

Build Your Social Media Influence and Leadership

Gihan Perera

Social media is, of course, big news in the business world. If you're a business owner or business leader, it's not surprising if you're feeling overwhelmed by everything you see, hear and read about how to get ahead with social media. The good news is that it doesn't have to be as difficult as it seems, especially if you ignore some of the hype and focus on the few things that really make a difference.

Most business owners and business leaders spend too much time, with too little return, on social media. Usually that's because they are engaging in social media activities that might feel good but don't bring results.

In this report, we'll look at how to build true influence using social media. Broadly, here's an outline of what we'll cover:

1. Think of social media as a way to magnify your marketing efforts, rather than treating it as a separate channel.
2. Set up your online platform using a variety of tools—starting with a blog, and then connecting it to social media.
3. Publish high-quality content that positions you as an expert in solving your customers' problems.

Part 1: Use Social Media to Magnify

The first step is to understand that social media is *part* of your marketing, and it should amplify your core marketing efforts, rather than being a separate marketing channel.

Some social media experts will disagree, but for most businesses, social media is a distraction! More precisely: Obsessing about social media is a distraction from doing your job.

In a nutshell: Your job is to solve your customers' problems. Marketing *proves* you can solve their problems, and social media magnifies your marketing efforts.



Instead of spending more time on social media that doesn't work, spend *less* time but focus on activities that prove you're an expert in solving your customers' problems. In other words, use social media to magnify your expertise and become an authority.

> *Use social media to prove you can solve your customer's problems*

This is different from what many social media experts say. They might tell you that the only way to succeed with social media is to be constantly engaging with your customers, monitoring their online conversations and responding promptly to concerns and problems. That is important for some roles in your business, especially in customer service. But it shouldn't be your *primary* use of social media.

Your primary use of social media is to prove you can solve their problems. It's not to engage in inane chatter with anybody and everybody who wants to "follow" you.

If there's one thing that will make the biggest difference to your social media presence, this is it: **Use social media for distributing content, not for having conversations.**

In other words, stop thinking of social media as a two-way communication channel where you listen, respond and engage in conversations. Instead, use it as a (mostly) one-way communication channel where you speak, share and distribute your key strategic messages.

Because this is a radically different way of viewing social media, be prepared for some resistance from your marketing team, your social media consultants, and even perhaps your own prior thinking.

Here are three common social media myths that can make your life seem far more difficult, but which you can safely ignore:

- **MYTH #1: It's all about the numbers**. Having millions of followers on your account doesn't mean any of them are actually following you in any meaningful way. Most of them won't even see your posts because they get lost among all the others they follow.

  Instead, focus on consistently delivering value to the people you want to reach, and they will spread the word naturally. That will get you more of the *right* followers and friends.

- **MYTH #2: It's all about two-way conversations**. This is the typical use of social media, but it doesn't position you well as a leader, influencer or problem solver in your customer's eyes.

  Instead, use social media as another way to prove you're an expert in solving their problems**.** This is so important that we'll talk about it (a lot!) in the rest of this report.

- **MYTH #3: It's all about Facebook and Twitter**. When most people use the term "social media," they are referring to social networks like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+. These are important, but they are mainly for *amplifying* your message.

  The real value comes from the tools that give you the freedom to *deliver* your message (which is all about solving their problems, remember). These are tools like blogs (for articles), YouTube (for videos), SlideShare (for presentations), email newsletter providers, Amazon.com (for e-books) and the iTunes Store (for podcasts and e-books). Use these tools for crafting and delivering your messages, and then use the social networks for sharing them more widely.

So, in summary:

- Don't use social media to connect with everybody.
- Don't use social media to engage in two-way conversations.
- Don't use social media for small talk.

Instead, use social media to deliver high-quality content that proves you're an expert in solving your customer's problems.

This starts with setting up your online platform. So let's look at that now.

