

Which Social Media Marketing Methods Are Best For You?

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Introduction

The explosive growth and ever-increasing diversity of social media have left even the savviest marketers unsure about the best ways to take advantage of this too-big-to-ignore opportunity. The challenge won't go away any time soon, as new platforms appear and user behaviors continue to evolve. But this doesn't mean that marketers need to choose between trying everything or doing nothing. There's a solid middle path of making selective investments in the most appropriate techniques.

Determining which techniques are appropriate is a challenge in itself, but it's ultimately similar to any other business decision: marketers must define their goals and then pick the approach that best meets their goals given their business situation. Where social media are concerned, the numbers of goals, methods and situation variables are all small enough to be manageable. This paper presents a simple approach to analyzing the connections among them so you can pick the best social media techniques for your needs.

We'll start with explanations of the various goals, methods and situation factors.

Goals

Marketers' goals for social media are the same as their goals for other marketing activities. They range from building brand awareness to attracting qualified leads to strengthening relations with existing customers. A reasonable set of categories, tailored slightly to the context of social media, would include:

- **Attract attention.** This is getting people to notice and talk about you, without necessarily building a specific image. In colloquial terms, it's "generating buzz". The business value is limited but this is a reasonable objective for companies that are totally unknown or want to soften an existing brand image.
- **Build brand reputation.** This is getting people to understand your identity, including the types of products you sell, your position in the market, and your corporate personality. It goes beyond simply attracting attention to communicating a specific message.
- **Generate qualified traffic.** This is attracting people to your website or physical locations, where they might make a purchase or just learn more about you. These visits can be anonymous or identified, particularly in the B2B environment.
- **Generate qualified leads.** This is getting potential buyers to give you their contact information so you can reach them in the future. As such, it is more than traffic

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generation, although most traffic generation programs include a lead capture component. Lead generation is also more focused on attracting the right people—that is, qualified prospects – than buzz, branding or traffic generation.

- **Nurture relationships.** This is engaging in a dialog with individuals to better understand them and connect them with the company. It may also include monitoring social media to find people who might want to start relationships, even if those people have not sought you out.
- **Retain and grow existing customers.** This is communicating with existing customers to encourage them to keep buying or to buy more. It may involve direct messages to individuals or public messages that support this goal.
- **Provide customer support.** This is helping existing customers to use your product and resolve problems. The help may come from the company itself or from other customers who are sharing their expertise.
- **Gather market intelligence.** This is gathering information about customers' needs, interests, and attitudes towards you and your competitors. It may involve listening or more active programs such as surveys.

Methods

Social media offer many ways to reach marketing goals. Some social media sites support a single method while others support several. Major techniques include:

- **Monitor.** This is watching for relevant posts and responding on public social media such as blogs, Twitter and LinkedIn.
- **Publicity.** This is creating content for redistribution by media or similar outlets. Typical content might be press releases, infographics, videos or contests.
- **Publish.** This is creating content that the marketer distributes through their own outlets, such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or Webinars.
- **Sharing buttons.** This is making it easy for recipients to share content the marketer has already distributed in emails, Web pages, blog posts or other media.
- **Social bookmarks.** This is promoting the marketers' content on social bookmarking sites such as Digg, StumbleUpon, Reddit and Tumblr.

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- **Influencer campaigns.** This is working with influential individuals to post about the marketer's company. Marketers might provide information, offer free samples, run contests, pay for coverage or provide content worth redistributing.
- **Reviews.** This is working to ensure positive comments on review sites such as Yelp!, TripAdvisor, Glassdoor, TrustRadius and G2Crowd. It includes encouraging satisfied customers to write reviews and responding to negative reviews.

