



SOCIAL MEDIA: SALES, MARKETING AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

[Chapter 5 – Digital Minds v2]

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Introduction

Many businesses deny it, but social media has positioned itself at the core of digital marketing. And it's not just core to marketing, but essential for lead generation and sales too. Think about the last time you booked a hotel or restaurant online – did you complete the reservation without checking for a 5-star rating or customer reviews?

While it might be difficult to keep up with the rapidly shifting social landscape, the businesses that find a way to make social work are reaping the benefits. Despite the plethora of available social platforms out there, if you've worked through persona development (see our *How to Create Buyer Personas* at this link: www.wsiworld.com/buyer-personas), then determining which social channels to concentrate on should be easy. Remember to be successful the simple rule is, "fish where the fish are!"

While some may argue sales and marketing are two sides of the same coin, we've separated them because depending on your goals, you may decide to take a slightly different approach when it comes to how social media is used in your business. While there are some "naysayers" who don't believe social media can ever be used to drive sales activity, we hope to give some practical examples as to why that is simply not the case.

Marketing with Social Media

We've already touched on content marketing, and if you consider content to be the fuel of your digital marketing efforts, then social media is the engine that drives its success.

Here are a few fundamentals to help you leverage social media from a marketing perspective:

Social listening:

No matter which channel you use, before talking you should listen. If you're swimming in the same pool as your target personas then you're in the right place to better understand what's important to them. Aside from using the same social channels, there are also more specific discussion groups or communities you should join to gain an even deeper understanding of the needs of your customers.

Social focus:

When the time is right to join in on the conversation, your focus should match your business objectives. For example, if brand awareness is your main objective then focus on the conversations that will help to build your visibility, rather than joining in randomly everywhere.

Quality before quantity:

It's far better to have 100 dedicated followers than 1,000 people who followed you for a chance to win a free giveaway. If you connect with two to three quality prospects every day, then over a couple of years you'll have a great list of potential customers.

Take your time:

If you want leads immediately, paid search marketing is a great option. But if you want to build a strong prospect pipeline that is resilient and delivers significant return on investment year after year, then social media marketing will need to be part of your mix. When used effectively in conjunction with good content marketing, success will come, but patience is required.

Value vs viral:

Don't expect any of your content shared via social media to go viral. There is a lot of nonsense and hype surrounding the topic of viral marketing. What's more important is that you share good, quality content with an engaged audience. If you do this, you'll find that its reach will be multiplied many times over through likes, shares, +1s and retweets. This in turn will help your natural search engine ranking too, bringing you yet another source of potential leads.

Sharing on steroids:

This idea takes a little more time and effort but can pay dividends. As well as sharing with your quality followers, if you seek out key thought leaders or influencers relevant to your industry, sector, or even product or service, and connect with them, that's a start. You then need to develop a relationship. It is likely that over time, these thought leaders will share your content with their audience (which could be in the several thousands), thereby significantly extending your overall social reach.

411:

In our social selling program we talk about being perceived as too pushy. If you post too many updates that promote your product or service, then you'll turn people off. As a rule of thumb, we recommend your social messages reflect a ratio of 4:1:1, which is broken down as follows:

- **4** posts that speak to your prospects' interests or challenges
- **1** social post that humanizes your brand
- **1** social post promoting your product or service

By humanizing your brand we mean talking about something you or your staff has done; a charitable activity, for instance. As long as you add value, your audience will listen and share what you have to say.

Join in the conversation:

How often do you see a blog post get published and shared, only to receive comments from readers that are ignored? It's called social for a reason right? I don't care how busy you are, if someone responds to a post you've made, thank them for reading and respond accordingly.

Be consistent:

Don't get overly enthusiastic and publish content three or four times a day, and then reduce it to once or twice a week when you're busier. Consistency is the key. If you think you can only manage (as an individual or an organization) once a week, then so be it. But publish every week

without fail! People will then know that your brand is a trustworthy and reliable source of information.

Engagement vs broadcast:

Some marketing departments see social media as just another broadcast channel and treat them as such. Posts are distributed like press releases. All statement and no engagement. So you should not only promote conversation by asking readers a question or encouraging observations, but also take the time to engage in conversations started by others. Some call it reciprocity, but it's more than that. Through engaging in other relevant conversations (like blogs, discussion groups and on other people's posts) you demonstrate your brand's human values too.

Selling With Social Media

If you use content and social media marketing correctly, over time, potential customers will find out what you do, why you do it and (as discussed in the next section) how well you do it. As a result, you'll start to receive inbound traffic or what is sometimes termed as inbound marketing.

However, regardless of whether you're business-to-consumer (B2C), business-to-business (B2B), or a non-profit organization, sitting back and waiting for the phone to ring is not an option. One of the great things about social media is that it can offer sales professionals an alternative "pool to fish in". After all, social media platforms are essentially giant, perpetually running conferences; salespeople don't usually miss an opportunity to network at a conference. This idea of selling on social media is called social selling and is a great way for your sales team to expand their reach and lead generation activities.

So here are a few fundamentals to help you work out how to leverage social media to both increase the quantity and quality of your sales.