Part 2: Create Your Online Platform

As I've said, you should be using social media to amplify your message—in other words, proving you have the expertise to solve your customers' problems. So now let's look at how we put that into action.

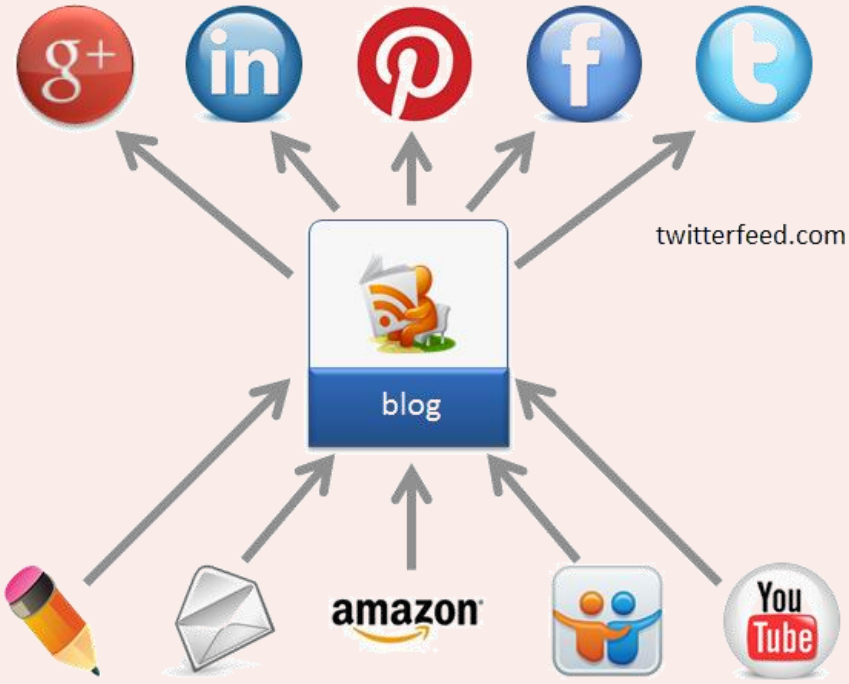
It All Starts with Your Blog

Your blog is the hub of your online platform. It has three important roles:

1. It's your business diary, where you record everything you do that's worth reporting publicly. Every blog post becomes its own web page, so it becomes a permanent record of what you do. You can refer to old blog posts easily, Google indexes all your blog posts and other people can link to it as well.
2. Next, it's the place where you publish all your original content—articles you write, videos you record, free e-books and special reports you publish, other content you post on other networks, and so on. Even if you publish it elsewhere (a video on YouTube, for example), you post it to your blog as well.
3. It becomes an easy way to *automatically* distribute your content to other places, including the Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ and online forums.

That's why you should have a blog. It's not for you to attract thousands of readers, or make money from selling advertising or promoting your products. It's for these three reasons.

I can't emphasise this enough. When you have a blog in place, you can publish material to it, and *automatically* distribute that material to social media platforms. Here's an overview of this process:



So now let's look at this process in more detail.

Creating a Blog

Ask your webmaster about the best way to create a blog.

If your website is built on WordPress, Squarespace or some other hosting services, a blog is already built in—even if you're not using it yet. All you need to do is start using it.

Your blog lets you distribute content automatically to social media

If your website doesn't have a blog built in, you (or your webmaster) can create a blog easily using Blogger.com, which is Google's free blogging service. Although this isn't as powerful as, say, a WordPress blog, 99% of website owners don't need the extra power anyway.

Connecting It to Social Media



Use the free Twitterfeed.com service to automatically connect your blog posts to Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. This means that every time you post to your blog, a link to that post will appear on these social media platforms. This alone will put you ahead of most of your competitors.

Twitterfeed doesn't connect to Google+, but it's easy enough to post manually every time you write a new blog post. Or you can use the (paid) dlvr.it service to automate this as well.

