

5 WAYS TO PUT STRATEGY IN YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA EFFORTS

We're getting more questions every day from clients and business colleagues about social media. Frankly, there are still a lot of people scratching their heads trying to figure out how to get into the social media waters. Some are diving head first into shallow water. Others are creeping in so gingerly they'll probably never make it all the way—they'll just torture themselves the entire time. We get questions like:

"I put up a Facebook page, but now what do I do with it?" or "Why don't I have any visitors to my Facebook page?"

Even worse, we sometimes hear "I just told my intern to put up some stuff for me, so I don't have to deal with this any more."

Just like any marketing effort, social media must be used strategically, and as part of a comprehensive, integrated plan. At MB Piland, our culture is steeped in strategy, so I'd like to share some our views on effective, strategically sound social media practices. Here are five ways to do it better.



1. Remember that social media is MEDIA.

Social media is not one medium that fits all. It's actually many media.

For example, on television, we have network vs. cable, multiple channels, infomercials, dayparts, programs and more. All of those different options can serve different purposes. They deliver different audience statistics like demographics and psychographics, as well as intangibles like attentiveness levels, buzz-worthiness and credibility.

Social media is like that, too. People actively engaged in FourSquare may or may not be the people actively engaged in LinkedIn. And if they are, then they're using them for different reasons and probably at different times. So you probably don't need to be everywhere. You just need to be where your customers are, and tailor your presence and your content to the people using that particular medium.

For example, MB Piland has a Facebook page and a LinkedIn page that serve two very different purposes. [Facebook](#) lets us let our hair down and show off our personality and corporate culture. Want to know what it's like to be a client, or how it feels to work here? Facebook shows you a glimpse of our brainstorming meetings, staff birthday lunches and volunteering in the community. It invites comments and ideas from fans and friends.



We use [LinkedIn](#) more like an online resume. It's more professional and a bit buttoned-up. Here's where someone might find out more about our credentials, our talented people and our capabilities. And each employee has an individual [LinkedIn](#) page that ties back to our corporate page. Those pages have a wealth of additional information about our experience, commentary and discussion of industry happenings, book reviews and recommendations.

2. It's a very good idea to listen first

You can use social media to help you have a better understanding of your customer. What used to be very expensive research is now available for free if you're willing to spend the time. Listening to what people say about your industry, how their needs are being met (or not) and what they think is important can be incredibly illuminating. Take the time to follow people on



Twitter or read what bloggers write about these subjects. It can give you insight into how to make your products better and how to improve communications with your audiences in ways they respond to. You have the power to find out what they want — then give it to them — easier than ever before.

Another way of using social media strategically is paying attention to what's being said about your product or service "out there" by others.

There are myriad resources for tracking e-conversation about you (some free and some pricey), but you can start with Google Alerts which is user friendly and free. Set up alerts so you're notified when someone says something about you. Then find out what's been said. If it's positive, you might thank them, re-tweet them, link to them or find some ways to further the fledgling relationship.

If what you see is negative, you may need to respond. (Side note: if the person complaining is obviously kooky, it may be best to ignore him. Consider the source before you decide.) And you do have recourse if someone is unjustly accusing you. Check out what can be done to defend your honor.

But maybe someone has posted something legitimately unflattering about your company on a site like Yelp or TripAdvisor or Amazon. You have a forum to set the record straight or offer an apology and try to make amends. That's power! Before social media, if someone told 10 friends about the terrible experience they had with your company, you probably didn't know it and you certainly didn't have a chance to fix it. Today you have that ability. But only if you know there's a problem. Take the time to listen!

3. Social media should be about convergence

Your social media efforts can't exist in a vacuum. Whatever you're doing — on your website, in print, PR or any communications — should tie in with what you're doing in social media. When orchestrated properly they act like conduits back and forth to one another, and allow audiences to customize their experience with your company in a way that suits them best. This gives you synergy and more for your money: $1+1=3$.

Back to that idea of just handing it all over to your intern. He probably has some excellent ideas. So it may be fine as long as you've indoctrinated him on all your brand standards and key messaging, shared your marketing plan, discussed your target audiences and allowed him into your processes so he can be a knowledgeable voice for your company. If you don't do these things, there will be dissonance. You'll dilute—and possibly even harm—your brand.

Everything must work together, fitting like a perfectly designed Lego Pirate Ship. Sometimes putting together all the pieces can feel complicated, time-consuming and daunting. But stick with it. It does get easier and the outcome is well worth it.

4. Social media is a two-way street

You know how it feels when you have that friend who talks nonstop and never listens? It's an understatement to say that it makes him a d-r-a-g. Over time, you stop spending time with him because he doesn't seem to care what you think or even know anything about you.

Think of social media the same way. If you're only talking and not inviting discussion—not listening—then your friends will drift away. "I *am* asking people to comment, they just don't respond," you might say. Maybe you haven't taken the time to ask the *right* questions.



Have you ever attended a cocktail party where you met someone new and had a little roughness getting over the initial hump of small talk? If you're a good conversationalist, you ask a few open-ended questions, looking for some common ground. Usually, after a few rounds, you hit on something you can both talk about... then the conversation becomes much easier. Free-flowing. Even fun!

Your social media posts are a lot like a cocktail party. If you bring up a discussion question and you get very little response, try again with another train of thought. If that doesn't work, try again. If you pay attention and think about what your acquaintance might want to talk about, eventually you'll hit on something that resonates. It may take several rounds of trial and error to find those areas of common ground. Once you do, keep at it. Continue to pay attention to what friends like, where they comment and where they don't. Respond accordingly. Strong friendships usually aren't born in a day, whether they're face-to-face OR online.

5. Be generous

Social media is about relationships. About sharing. When someone tweets about what they had for lunch, it's only interesting for about three seconds. If you're using your status to tell people your own product is super-special, that's boring.... and it's probably a little selfish. But if you use your status to tell something interesting and valuable, or to offer a point of view, that's worth sharing.

[Chef Alli](#) could be selfish and force you to *only* enjoy her delicious dishes if you purchase them already made at the grocery store. Instead, she shares recipes on her blog. I already thought she was pretty groovy, but this makes me like her even more. Am I a fan? You bet.

My friend Jim Mathis at Adwërks shares his advertising insight to anyone who comes to his blog. He wrote a great [article](#) about why not everyone needs a viral video. Jim could be stingy and keep his marketing expertise to himself. But he knows that sharing smart information positions him as an authority and that sometime when his audience really needs help, he's someone they should call.



Time to get your strategy together

Take some time out today to consider your social media presence and how you can be more strategic. Start to evaluate your approach in the context of the five points listed here. Then go use your power wisely!



Martha Bartlett Piland is President + CEO of MB Piland. You can learn more about MB Piland's innovative, strategy-based work at our website: mbpiland.com.