The aim of the Social Media Strategy (SMS) Wheel framework is to provide a simple template for marketing professionals and business owners to develop an effective social media strategy for their company and this SMS should form part of the company's overall digital marketing strategy.

Social Media Strategy Wheel

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"Thank you for downloading this framework. If you would like to discuss any of the information in this report you are welcome to contact me at the above number or email address. I hope you implement this framework and it is of benefit to your business."

Cathal Quinn

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Social Media Strategy (SMS) Wheel Introduction

It's time for companies to stop burying their head in the sand, social media is real and it is here to stay. The astounding growth of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn is phenomenal and what is most interesting is how people's use of social media is evolving. It's no longer about wooing potential customers with elaborate marketing campaigns and buying fans. Now, companies using social media marketing are entering the consumer's domain, where they have to play by their rules and earn customers support! Unfortunately for companies, this takes time and they need to start developing an effective social media marketing strategy.

The aim of the SMS Wheel framework is to provide a simple template for marketing professionals and business owners to develop an effective social media strategy for their company and this SMS should form part of the company's overall digital marketing strategy. The SMS Wheel framework is designed with the customer central to each step. Importantly, it is not based on building audiences with massive marketing campaigns and budgets. It's designed for small, medium and large businesses alike to organically connect and establish a relationship with their customers or potential customers, anyone can do it but it does take time and commitment.

The framework can be applied to develop a new social media strategy or it can be applied to review a company's existing strategy, either way, companies should start at the beginning. Remember, a strategy is a plan, and a plan has to be implemented and there comes a time to stop talking and start doing!

Develop A Social Media Strategy

Social Media Strategy Wheel
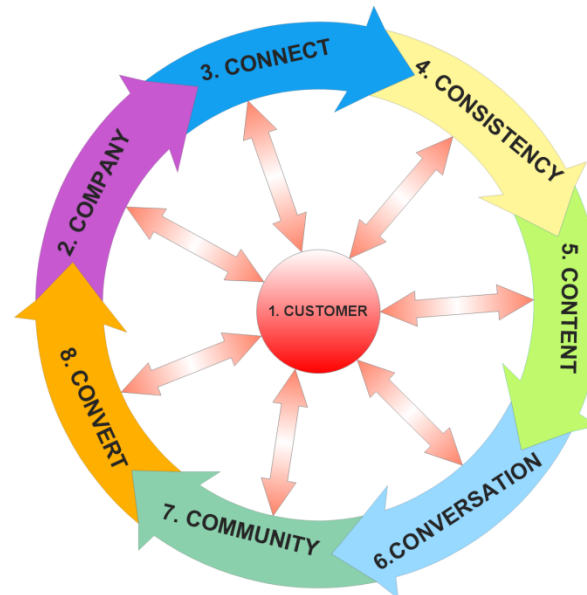
1. Customer
Every strategy starts here!

The customer is the life blood of any business. Firstly, identify the target market and build a profile of the companies ideal customers. There are numerous ways to do this: By demographics including their income, lifestyle and hobbies but also their goals and the challenges they may experience in their lives. Hubspot.com describes these customer profiles as target personas and each target persona represents a particular group of customers. It is essential to know who their customers are so the company can effectively target their marketing efforts. The customer profile/target persona informs every aspect of the strategy.

Research by Hoffman and Fodor (2010) identified what motivates consumers to use social media. They want to **connect** with others, they want to **consume** good relevant content, they want to **create** by commenting, sharing on Facebook or tweeting about a brand and finally, they are in control of their online experience not the marketer, choosing what they do and when they do it. This is essential and forms the basis for any

good social media strategy. To be effective, your social media strategy should satisfy your customers need to connect, consume, create and control their online experience.

2. Company
Objectives and Resources

Objectives – What does the firm want to achieve?

- Build awareness?
- Sell their product or service?
- Use social media for customer service?
- Create brand ambassadors or brand advocates?
- Build an engaged online community around their brand?

The objectives are their reason for developing a strategy in the first place and they should be aligned with the company's overall objectives. As outlined later, it's important to measure the return on investment from their social media marketing efforts, so their goals should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely. The firms objectives steers the strategy.

It is important to remember that social media marketing is not traditional marketing and to expect immediate results is very short term focused. Developing meaningful relationships with customers takes time and a narrow focus ignores more qualitative objectives, such as the value of a tweet about a brand. There are 3 key marketing objectives that take advantage of the distinctive characteristics of social media.

1)   '***Brand Awareness****' among consumers. When a consumer uses a company's social media application this increases exposure to its brand and often in highly relevant contexts.

2)   Encouraging user generated content on a company's social media application which involves commitment on the part of the consumer increases ***'Brand***

Engagement'. This reinforces loyalty to the brand and consumers are more likely to commit additional effort to support the brand in the future.

