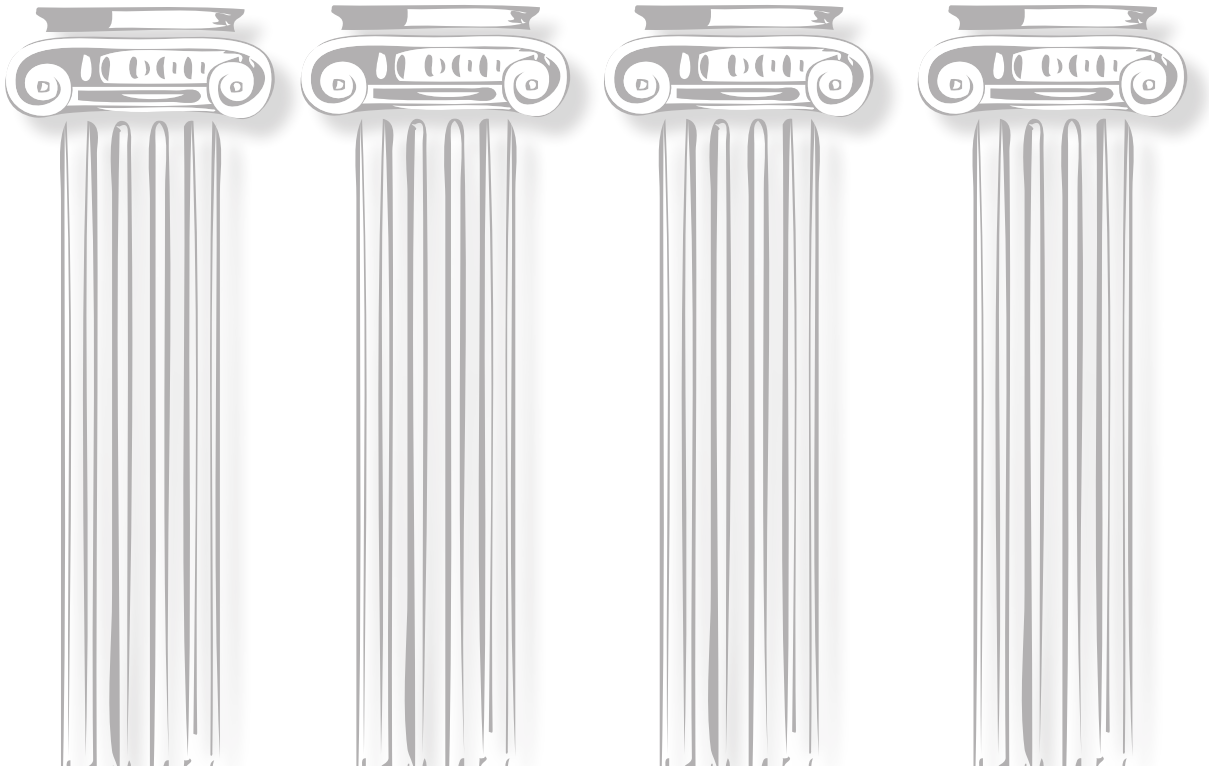
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Getting on the Same Page.

The Four Pillars of a Successful Corporate Social Media Marketing Strategy



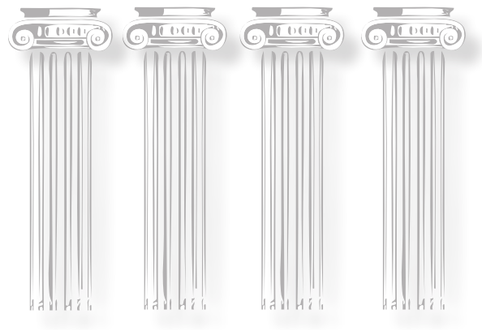
Introduction

Most B2B companies know that social media marketing has the potential to deliver great business value. However, unfamiliarity with new platforms and approaches, together with the complexity of the social media environment, has tended to prevent a coherent and workable strategy from being established.

This white paper sets out the four pillars of a successful, organisation-wide social media marketing strategy. It contains advice and guidance for successfully establishing each of the four pillars:

1. **Executive endorsement**
2. **Business case**
3. **Operational framework**
4. **Implementation plan**

By following the advice in this white paper, you will be able to create an approved social media marketing strategy that enables your organisation to unlock the full business value of social media engagement.



Executive endorsement

The first pillar of any corporate social media strategy is senior-level support for the proposed activity. It is essential not only to initiate the programme itself, but also to secure the buy-in of other stakeholders and contributors.