Situation

Marketers must pick social media methods they can deploy successfully, given the resources available and nature of their business. Situational factors include:

- **Resources**
 - **Content volume.** The company can generate a large, steady flow of content using its own staff, paid outside authors, contributions from customers and other volunteers or by curating content published elsewhere.
 - **Content quality.** The company can generate high quality content that will attract interest from prospects, customers, media and influencers.
 - **Existing traffic.** The company already attracts a large volume of traffic to its Web site, social pages or physical locations.
 - **Support staff.** The company has adequate staff to monitor social media channels for relevant posts and to respond. The work may be done in-house or by an external agency. The company also needs adequate training, policies and controls to ensure support staff behaves appropriately when acting on the company's behalf.
 - **Budget.** The company has resources to support expensive campaigns, through elaborate videos, contents, games, custom apps, product sampling or payments to influencers.
- **Technology**
 - **Execution tools.** The company has appropriate tools and trained users to execute the selected programs efficiently. Tools might be products for social listening, high-volume posting, contact management or sharing buttons. Free or low-cost tools are available for nearly every social media marketing function,

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but large-scale operations often need more sophisticated products which can be quite costly.

- **Measurement tools.** The company can measure the size and quality of audiences attracted by social media programs, identify individuals and track their behaviors, and link social programs to revenue. This often requires both program-specific techniques and a shared customer database to unify data from all interactions.

- **Industry**

- **Customer engagement.** People care enough about the company or its products to engage directly or discuss them on social media. This depends on factors such as how many customers use a product, how important the product is to its users, difficulty in making a product selection, need for information after purchase, availability of information from non-social channels, and how many customers are active on social media.
- **Findability.** People interested in the product must be able to information about it through tools such as keyword searches or hashtags. This enables marketers to monitor social media efficiently, to identify potential buyers and influencers, and to gain an audience for their social contents.
- **Local service.** The industry offers a local service that is difficult to rate objectively, such as restaurants, plumbers, doctors, and accountants. This makes certain social methods especially important, such as monitoring and reviews.

Making a Choice

Each social marketing method supports different goals and works best in different situations. A systematic approach to choosing social marketing methods is to start with your company's goals and first assess which methods are best suited to those goals, and then how well these methods match your company situation.

The tables below support this approach. Table 1 lists all method/goal relationships, with points reflecting how well each method matches each goal. To use this table, select your top goals for social media (no more than three), and circle the point values across each row. Then add the circled values within each column. (See the worked example following this section for help.) The resulting scores rank the methods by how well they fit your goals. (Note: the point values are approximate. Feel free to adjust them if you feel other values would more accurately reflect your business.)

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Table 1: Goals vs Methods							
	Social Marketing Method						
	Monitor	Publicity	Publish	Sharing buttons	Social bookmarks	Influencer campaign	Reviews
Goals							
Attract attention		50	10	10	30		
Build brand reputation	5	10	35	10	15	35	
Generate qualified traffic		10	40	20	15	15	
Generate qualified leads	40		10			10	40
Nurture relationships	60					40	
Retain and grow existing customers	40		40	10			10
Provide customer support	70						30
Gather market intelligence	65						35
(total score)							

Table 2 lists all method/situation relationships. Here, the points reflect how important the situation variable is for the method. Take the highest-scoring three methods from Table 1 and circle their heading on Table 2. Then, circle all the situation factors that apply to your business. Finally, circle the point values for the selected situations in the columns for the selected methods. Add the circled values in each column.

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Table 2: Situation vs Methods							
	Social Marketing Method						
	Monitor	Publicity	Publish	Sharing buttons	Social bookmarks	Influencer campaign	Reviews
Situation							
Resources							
Content volume.			25	15	30		
Content quality.		50	30	30	30	10	
Existing traffic.	15		10	20			
Support staff.	25					15	20
Budget.		40			15	25	
Technology							
Execution tools.	5		10	5		5	10
Measurement tools.		10	10	10	15	10	
Industry							
Customer engagement.	15		15	20	10	35	30
Findability	30						
Local service	10						40
(total score)							

Here is a set of completed tables to help you see how this works:

Table 1: Goals vs Methods		Social Marketing Method						
		Monitor	Publicity	Publish	Sharing buttons	Social bookmarks	Influencer campaign	Reviews
Goals								
• Attract attention			50	10	10	30		
• Build brand reputation		5	10	35	10	15	35	
• Generate qualified traffic		10	40	20	15	15	15	
• Generate qualified leads		40	10	10		10	40	40
• Nurture relationships		60						
• Retain and grow existing customers		40		40	10			10
• Provide customer support		70						30
• Gather market intelligence		65						35
(total score)		40	10	50	20	15	25	40