3)   Once consumers are aware and engaged they are in a position to communicate their opinions to other consumers through '*Word of Mouth'* (WOM) (Hoffman & Fodor 2010). WOM is also known as earned media, this is organic, and it is what people say about your brand. There is no better recommendation than WOM but it works both ways and disgruntled consumers can share bad experiences of the brand and this has to be managed.

Company Resources – What resources are available to achieve their objectives?

Time and People: The good news is that Social Media is a relatively low cost platform to market a business. Firms can organically grow an audience but it does take time and people to implement the strategy, but time & people cost money. In the early stages, be realistic, allocate resources and allow time to implement the strategy.

Paid Advertising: If there is a budget available, it would be worth considering using paid media to target and connect with new customers. For example Facebook ads allows firms to target their exact customer profile as they can select who views their ads based on their personal information and they can also target friends of their fans. Companies can set a daily budget which is realistic and affordable and through Facebook Insights or Hootsuite.com, depending on their objectives, they can measure their return on investment.

Tools: Social media tools are another resource which has to be considered and fortunately there are many free tools such as Hootsuite.com for managing and measuring their social media activity in one program.

3. Connect

What is your customers' online behaviour and what platforms are they using? Based on this build the company's presence on the relevant platforms and connect.

After developing a profile of their customers, companies now know who they are, their interests and they should have an idea of their online behaviour. This information will suggest the most appropriate social platform(s) for the company to target these customers. Companies can choose multiple platforms but remember each platform has to be maintained.

4. Consistency
This applies to the consistency of the company message and the consistency/frequency of posts.

The company message should be clear and consistent across all platforms. Conveying the company message at every point of contact with the consumer is essential to creating awareness. This is particularly relevant to take advantage of the 'Amplification Effect' offered by social media.

Companies should convey their message by:

➢ Ensuring company branding is consistent on their website and all social media applications.

➢ Updating their 'About section' on Facebook, 'bio' section on Twitter and any other application.

➢ They should design a banner for their Facebook page which conveys their core message and they could also include a clear call to action for the customer. Similarly, apply this across all selected platforms.

➢ On Twitter, they can use existing #Hashtags to join existing conversations to create awareness or they can create their own #Hashtag that should be used on all communications.

Importantly, it is the responsibility of all departments to promote social media, add it to letterheads, all email signatures, announce it at conferences and press releases etc (Smith & Zook 2012) anywhere there is contact with the public, social media should be promoted.

Consistency and frequency of posts

Content should be consistently posted or tweeted every day, how many times a day depends on the audience, some commentators suggest 4 times a day for Facebook, but this can be trial and error. Unlike Facebook, Hubspot (2012) suggest tweeting up to 22 times per day, not that everyone should be tweeting that number of times a day but the point is that it is very hard to over tweet. The issue is developing quality and relevant content to tweet.

Research has found that to maximise engagement the time of day to post or tweet is very important. Research by Salesforce.com found that Twitter is the opposite of Facebook, it is better to tweet during busy hours whilst it is more effective to post to Facebook in non-busy hours.

To discover the best strategy for them, each company should develop their content, post it on their social media application at different times of the day or week, learn from the reaction or engagement of the audience and refine their strategy accordingly.

5. Content
What content will companies post that will engage their customers?

Develop a Content Strategy

When it comes to social media, content is king! The key to any good social media marketing strategy is to satisfy the customers' motivation to use social media by creating content that they will consume by reading articles, watching videos or viewing photographs. The aim is to engage the audience so they get involved and create content by commenting or posting and if they feel it is worthy they will share the content with others. Do not over promote the firms goods and services. Unless the content is of value to the consumer, it is just creating 'noise' and the content becomes a nuisance.

Start with the customer, focus on their interests and needs as a consumer, make it relevant to the audience. It is about providing value for the customer such as satisfying a need or benefiting them in some way.

Every business can develop a content strategy, it doesn't matter what industry they operate in, if they are in business they have customers, they have a relationship and

they offer something the customer wants. For example, [The Cupcake Factory](#) post to Facebook pictures of tempting food every morning and throughout the day, they also post offers such as buy 5 cupcakes and get a 6th free. They are connected with their target market, they provide content that is relevant and of benefit to their customers which tempts them into their shop. Their objective is to sell and their SMS is very effective.

An example of a larger company is Hubspot.com, it is an inbound marketing company, i.e. they do not recommend using paid media but they provide tools for businesses to organically attract customers. Their objective is to register business customers to use their service. They engage their consumers through social media applications such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook by providing valuable marketing content, such as marketing e-books, that businesses can use to promote their business. Not only does this engage their audience but it establishes their reputation as thought leaders in their field.

An excellent source for developing content is suggested by Caroline Ladd, VP of Account Planning and Digital Strategy at gyro, content marketing playbook.

Once the company has developed a content strategy, they should use the following guidelines to maximise engagement.

