

Social Presence: It Takes a Strategy to Build a Community

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In case you haven't heard, we're all content marketers now. And brand journalists. We have social media policies (ideally), and we all see the value in the day's communication invasion.

If you have a website or blog, a Facebook, Google+ or LinkedIn page, or if you tweet, you have a platform and a message, and you are a content marketer. But are you realizing its potential? How are you organizing and managing your audiences and communities, and the rich data gathered by your communication platforms?

Instead of posting because you "have to be there," make strategy the infrastructure that supports your content-marketing platform. Without a platform strategy, you'll only have a collection of directionless activities—content flying about with little purpose, trust or interest, as well as analytics with little value for your next marketing and business development initiatives.

Your primary platform

The power of content marketing—and the ability to leverage narrative and visual content with solid, informative analytics—begins with building the proper platforms. Your social presence is your platform, but several tools can be used to launch your communications, like websites, blogs, social media, email and texting. Each is like a channel or subplatform with a different audience. Your most important platform tool—the one I think deserves at least 70% of your marketing attention and budget—is your own networking station, newspaper, annual report, magazine and social media launch platform: your website.

My dad always told me to use the right tool to get the job done right. My friends, your website is the right tool to drive a successful marketing program. To build relationships, audiences and communities, you must go back to your website and rethink its value and function, and how it relates to the instant-gratification demands of having a social presence.

Understand that there is no quick fix for making a platform content-driven. To tell your stories, you need the storyteller. Your website lets you tell lots of stories—informing and entertaining your audience and communities by exposing your humanity, ideas and wisdom. It is your most important social platform tool.

Strategy for your website

Strategy in building your social presence is the key to creating audiences and communities that are interested, and stay interested, in your brand. A well-executed, strategic website plan is actually easy to break down, with just a few basic things to think through:

1. Know what you want from the tool/platform. Set goals and determine the results you want to achieve.
2. Build the tool/platform that will enable you to reach those goals. Don't let budget short- change its success. Instead, create a budget that will produce the tool to achieve results.
3. First, choose a reliable content management system (CMS). Content marketing demands a user-friendly CMS: one that gives you full control to quickly add content to your website, manage your story, and leverage data and analytics about your site to improve your marketing investment. Be sure the CMS you choose has the capability to grow by adding modules like video or blogging without having to start over.
4. Align your content-marketing strategy with your website's look and functionality. Think about how you will present information and how you will foster relationships by sharing that information.
5. Responsive web design (RWD) is no longer a "sounds cool" option: It's a must. Your content-marketing success is based on how people receive, view and interact with your brand marketing. With RWD, you can guarantee your audiences are checking you out on their smartphones, tablets, laptops or desktops: whichever is closest to their fingertips.
6. Search engine optimization (SEO) is more important than ever. Be sure to include SEO in the design and content-development stages, and create an ongoing SEO strategy to keep the website optimized so it will continue to help you reach your goals in an ever- changing world.
7. Design, presentation, exposure: All are essential. Strategy is critical in the creative and design stage. How will you present your brand identity, your firm's stories? How will you interact with visitors and share to other platforms? In what format will your stories be viewed? How will the visual aspects and calls-to-action look in a multitude of display tools?
8. Again: Content is key. Curate content that educates, entertains and engages, and then do it again and again and again.
9. Leverage and share your content on other platforms and channels, and drive specific audiences to important information, breaking news or resources positioning you as a thought-leader.
10. Understand the analytical information that is available to you. Your platforms can produce a lot of helpful data to measure the success of your website and content-marketing activities, letting you improve and build on positive activities that produce great results.

Strategy for secondary platforms

To reach and resonate with greater audiences, you need to use additional platforms strategically. These platforms can be targeted like email and texting, or broader like social media and blogging. When creating a strategy for a successful social presence, you need to think like a

storyteller and brand yourself as a media source.

Today, you need to be not just an information connoisseur, but an information curator. You need to understand your audiences and what they're interested in, and continue to provide them with exactly that. Each secondary platform needs its own strategy, but remember that each strategy should align with your primary strategy and goals—based on your planned social presence and driven by your website and content-marketing strategy. This means using the same keywords, messages, graphics and analytical data where applicable, in the format that best fits both the platform and the audience's expectations.

Identify your different audiences and strategically choose the platform(s) for interacting with each. For example: I only use Facebook for fostering personal relationships; I use Twitter for both personal and professional sharing; and I only use LinkedIn for a professional social presence. My audiences and my messages are different in each of these platforms.

Keep in mind that any social media platform is all about interacting, not just you talking and someone listening. That means you need to participate in group conversations, “like” others' posts, retweet and repost. In other words: Pay it forward.

Summing up

A few things to remember when building your social platforms:

1. Identify your space and audience.
2. Determine the best platforms to reach that audience.
3. Differentiate your brand within that space.
4. Engage your audiences in conversations and join other ones.
5. Attract like-minded and interested followers by sharing your content and nurturing your relationships with your community.

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