Twitterfeed also doesn't connect to Pinterest. There are some WordPress plugins to do this job, but again it's just as easy to do it manually for each blog post.

Posting to Your Blog

Now that you have a blog, you can start posting to it. Here are some of the things you can choose to post to your blog:

- Write an original article (we'll describe this process later) for your blog.
- Report on a current news story, by linking to an online news source and adding a paragraph explaining why it's relevant to your market.
- Report on new research in your area of expertise, and explain what's important and relevant for your market.
- Share a client success story or case study.
- Review a book you've read. Publish the review on Amazon.com and copy it to your blog as well.
- Promote a new product or service in your business.
- Quote other experts in the field—even competitors—and explain how it's relevant for your market.
- Profile a client or customer.
- Find a relevant article from EzineArticles.com and copy it to your blog.
- Share a positive testimonial from a happy customer.
- Record an audio clip on your phone and upload the MP3 file to your blog.
- Record a video clip explaining how to do something, upload it to YouTube, and embed it on your blog.
- Find somebody else's YouTube video that's relevant to your market, and embed it in your blog.
- Recommend a website that could be useful to your market.

- Answer a frequently asked question.
- Answer a question somebody asked by email (removing anything that's private or confidential).
- Publish a PowerPoint presentation to Slideshare.com and embed it in your blog.
- Find a relevant infographic in your area of expertise (search Google for "[whatever] infographic"), and if the creator allows you to embed it in your blog, do so.

As you can see, all of these activities are more substantial than the typical post on Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn.

And that leads on to the next section …

Part 3: Publish High-Quality Content

If you're worried that you're spending too much time on social media without getting anything in return, it's probably because you're engaging in a lot of shallow interactions that do very little for building your presence and reputation.

Here are some examples of shallow interactions:

- Liking a Facebook post
- Re-tweeting a tweet
- "+1'ing" a Google+ post
- Sharing somebody else's blog post
- Liking a LinkedIn group discussion
- Making a brief comment on any of these platforms

There's nothing inherently wrong with these actions, except they take up your time, energy and focus; and generally don't give you much in return. To really get them to work, you have to do a lot of them.

More importantly, these activities don't do much to demonstrate your expertise. Although they might position you as somebody who's active on social media, they also position you as just one of the crowd, someone happy to interact and engage but not necessarily in possession of any particular knowledge or expertise.

A far more effective way to boost your social media presence is to make more substantial contributions. These fall into four categories:

Engage in a way that boosts your authority and credibility

- **Comment with value**: Make comments on other people's material, but do it in a substantial way, such as making meaningful and useful comments on blogs, publishing book reviews on the Amazon website or reviewing podcasts and apps in the iTunes Store or Google Play Store.
- **Curate with context**: Share other people's material with your network, but do it in a way that explains why you're sharing it and why it's relevant to your network. This is called content curation, and its power comes from you being selective with what you share. You consume a lot of material; choose not to share 90% of it and your readers know you're sharing the cream of the crop.
- **Collate with perspective**: Point out patterns in seemingly disparate areas, such as news and current affairs, behaviour in different fields and industries or results of scientific research. By taking a big-picture view of the individual data points, you can point out patterns that others don't see.
- **Create unique material**: Finally, you can generate and share your own ideas, models, metaphors, concepts and research. Publish them on your blog and YouTube, and then distribute them through social media platforms.

By commenting, curating, collating and creating in this way, you'll be building a powerful social media presence with a solid foundation based on your expertise and authority.

Comment with Value

Commenting is the easiest of the four ways to engage your network. But don't just comment in a shallow way; make meaningful comments that *add value to the conversation* already taking place.

Here are some places where you can comment in this way:

- Amazon.com: When you read a book, write a short review on Amazon.com. Make it positive (if you didn't like the book, don't review it), and highlight what makes it relevant to your market.
- Podcasts: If you listen to podcasts you like, go to the Podcasts app on your phone and comment on the podcast. As with the book reviews, keep them positive and relevant.