Find the Best Way to Connect

Your sales team should know the various personas that you have developed as an organization to better understand your target customers' wants, needs, challenges and, for instance, what social media channel they are likely to be active on. Each social media platform has its own set of rules of engagement that you need to understand and ultimately use to your advantage.

Facebook

Facebook, for instance, being one of the best arenas for B2C sales, is difficult to get much traction on without engaging with their advertising platform. However, because of its highly visual nature, once you have an "on profile" engaged audience on Facebook it's much easier to connect with your customers.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn, on the other hand, is predominantly focused on (but not exclusively so) B2B relationships and connections. They make it much easier and more productive for sales people to connect directly with prospective customers. There is however a specific science behind the concept of

social selling that needs to be followed. These professional interactions need to be conducted in a way that strikes a balance between giving people just the right amount of information and not coming off too pushy.

Twitter

Twitter, while a great broadcast tool should also be used as a research tool to help you listen to what's being said about you and your brand. Even if your connection with a consumer starts on another social site, they may follow you on Twitter to see what it is you really have to say about your products and services. So it's always a good idea to ensure you are actively managing and monitoring this type of social profile.

When it comes to focusing your efforts, we always recommend companies and sales professionals to first seek out their prospects on the channel they are most likely to frequent, and then offer alternative ways of connecting with you across your other social profiles. This way you can extend your connection with your prospects and customers across multiple social sites. After all, an email database goes stale, often at a rate of 30% per annum, as people change companies or Internet Providers, but people don't change Facebook or LinkedIn accounts. And as new social media sites come along, depending on your target market, it's essential to remember to fish where the fish are.

Build Your Own Presence and Persona

People do business with people. That's always been the case and this hasn't changed even in today's digitized world. Regardless of whether you are a B2C or B2B company, your organization has a persona which is represented by your team members who communicate through social media. That's why it's important you present a persona consistent with your brand values. For larger organizations that may have more people using social media on behalf of the brand it is especially important to have operating procedures and policies in place to both protect the brand integrity of the organization, as well as personal integrity of your team members.

In fact, some organizations are so scared of the reputation risk that comes with being on social media that they limit what the marketing or sales teams can do. So much so that from a sales perspective, the ability to do any type of social selling becomes non-existent.

The truth is there are risks that must not be ignored, but with a clear and transparent set of social media guidelines most organizations can build a comprehensive and effective social media presence and a persona that helps grow sales in many directions.

12-Step Program: How to Build a Social Selling Routine

There is a danger that as social selling becomes part of your everyday activity it can, if not kept in check, take over your day. Rather, than being more effective, you might actually become less productive overall.

We've developed a 12-step program to help sales professionals focus on the social activities that are going to add value and ultimately increase their conversations and engagement levels with prospective customers.

Here' a quick rundown of these 12 steps:

Step 1: Find content to share

Both created and curated. Use tools like Feedly and Pocket to help aggregate content quicker and easier.

Step 2: Share content to relevant social networks

Syndication tools like Hootsuite allow you to do this in a more streamlined approach.

Step 3: Check who's viewed your profile

Check them out to see if they match your potential customer persona.

Step 4: Convert hot prospects into a connection

That way when you post updates they will have the opportunity to see your outbound communications.

Step 5: Check your content engagement

And then convert these into connections too if they match your ideal persona.

Step 6: Once a week build your online reputation

Seek a recommendation, endorsement or testimonial and give one too.

Step 7: Review all LinkedIn email reminders and alerts

Part of the social selling process is to set up saved advanced searches and alerts so that each week you get a list of hot leads dropped straight into your inbox (it's the gift that just keeps giving!).

Step 8: Tag your prospects and set reminders

Tagging is like segmenting. It ensures that your sales conversion activities can be far more personal and relevant, and reminders help you assign yourself tasks to move them down your sales funnel.

Step 9: Overcome the dead zone with targeted content

The dead zone is often the period between demonstration, proposal and a purchase decision. Impatient sales people can become pests and anxiously chase leads. Sharing relevant content keeps you on their radar without being a nuisance.

Step 10: Review other trigger alerts

While each social media platform has their equivalent to saved searches, there are other tools like Google Alerts that you should use to supplement and achieve a 360 degree view.

Step 11: Follow up on outstanding messages

Whether you're using LinkedIn's own mini-CRM by leaving notes on your contact's profile (notes, reminders, where you met) or using your own CRM system, keep on top of this to make sure you help move potential customers down the sales funnel.

Step 12: Kick-start five conversations every day

If you've done steps one through eleven you're likely already having five conversations or more a day. But if not, take action to make it happen and you *will* hit your sales goals.

Social Media and Reputation Management

There's nothing worse than having your sales and marketing teams spend all this time and effort on building your sales pipeline and brand awareness using social media only for it all to be hindered by a poor online reputation.

Most social media platforms encourage some form of reputation management. There's the soft side, based on social signals such as likes, shares, retweets and endorsements (which say something about how good your content sharing is). Then there's more robust evidence in the form of recommendations on LinkedIn or 5-star ratings across a range of social sites, including Google+.

