

Developing a Social Media Marketing Program



Planning (week 1-2): Think through your plan, carefully

Developing a social media marketing program doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. But there are some critical steps you need to follow to improve your chances of success.

Before you start, develop your objectives and goals. Are you trying to boost awareness about your company or product? Do you want to establish your company as a thought leader? Drive sales? Once you figure this out, you can think about how you can use Web 2.0 technology. Then you can start working on a long term (at least 1 to 2 year) plan.

Web 2.0 IS different than web 1.0 in many ways, but mainly it's about building relationships, creating conversations, and developing community. It's also more collaborative and democratic: so rather than "driving a message," you might be encouraging participants to share their experiences on a blog or in a community or forum.

Define your audience. Is it IT managers? Corporate vice-presidents? Then write up a list of their key issues, challenges, and topics they would be interested in. Each of these audiences uses social media differently, and will pose unique challenges.

Next, start researching social media platforms. Think about the most natural channel in which to reach your audience, and how they interact with each other. Choose the channel that best aligns with your audience, your technology and goals, not because "everyone's doing it." That might mean a video, a blog, one of the popular platforms, or a combination.

Each major platform (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) has its own characteristics; you need to make sure it's the right fit for you, your audience and your company. Start with just one or two so you can learn it well and see if it's going to work for you.

When it comes to your strategy and plan, be very clear: will you try to build relationships with the key influencers, or energize brand advocates to help promote? What are your key resources—is it just you, you and an intern, or a group? How much time will you/your team devote to social media communications and what will be the focus areas?

You can start small. For example, on Facebook, you can easily set up a "group" on behalf of your company and start inviting employees, customers and any other contacts to join the group. You can then use this group to promote events, news, and other activities, while also facilitating a network (community) of people associated with your organization's success.

With Twitter, you only need someone in your organization motivated and willing to post frequent, short (max 140 character) "tweets" – thoughts, ideas, daily adventures, and interesting links. Done right, you can quickly build a following of readers and a Twitter network. You can see a great example of this by checking out how Padmasree Warrior, Cisco's CTO, leverages Twitter as part of her communications platform (@Padmasree).

Week 2-4: Staffing, Guidelines and Measurement

If you're ramping up a team, it's critical you choose the right people. They should be well versed (immersed if possible) in social media and be willing to learn and stay up to date, as the field is constantly changing (and is vastly different than traditional media). With a

blog, your writers should be motivated to write and post at least twice a week—and spend ample time researching online sources for ideas and best practices.

Develop a social media policy or set of guidelines for bloggers (or employees) on how to manage themselves online, such as how to engage in online conversations. Cisco's code of professional conduct includes, "Communicate in a respectful and professional manner."

This plan can be as detailed as you want, but the main goal is to set a common set of marching orders so everyone is on the same page. Other issues you might want to cover include: handling comments and media inquiries; content ownership (who owns what); transparency (how open can bloggers or other social media participants be?); confidentiality (list areas that can not be disclosed); and copyright, trademarks and other legal issues.

Decide early on what you want to measure and how you'll measure your ROI. With blogs and websites, Feedburner and Google Analytics are two tools that will help you track visitors, subscribers, and analyze traffic. You should also be measuring other more qualitative factors, depending on your goals (thought leadership, corporate reputation, customer relationships etc). This might include benchmarking conversations: were you able to connect/engage with customers in new ways? Have you been able to engage in conversations where you were shut out before? Or it could be a broader measure: did this change the way your audience views your brand? Other tools to help you analyze your traffic and audience engagement, and help customize your sites include PostRank and BuzzMetrics.

Week 5

Ongoing Support: Help your staff do their jobs

Don't just launch a social media program and put it on auto-pilot. Set up training sessions for your staff to review engagement policies, best practices and overall strategy and expectations. These could be webcasts, conventional meetings or short workshops. Besides weekly meetings, also consider convening your group in regular (once or twice a year) brainstorming and vision sessions. This is when you can review your progress, and stay on top of key issues. Also don't forget to stay involved with industry-focused groups like MarketingSherpa and MarketingProfs, which can help you stay up to date with the latest cutting-edge trends, including social media.



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Cisco Systems, Inc.
San Jose, CA

Asia Pacific Headquarters
Cisco Systems (USA) Pte. Ltd.
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