- LinkedIn: Join relevant groups, and add your comments to discussions and questions. Don't promote yourself or your business; just provide solid answers to the questions being asked.
- Other blogs: Subscribe to blogs you like, and when you find posts that you can contribute to, add a comment to the post. Again, don't promote yourself; add value to the conversation.
- YouTube: Find relevant videos for your market and add your comments.
- Social networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+): If you can provide meaningful and relevant comments here, do so. However, this is one time when simple shallow comments are tolerated, so feel free to do them as well.

As noted earlier when we talked about blogging, whenever you comment in these forums, consider whether it's worth posting this to your blog as well. For example, if you answer a question in a LinkedIn group, it's likely that the answer will be relevant to others in your network as well. So copy it from LinkedIn to your blog.

Curate with Context

As part of staying current, you need to be constantly reading new material (or watching videos or listening to podcasts). Much of that material is only for your own learning, but some of it might be relevant to your market as well, so share it with them. This is called "content curation." Like a museum curator who chooses which items to display in an exhibition, you're choosing which material is worth sharing with your network.

The key to content curation is to *not* share most of what you read. (As a rough rule of thumb, you might ignore 90% of what you read and only share the remaining 10%.) People are already suffering from information overload, so they don't want more irrelevant information. However, they *do* want relevant information, hand-picked by an expert they know, like and trust.

When you share material, respect the originator's copyright. In general, it's acceptable to *link* to a web page with the material, but not to copy it directly.

There are three useful productivity tools to help make your content curation more efficient:

- Use a feed reader—such as Feedly or Flipboard—to get the material delivered to you automatically. This is usually better than subscribing to email newsletters, because you don't fill up your inbox, and you can share the material more easily.
- Save it for reading later using an app like Pocket (from GetPocket.com) or Safari's Reading List, so you can read the material at your convenience rather than letting it distract you when it arrives.
- Spread out the posts to social media using Buffer (from BufferApp.com).

Collate with Perspective

Collating means you gather material from different sources and show how it's related—and in particular, how it's relevant for your market. As Marcel Proust said:

> "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes."

For example, if you're an accountant, you might notice a coming change in government, tightening of credit from the Global Financial Crisis and a trend towards consumers renting rather than buying houses. Most people wouldn't see a pattern between these three things, but you might be able to spot something that's relevant for your market.

Unlike commenting and curating, you probably won't be collating material frequently. However, when you do, it can be very useful for your market.

Create with Insight

Finally, the fourth way to publish high-quality content is to create your own content. The key is to focus on content that proves you know how to solve your customer's problems. You then publish it in as many (relevant) places as possible, which attracts high-quality traffic to your website, and that leads to a better quality of enquiries.

Many consultants who advise you to do content marketing will urge you to keep creating and publishing new content, and this can seem like an overwhelming task. Content creation *is* important, but as you've seen already, it's only one of the four content marketing tools. In fact, you should spend more time commenting and curating—rather than creating—content.

You can also easily convert the same material into multiple content marketing pieces, saving yourself time and effort.

For example, suppose you write an article with seven tips or ideas that would improve your customer's life—for example:

- Seven Ways to Make Your Money Go Further
- Seven Tips for Having a Difficult Conversation with Somebody You Love
- Seven No-Cost Marketing Ideas

Start by writing an article (400-500 words) on this topic. This is simply an introductory paragraph, a paragraph for each of the seven tips, a closing paragraph and then an invitation for readers to contact you.

Convert one idea into multiple content marketing pieces

Now, let's look at 20 ways to leverage this article:

First, publish the article itself:

1. Publish the article on your blog.
2. Publish it in your email newsletter.
3. Submit the article to EzineArticles.com. This allows other people to copy your article and use it in their material—as long as they promote you as well.
4. Post the article in full on Google+. Unlike Twitter, Google+ allows you to post entire articles, and Google uses them in search results.
5. Look for blogs that reach the same target market as yours—but are written by non-competing authors—and offer to post the article on their blog.
6. Offer to submit the article to somebody else's email newsletter.
7. Print it on your letterhead and post it (yes, by snail mail!) to 20 key people in your network.

