



## The Social Media Success Formula:

### IT STARTS WITH RELEVANT CONTENT

Why does getting social media strategy dialed in correctly matter so much to the future growth of your business? For one, never before in the history of brand marketing and public relations have we been in such a position to construct close, credible and interactive relationships – real ones – with those we wish to communicate with. But as you may know social media is radically different than other communications channels, so it only makes sense to get this right...

How so? As a marketing tool, social media sits inside the purchase funnel as a vital intermediate step between brand awareness and the decision to buy. Not unlike that helpful and engaging wine sommelier at your favorite restaurant who trades you up to an exciting new Pinot Noir. And does it in a way that doesn't feel pushy or contrived. What's more you're thankful for the new knowledge you've just acquired, and thus won't hesitate to relay your experience after trying the wine recommendation.

As a key component in the expanding arsenal of "brand owned" communication tools, successful social engagement is first and foremost an

outcome of what you do and say. We offer some guidance here on formulating the winning recipe that will help you attract and put scale underneath your emerging community of followers.

- The onion surrounding social media success can be peeled back to reveal one central and over-arching truth – it's the quality of the content brands offer that drives the attraction value, fan-base growth and level of conversation.

### Throwing messaging baseballs still?

However there are many businesses these days still that push self-serving messages AT people in every media pathway. Why? Because for a long time we've labored so greatly to define the brand and product proposition – and then turn to media channels as a vessel to deliver the "convince and persuade" message payload – be it in paid, earned or owned media. **We're throwing message baseballs at people expecting them to step up and in effect, catch them.**

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## Oops she dropped the ball...

But more often now, consumers ignore the ball, or walk away from home plate entirely, oblivious to the spinning missive as it passes by. She doesn't want to play the game that way any longer. Social media is by its very definition an “accrual” proposition. Every brand Facebook page or Twitter account begins with an audience of zero. **Unlike every medium that's come before it where access to a given channel brought you a defined audience size and type.** In the new world of owned media, you start at the beginning – with nothing. The early agenda is to “earn” your way into a trusted relationship.

## Building the fan base

Aggregating an audience is an outcome of thoughtful, useful and interesting multi-media content, conversation and meaningful offers. The authenticity and value of that content is related directly to its relevance to the consumer's lifestyle desires. Thus brands must find a path to engage consumers around what THEY care about, not the other way around.

1. For a **food brand** it might be enabling a recipe sharing community or bringing consumers into contact with their kitchen heroes like respected chefs.
2. For a **beverage brand** it could be enabling unique social experiences and providing ways for fans to share their knowledge and interests with each other.
3. For a **pet brand** it could involve helping pet parents provide the best quality of life for their four-legged family members through expert advice on nutrition, behavior and life-stage care.

## Eyes wide open

This whole process gets a lot clearer when brands employ consumer insight research to better understand the lifestyle passions and concerns of their core consumers. Then ask themselves: what can our brand do to facilitate, enable or create opportunities to experience and share those things?

## Building better brand relationships

Establishing a follower community is an outcome of providing content that's consistently engaging and entertaining. Here are a few practical hints for doing it right.

- **Multi-media tools are the way to go.** The Facebook share functionality only works when multi-media content is employed – podcasts and videos for instance.
- **Ask questions.** Interactivity occurs when we purposefully invite our community into the conversation, seeking their views, ideas and opinions.
- **Use emotional terms and words.** People are not fact-based, analytical decision making machines. Rather we are expectation creation machines and thus frame our brand relationships around feelings more than facts. **Are you employing emotive forms of communication?**
- **Responsiveness.** The “get back to me” bar is considerably higher in the digital era. Consumers want and expect quick responses to their questions. **Speed matters and being responsive is part of the assessment of how well your brand performs in the social media space.**
- **Conversation.** Like-minded individuals congregate together in specific communities because of their shared interests. Are you helping enable their ability to talk with one another?
- **Surprise and delight.** Reward your fans with special offers and values they won't get elsewhere. Recognize your most faithful followers with special status and access to unique content or other VIP experiences.

Social media brings scale to word of mouth. Yet at times it can feel like a big time and resource investment to speak with a very small audience. Rome wasn't built in a day either. Social media should not be viewed as a “communications island” unto itself. Rather integration of social media platforms into all brand touch points and outbound communications channels helps feed scale and thus deliver on your ROI expectations.

