

Sailing in the Social Media Stream



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12 Tips to Help You Construct Your Own Social Media Ship

Every day, it seems as though the social media stream has another new current that promises to do more and be more. Add new social media sites such as Pinterest or Quora to the existing streams of Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, and blogs, and navigating the social media waters becomes an almost Herculean task. You may wonder, “Who has the time to sell and complete all those other necessary business actions, not to mention get a little sleep?”

The social media “stream” is more like a deep, broad river, with new tributaries forming each day. For example, WordPress alone is the software basis for more than 55,000,000 blog sites.

For the last five-plus years, I have attempted to keep atop the social media current in at least some cases—and I’ve aimed never to fall behind when it comes to this powerful marketing channel. During this time, I have observed the good, the

bad, and the ugly of sailing in the social media stream. The following 12 tips may help you construct your own social media ship, allowing you to navigate safely through the existing and future social media waterways.

1 Values Are the Rudder

Your organization’s values—and your own—are the rudder for your social media ship. People buy from those whom they know and trust; your core values and those of your organization reinforce that buying trust. All of your social media actions must, without exception, consistently reinforce the organization’s core values, as well as your own personal core values.

2 Strategic Plans Are the Masts

Think of your strategic plan as the main mast to hold all of your ship’s sails. Without strategic planning, your ship will be at the mercy of the elements and other ships. President Dwight Eisenhower said, “Plans are worthless; planning is everything.”

Certain elements are key to this strategic planning and thinking: customer profiles, market factors, and business trends. This information is necessary to ensure sustainable social media marketing execution.

3 More than One Marketing Sail

Social media is not a stand-alone, one-sail marketing effort. A plan that integrates inbound actions (Internet with outbound actions (traditional marketing) is a must. This integrated, “multi-sail” approach reinforces successful marketing actions and creates a unified message. The last thing any successful business wants to do is to confuse its existing loyal customers with mixed marketing messages.

4 Watch Out for the Reefs of Risk

Newton’s Third Law of Physics states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Many social media marketing plans fail to calculate for the opposite reaction or the risks. One recent research report revealed that one in three organizations does not assess its risk. Those firms that do assess their risk often do so after receiving negative feedback. Organizations should prepare to receive some social media criticism by planning for how to efficiently and effectively mitigate potential criticism.

5 Prepare for a Long Digital Race

The flow of the social media river is powerful. The slow-and-steady approach truly wins this digital sailing race. I have engaged in social media beginning with content marketing in early 2005, so my digital relevance, as calculated by a Google-related tool, shows me to be “Digitally Distinctive.” Expecting overnight success is unrealistic and sets everyone up for failure.

6 Check the Riggings

The sails interconnect with and depend on all the riggings, just as marketing and selling are entwined with the sales process. To construct any social media plan without understanding the entire sales process is a foolhardy exercise.

7 Keep the Local Shore in Sight

Mobile applications are having a great impact on local searches and

sales. Additionally, more and more people are wired into local media networks. Understanding your local market is crucial, given that \$68 out of every \$100 spent at local businesses stay in the community. (Source: 3/50 Project and American Express “Shop Small” Campaign)

8 Stay the Marketing Course

Captains have their course charts; social media navigators need them too. Marketing has a two-fold purpose:

1. To attract attention and
2. To begin to build a relationship.

Noted management guru Peter Drucker said, “The aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous.” All social media marketing should reflect Drucker’s words; your marketing dollars will go further and demonstrate a positive return on investment.

9 Education Is the Cargo

Some in social media engage in a constant stream of “sell, sell, sell” from their cargo holds. Education-based marketing cargo, however, builds a far stronger foundation with potential customers and attracts far more attention.

Today’s buyers are more educated and less likely to be browbeaten into buying. A strong, education-based marketing approach that unites relevant content with the various target markets on the communities’ shores will succeed far more than one in which the only social media message customers receive is “Buy this” or “Buy that.”

10 Heed the Winds of Customers’ Voices

Despite all the customer-loyalty research saying otherwise, many companies using social media still make it their goal to secure new

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customers at the expense of existing customers. One example is offering new customers five percent off. This approach is 100 percent counterproductive: existing, loyal customers will ask themselves, “What am I, chopped liver?” Listen to your customers’ voices. Include their feedback in your social media strategy, and continue to honor their loyalty.

11 Remember the Tides

Just as tides affect ships’ courses, they can also impact your route in the social media stream.

Many organizations schedule marketing campaigns for certain times of the year or when a new product is introduced. However, social media is not a single campaign; rather, it’s an ongoing series of unified mini-campaigns. This setup requires a daily schedule that works with the target audience, because this timing reinforces the idea that the brand, as Seth Godin puts it, is defined by the customer’s expectations. Free automation tools such as HootSuite enable a consistent daily schedule.

Recently, Yesmail released a report with these findings:

- Facebook campaigns reached the highest level of interaction between 10 p.m. and 12 a.m. EST, yet this timeslot was the least utilized by marketers. Instead, the most popular time to deploy campaigns was between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. EST.
- More than 84 percent of Twitter campaigns occurred within the regular work hours of 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. EST, even though 5 a.m. to 8 a.m. EST is the timeframe with the highest level of customer engagement.
- When it comes to running YouTube campaigns, only 3 percent of emails are sent after 6 p.m. EST, yet it is a fairly consistently utilized timeslot for social campaigns.

Data from studies like this one reaffirms the importance of a schedule that moves with the customer-interaction tides.

12 Steer with Emotional Intelligence

Workplace research continues to support the premise that keen emotional intelligence is a primary characteristic of a good leader. Social media marketing should deploy each smaller-scale effort or division



within a larger organization so that the larger organization rides even further ahead of the flow. That means that emotionally intelligent leadership is required, especially when working with other departments. (See #3)

Emotional intelligence (EI) is frequently ignored in social media because those making postings in social media outlets have not necessarily honed this capacity. When EI is not present, criticism and risk are more likely to occur. (See #4)



These 12 tips on guiding yourself and your business through the ever-expanding social media river will help you stay the course by conserving your limited resources of time, energy, money, and emotional well-being—although the sailing may still be bumpy at times, as new streams continue to flow into this river.

Remember: the size of your ship will not determine your social media success. Success in the digital-communications marketing world comes from your leadership prowess as a social media captain, teamed with the skills of your crew. **N**

Leanne Hoagland-Smith, executive consultant, corporate coach, and author, helps innovative leaders at all levels and in all industries to dramatically improve their teams’ results. What this looks like, and why, differs for each firm; therefore Leanne offers a free strategy session to those who forward a request to leanne@processspecialist.com.