Then create an audio version for the people who prefer to listen:

8. Read it out loud, record it and post the MP3 file on your website as a free download.
9. Post the MP3 file to your podcast (audio newsletter). If you don't have a podcast, use Hipcast.com to create it.

Now let's make it more visual:

10. Turn it into a PowerPoint presentation, with an introductory slide, one slide for each of the tips and a closing slide; then publish it to Slideshare.com. (Think of Slideshare as YouTube for PowerPoint.)
11. Publish the same PowerPoint presentation to AuthorStream.com, which is not as big as Slideshare, but still has a large number of users.
12. Save the PowerPoint slides as individual graphics, and use them to create a series of printed postcards.
13. Use Visual.ly to create an infographic from the article's content.

You can also convert the article content into video form:

14. Record a YouTube video talking through the article point by point.
15. Save your PowerPoint slides as individual graphics and use Animoto.com to create an animated slide show.

Expand the article to create even more substantial content:

16. Expand each of the points in the article and turn it into a special report (4-5 pages) that you publish as a free PDF download on your website.
17. Upload the PDF report to Issuu.com. (Think of Issuu as YouTube for special reports.)
18. Turn the article into a one-page diagnostic tool by writing each of the seven points as a question, and provide a simple 0-5 scale. Then publish that as a one-page PDF report.

Finally, you could even make it an event:

19. Run a free educational webinar on this topic, using GoToWebinar.com to conduct your webinar.
20. Use a Google+ Hangout to run an educational video conference call on this topic. This is similar to the webinar, except participants see you instead of your slides.

These 20 ideas are just scratching the surface of what you can do to create high-quality content. So don't ignore other opportunities as well. But if you're not creating much content now, use this list as a starting point.

SUMMARY

To reiterate the main point of this report: Use social media to magnify your expertise and become an authority. That's the way to be truly influential in social media, which means you'll attract the right sort of clients and customers to your business.

In this report, we looked at these three parts of your social media influence strategy:

1. Think of social media as a way to magnify your marketing efforts rather than treating it as a separate channel.
2. Set up your online platform, using a variety of tools—starting with a blog, and then connecting it to social media.
3. Publish high-quality content that positions you as an expert in solving your customer's problems.

The good news is that this doesn't take a lot of work. In fact, if you're already engaging with people on Twitter or Facebook, this strategy will take less work than you're doing now! So switch your efforts into this strategy, and you'll see results that are better—and faster.

About Gihan Perera



Gihan Perera is a consultant, speaker and author, who helps thought leaders and business professionals leverage their expertise.

He is the author of the book *Webinar Smarts* and *Fast, Flat and Free*, among others; Forbes magazine rated him the #5 social media influencer in book publishing.

He blogs at GihanPerera.info and his website is at GihanPerera.com.

About our Sponsor:

GoToWebinar by CITRIX

Global Reach from Your Desk.

With GoToWebinar you can conduct unlimited do-it-yourself webinars with a global audience of up to 1,000 people while slashing your travel budget.

Communicate, present, demonstrate and interact with prospects, employees, partners and customers easier and more efficiently than any other webinar product available today—any time, anywhere and as often as you want – for one flat rate.

- Set up a webinar in minutes—without IT support
- Generate more qualified marketing leads—for less
- Integrate easily with your existing marketing applications
- Invite guests to attend from mobile devices

Do you host large events that require more attendee capacity?
If so, we're now offering a webcast solution for your largest events. Citrix GoToWebcast can broadcast to audiences of up to 5,000—with video included!

For a free trial or to learn more visit www.gotowebinar.co.uk, call 0800 011 2120 or email uk@citrixonline.com.