you’re a news consumer or general public searcher with an interest in your organization. Which phrases or words would you Google to find it? Those are your keywords. Include them in your posts.

**MAKE IT VALUABLE**

Is the content funny? Interesting? Useful? Engaging? Does it show some personality or a point of view? Worthy of forwarding or re-tweeting? Does it link to something that is? Think of a colleague in your office or others in your industry. Would they care about it? If not, it may not be tweet-worthy.

**FACEBOOK**

**FOUR CONSIDERATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS**

1. Though many organizations have established profiles, Facebook is still primarily a **casual, fun tool** to connect friends and colleagues.

2. That said, the power of Facebook’s social graph (the network connections of its members), broadcasting user actions and endorsements could **prove a powerful mechanism**.

3. Think about **sponsoring or partnering with complementary organizations**. This has the potential to work online as well as it works offline.

4. Ensure that your **primary online “home” (main website) is in order, up-to-date** and that it mirrors your social media efforts. In many ways, organization profiles on social media sites are
invitations for those interested to visit your website to learn more. These efforts should be coordinated.

**TWITTER**

**FOUR CONSIDERATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS**

1. Tweets are expected to **provide value**, especially tweets from organizations.

2. Your audience appreciates a **well-defined, unique niche and voice**. Have a point of view. Using a character can work, but this shouldn’t be done halfway. The character should have a consistent personality.

3. Your **reputation is everything**. Fully disclose your identity and intents. When you make mistakes, own up as soon as possible.

4. The value of **succinct, conversational and engaging content** cannot be overstated.