So don't wait until you have a problem (like a bad customer review) to repair your reputation. Build a strong digital reputation now. It's not difficult, it just requires you to plan a process to consistently seek out feedback and then use the right tools to make that reputation visible to the world.

And social media helps you do that. We all know that the best form of marketing is to have an army of raving fans shouting about you.

There are really only two main reasons that you might not have a good reputation online:

- 1. You're not that good!** In which case you should improve your products or services before engaging in social media. Period.

2. You haven't asked your customers for feedback. So ask them and begin the process of gathering positive testimonials!

A positive online reputation will not only have a big impact on your inbound opportunities, but also on the conversion rate of prospects who are doing their research about you online before they purchase from you.

Remember, your reputation doesn't have to be bad to lose the digital marketing game. If your competitor's reputation is better or you have no visibility at all, then you're out of the game before you even knew you were in it.

So here's some quick tips to get you started:

Tip 1: Implement a process to ask for feedback and make sure your customers know about it.

Tip 2: When you get good feedback from a customer, spread it across multiple social channels. For example, take recommendations gathered from LinkedIn and use software to inject them into your website, blog and Facebook pages so that they have maximum exposure across your digital properties and profiles.

Tip 3: Turn your best customer feedback into case studies with attributed testimonials and showcase these on your website.

Tip 4: Don't forget to thank those who leave great reviews. In fact, respond to all who take the time to give their feedback. Repeat businesses and referrals are a huge boom to your business.

If online reputation management is an area of your digital marketing strategy you haven't worked on yet, put aside this whitepaper and do a search on Google to see what people are saying about your brand online. Using a search phrase like "*brand name reviews*" will give you a quick glimpse into what your customers are finding when they do the same sort of search as well. Based on what you see will determine whether you have some cleaning up to do or if you can just concentrate on the tips we have listed above.

Social Media for Service

While most of the focus of this whitepaper is around driving up your bottom line through sales and marketing, don't forget that you can also improve your bottom line by reducing costs as well. In fact, one of the elements organizations are now adding into their digital marketing strategy are ways in which they can use social media to reduce their operating expenses.

How you go about using social media in this manner will vary from business to business, but here are a couple of scenarios that will help get your cost reduction ideas flowing.

Scenario #1

A veterinary practice spends a fortune sending out postcards (printing, compiling, and postage) to remind registered owners that their pets' vaccinations are due. An option to reduce these costs is to collect pet owners' social media preferences and permission to alert them via direct

messaging. Since not all pet owners will be active on social media, an email address or phone number serves the same function so email or text messaging could be used instead.

Scenario #2

A bus company suffers a terrible winter financially. Partly due to cancellations caused by roads conditions but mostly by a terrible reputation for poorly communicating those cancellations to their customers. With only a few staff and a couple phone lines, they just couldn't get the word out quickly enough. To fix their communication problem, the bus company could gather people's social media information and set up their own social feeds to send out alerts to passengers. This would allow them to not only communicate real-time updates and alternative routes, but also allow their passengers to alert the company to localized weather conditions and road blockages as well.

We recommend that you take some time to consider the ways in which social media could make you more efficient and not only help you maintain a great reputation with your customers but also help you reduce costs at the same time.

Tools That Save Time and Measure Success

There are many tools out there to help you be successful in reaching your business goals through the use of social media. Here are just a few to get you started:

Discover.ly

This is a chrome extension to help you see the social media accounts of people in your existing email database so you can connect with them in a variety of ways. Rapportive is another similar option.

Pocket

Helps you quickly save any content you come across online, which you can then drop into folders you've created for later use. It's a content curator's dream as you can tag and filter content by image, video or article.

Feedly

Another tool to aggregate content from trusted sources. In addition to connecting sources directly into your Feedly account, if you have created Twitter lists (which is another brilliant way of pulling articles from subject matter experts or thought leader into one place) then simply add your list to Feedly to create your own topic-specific daily eNewspaper.

Hootsuite

Speaking of Twitter lists, if you are looking to maximize your benefits from your content marketing efforts and minimize the time you spend syndicating it across all your online properties (site or social), then adding your Twitter lists to your streams of information on Hootsuite is a must.

Hootsuite is also a social media management system that can help you organize your social postings across multiple channels through one interface.

Conclusion

Whether social media will help you achieve your business goals is something that you need to consider as part of your overall digital marketing strategy. But in today's online world, it should be a vital component of everyone's digital marketing mix.

Through continuing to educate and sharing useful content that speaks to your customers' interests or challenges, as well as providing superior service, the ultimate goal is to turn people who started off as strangers into your loyal brand advocates. All of which can be achieved when you have a solid social media strategy in place.

About the Author



Rob Thomas lives and breathes social technology and digital marketing and is a Fellow of the Institute of Sales & Marketing Management

Rob Thomas has been a part of the WSI network for over 10 years and recognized as an expert in reputation management, digital and mobile marketing. Rob is a professional speaker who regularly speaks in North America and across the EMEA Region.

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About WSI

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Over the last 20 years, WSI has won multiple digital marketing awards for our solutions by adapting to the constantly shifting landscape of the Internet. We take pride in helping businesses make the most of the dollars they spend on digital marketing.

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