Table 2: Situations vs Methods		Social Marketing Method						
		Monitor	Publicity	Publish	Sharing buttons	Social bookmarks	Influencer campaign	Reviews
Situation								
Resources								
• Content volume				25	15	30		
• Content quality			50	30	30	30	10	
• Existing traffic		15		10	20			
• Support staff		25					15	20
• Budget			40			15	25	
Technology								
• Execution tools		5		10	5		5	10
• Measurement tools			10	10	10	15	10	
Industry								
• Customer engagement		15		15	20	10	35	30
• Findability		30						
• Local service		10						40
(total score)		30		50				30

Example

On Table 1, the marketer selects Generate qualified traffic and generate qualified leads as her goals. She circles the points on the rows for those two goals and adds up the totals of the circled items. Monitoring, Publicity and Reviews have the highest scores, so...

...on Table 2, she circles the three selected methods and then assesses her situation. The company has high content volume and existing traffic, and is in a business where customers are highly engaged. She circles the point values on the rows for those three situations for the three selected methods. The highest score is Publishing, meaning that is the most appropriate social marketing method for her business. But the value of 50 is relatively low, so she might want to add some resources or technology before proceeding.

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Interpreting the Results

As you probably expect, the highest scoring method after calculations are completed on Table 2 is best fit for the specified goals and situation. But there are a few nuances to consider beyond this.

- In Table 1, if any one method's score is far higher than the others, then that is the clearly preferred technique. But if several methods have similar scores, then they are all reasonable candidates.
- In Table 2, all lower total in any column means that fewer of the conditions required for success are present. (If you look carefully, you'll see that scores in each column add to 100.) A score lower than 50 suggests that some additional resources or technology might be needed.
- It's important to balance value against risk. Companies with less social media experience or tightly limited resources might want to choose a slightly lower priority goal or less suitable method if that approach has a higher chance of success.
- Companies with more resources can afford to pursue more options, including multiple goals and methods. In fact, most organizations will probably do this.

What Next?

Picking your social media methods is only the first step on a long path. Whether you do the formal calculations suggested in this paper or just informally assess which approaches make sense, your next steps will be to set specific objectives for your project, build and execute your programs and measure the results. Advice on how to do this is beyond the scope of this paper, although the framework provided should help the structure of your planning.

Final Thoughts

This paper has presented a simple approach to selecting your social media projects, balancing methods against your goals and business situation. However, results of these calculations are just one input to your final choice. Other factors to consider include:

- Think long term. Social media is here to stay and so, presumably, is your business. You'll want to make investments that build develop resources which will support future programs, including programs using different methods and supporting

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different objectives. This may mean your initial program isn't the one with the highest scores.

- Goals change. As your business grows and conditions change, your marketing needs may shift. This argues in favor of trying multiple methods, so you have options to do new things as the need arises. In mechanical terms, the Table 1 columns with the most entries represent methods with the broadest application.
- Some resources are more valuable than others. Just as some methods support more goals, some resources support more methods. This is illustrated on Table 2 by the rows with the most entries and by higher values for those entries. If you ever wanted empirical support for the cliché that “Content is King”, here it is.
- It's important to get started. Social media can be overwhelming. But marketers can't afford to wait until it's clear which approaches are the best. This paper is intended to help overcome the confusion of too many choices by offering a simple way pick your social media methods. Whether you follow the recommendations generated by the scoring or simply use the process to help clarify your own thinking, the goal is to move ahead. The worst choice you can make is to do nothing at all.

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About Raab Associates Inc.

Raab Associates Inc. is a consultancy specializing in marketing technology and analytics. Typical engagements include marketing architecture planning, business needs assessment, technology audits, vendor selection, results analysis, and dashboard development. The company also consults with industry vendors on products and marketing strategy

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