

Before you consider new web tools...

Make sure your existing website is current, accurate and relevant, and that you have a plan to continue maintaining and updating online content.

Take a good long look at all of your online real estate. Social media tools are excellent for driving traffic to your primary online property, but they are not designed to take the place of a rock-solid website.

Work with Corporate Communications to define goals and objectives for the program or campaign. Then make a plan that integrates online and other communications tools in order to reach those goal and objectives.

Then, consider creating a social media strategy to compliment your existing web-based communications activities.

What is a social media strategy?

Going through this checklist as you build a social media strategy will help you develop a strategy based on results, not hype.

1. **What are we trying to accomplish?** Are you looking for more leads, more direct sales, greater brand awareness, conversions, or brand engagement? Understanding what you're trying to actually do with your social media presence should be the first step in developing a social media strategy.
2. **Why social media?** Is your audience there? Do you want to build stronger relationships with customers and prospects? Tap into online word-of-mouth channels? Demonstrate that you're down with the kids? You have a niche audience that's difficult to reach otherwise? The best way to avoid recklessly jumping on the bandwagon is to examine why the wagon is the best way to get where you're going before you hop on. Ask yourself: is spending money on social media going to provide better ROI (define) than other forms of advertising you could be spending money on?
3. **What kind of social media will help us best achieve our goals?** Do you need to utilize social networking sites, blogs, real-time updates (e.g., Twitter), social news sites, media-sharing sites, review/directory sites, virtual worlds, or display ads on social media sites? In some respects, talking about a social media presence is like talking about having an advertising presence: you must specify what you're doing and where you're going to place it. Examine the characteristics of the type of social media you want to have a presence on and how those characteristics fit what you're trying to accomplish to help choose the ones that will work best for you.

4. **Are we prepared to let go of control of our brand, at least a little?** You can't participate in social media without being...well...social. And that means engaging in a conversation with customers. Once you engage in a conversation, you have to give up control. Is your company willing to do that?
5. **What will we do to encourage participation?** There's nothing more embarrassing than going to a corporate YouTube channel and seeing that the viral video it spent tons of money making has just 127 views. Ditto for going to a company's Twitter feed and seeing that it has all of 11 followers. What are you planning to do to drive people to your social media presence? And do you have the money to do it?
6. **Who will maintain our social media presence?** Participating in social media takes a lot of work. You must have something to say and you must have someone (or a team of people) to say it on a regular basis. It won't happen unless it becomes part of someone's job. Do you have someone ready to commit a big chunk of time to maintaining your social media presence?
7. **Do we have the resources to keep this up, or will this be a short campaign?** Similarly, unless you specify that what you're doing has a limited duration (such as a Twitter feed based on a particular conference), people will expect you to keep it up. Have you budgeted the resources to continue your social media presence beyond the fiscal year?
8. **How does engaging users via social media integrate into our overall marketing/communications strategy?** None of this stuff exists in a vacuum. It has to be part of a larger marketing/communications strategy. How does social media fit into what you're trying to do in all your other channels, and how will you use those channels to support each other?
9. **How do we measure success?** What constitutes failure? Are you measuring views, followers, comments, or subscribers? What's the threshold for your success metrics that takes them into success territory? What happens if you don't get there?
10. **What will we do less of if we're spending resources on social media?** Chances are you have limited dollars, and limited staff time. If you spend more time or money on social media, you have to spend less on something else. How will your overall goals be impacted by taking money away from other forms of advertising/marketing and moving it into social media?