Facebook Post Strategies – How to build an effective post

1. Keep posts short. Posts with 80 characters or less receive 23% higher interaction than longer posts.
2. Use Photographs. Photo posts receive interaction rates 39% higher than average. In 2015 video has become hugely important and is now an essential part of many companies social media campaigns.
3. Ask a question, specifically at the end of the post. Though posts containing questions receive slightly lower interaction overall, they generate 92% higher comment rates than non-question posts.
4. 'Fill in the blank' posts where fans are asked to add their own words or phrases to complete a sentence, is a great way to start a dialogue within a Facebook community. This can generate 4 times more comments.

5. Use Emoticons - A representation of a facial expression formed by combinations of keyboard characters. :D and :P being the two most effective. Posts that contain emoticons receive 52% higher interaction rates.

6. Use Call to Actions. The goal of the post determines the call to action to be used, i.e. like, comment or share. Research has found that when a user is asked to 'like' a post it was 3 times more effective, when a user was asked to comment on a post it was 3.3 times more effective and when a user was asked to share it was found to be 7 times more effective! (Salesforce 2012)

Twitter Strategies – How to build an effective tweet

1. Tweets with around 100 characters are more effective. They receive 17% higher engagement than longer Tweets.

2. Include a link in a Tweet. They receive 86% higher Retweet rates than Tweets with no links.

3. Tweet with image links achieve engagement rates two times higher than Tweets without.

4. Use one or two #hashtags per tweet this achieves 21% higher engagement rates.

5. Ask followers to 'Retweet' Tweets. By asking people and spelling the whole word 'Retweet', the retweet rate is 23 times higher than average (Salesforce 2012).

6. Conversation
How do companies interact with their customers?

'Content is the spark, that ignites a conversation'

Cedric Devitt, Chief Creative Officer, LBi, New York

Effective content starts the conversation, prompting the audience to comment, like, share or 'retweet'. It is essential to respond to all comments, promptly and timely. The conversation is an excellent opportunity to interact with customers and establish a

personality for a brand. On twitter, the company can join/start relevant conversations through a #hashtag, this is a chance for the company to engage and build a relationship with their target personas. This can generate great brand awareness, attract followers and build loyalty.

Unfortunately, customers often turn to social media to complain and this has to be managed. It is important to remember the person who is responding, is representing the company so responsibility for social media cannot lie at the hands of a junior staff member. The person or persons should be adequately trained to handle all situations.

Smith & Zook (2012) suggest that the organisation prepare a selection of 'canned messages' or pre determined responses, for a range of issues so they can be used and slightly modified depending on each situation.   An organisation should prepare guidelines for what is and what is not appropriate, appoint a spokesperson or persons to handle responses and post content.

7. Community

The ultimate aim of any social media strategy is to build an online community that will share the company message and become brand ambassadors.

Companies will build a community by following each step of this plan. It is about identifying their ideal target customers and connecting with them on the relevant social media platforms, i.e. Twitter and Facebook. Then the focus is on creating relevant content and timely posts/tweets to engage their followers. That content starts a conversation and this is the brands opportunity to create the brands personality online. Be patient, it takes time, but if implemented correctly these activities will build an engaged community around the brand and create brand ambassadors that promote and support the brand.

8. Convert

Measure the Return on Investment.

This step involves measuring the success of implementation. It identifies if the strategy is effective and what part of the strategy is working best. A strategy is just a plan, a plan

has to be implemented and if it is not effective a plan has to be re-directed. Again, the point is, 'Try, Learn, Refine'. Try a strategy, learn from it by measuring the reaction or level of engagement from the audience and if necessary refine it: is there anything that can be done to improve the strategy or maybe do more of it.

Measuring social media performance is essential because:

1. It confirms if the business is achieving their social media objectives and getting a return on their investment. Facebook is free to use but the resources are not: time and people.
2. It identifies which posts or tweets are most effective at engaging the audience.
3. If effective it can justify further investment in social media and the company could consider paid advertising, for example Facebook Ads to target friends of fans.
4. It indicates if the strategy is working and if it is not why not. Is it that it is not being implemented on a consistent basis or is the strategy not effective and should it be refined.

Facebook Insight provides important analytical information. Similarly, Hootesuite.com is an effective tool that can be used to manage activity across multiple social media applications in one central application. It also provides detailed analytic reports which measure the results of a company's social media efforts.

On the website, when people are filling out an enquiry form, they should be asked to select where they heard about the company, i.e. if it was through social media, ensure to include this in the results.

It is also important to record results offline. When a customer is registering for a service, buying a product or making an enquiry over the telephone, they should be asked 'where did they hear about the company?' This will have to be co-ordinated with the relevant personnel but these are important factor in measuring the true effectiveness of the social media strategy. Once the company achieves their objectives the cycle begins again.

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