Senior-level endorsement is becoming progressively easier to obtain, as most boards of B2B companies are now aware that engaging with audiences through social media can deliver significant benefits. Similarly, most are conscious that not engaging can lead to loss of business and diminished brand awareness.

But while senior-level executives tend to be amenable to the idea in principle, they will need to see concrete evidence of the business value of social media engagement before committing their support. Your first task, therefore, will be to present a compelling business case for social media engagement, and a robust implementation plan that shows how it will work in practice.

As your aim is to gain approval for the programme across the board, a good approach is to convene an initial workshop with all the relevant senior stakeholders. At this initial session you will need to:

Make the case for social media engagement: This should cover not only what the organisation has to gain from engaging in social media, but also what it has to lose by not engaging. You will want to present the benefits of conversing directly with customers and influencers, but also the advantages that come from knowing what is being said in public about your brand and having the opportunity to address and defuse any negative situations before they become 'PR disasters'.

Identify the value: Show – with concrete examples where possible – specific ways in which social media engagement can deliver value to the organisation; especially if these benefits cannot be achieved as easily or cost-effectively (or indeed at all) through other marketing channels or methods.

Agree objectives: Your strategy will need concrete objectives so that once it is underway, you can demonstrate whether or not it is working. This sounds simplistic, but many B2B social media initiatives fail to include relevant objectives that tie in with the organisation's overall business goals. Ideally, agree three or four high-level objectives that are 'SMART' (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound).

Outline an implementation plan: Social media marketing requires people and departments to adopt new practices and responsibilities that often cut across established operational frameworks. You will need to outline how the strategy will work in practice, in order to convince the board that it is achievable and sustainable and will not undermine established structures.

The outline plan can be top-level only, since others will need to work with you on detailed plans. Initially, however, you should at least cover:

- **How the programme will be managed**
- **What governance will be in place**
- **Which channels have been chosen for distribution and why**
- **How the messaging and content will be developed**
- **How the messaging and content will be delivered**
- **Who will be involved**
- **How much time and resource they will need to commit**
- **What each person or department will contribute**
- **How they will collaborate.**

(For further advice on creating an implementation plan, see page 10.)

In following these steps you will have a solid foundation for convincing the board that social media engagement is the right approach for the organisation, which should go a long way towards gaining their support for the implementation of your proposed strategy.

"Show specific ways in which social media engagement can deliver value to the organisation."

Business case

Securing board-level support for your social media programme is vital, but it's not the end of the story. You will also need to make sure that the rest of the organisation is onside, especially those teams and departments who will play an active role in implementing the strategy.

To secure the support of all of the relevant stakeholders, you will need to draw up a business case: an internal proposal that outlines the rationale for implementing a social media programme, how it will work in practice, and the benefits it will bring to the organisation.

There are usually three different viewpoints that you will need to address:

- **Those who support your championing of the cause**
- **Those who support the principle but have issues with committing time or resources to it**
- **Those who support the principle but have different ideas about the approach**

The business case can be used as a vehicle for negotiating these differing viewpoints and reaching a consensus on the way forward. Typically, it would cover the following topics:

Current situation: A realistic assessment of the current status of your company's social media presence and capabilities, versus what is happening in the market.

Objectives: The high-level SMART objectives for the programme – as agreed by the Board during the initial workshop session outlined in section 1 – backed by initial social media monitoring research.

Critical success factors: An estimate of what the programme as a whole needs in terms of management, internal resources and external services such as agency help with buzz monitoring and content creation.

Operational framework: A high-level overview of the programme management structure. This will set out the roles and responsibilities of the steering team; list the groups who will contribute content or resources; and establish any ancillary/external facilities needed to support ongoing operations. (For further advice on drawing up an operational framework, see page 8.)

Implementation plan: A summary of the proposed implementation plan, including timelines, messaging platform, content schedule, KPIs, policies and guidelines, and crisis management plans.
(For further advice on creating an implementation plan, see page 10.)

You may find that the following tactics help to make your proposal as compelling as possible:

- Demonstrate senior-level support for the programme
- Provide real-world examples of how social media can turn customers into active and public advocates for your brand
- Present statistical evidence visually in attractive and compelling ways
- Emphasise the experimental nature of the programme and reassure stakeholders that it is not expected to be perfect from the start – but that a process will be in place to manage risks, learn lessons and make refinements. This can help to convince more risk-averse stakeholders to pledge their support.

> Provide real-world examples of how social media can turn customers into active and public advocates for your brand.

Operational framework

The third pillar is a detailed operational framework, expanding on the one outlined in the business case. This covers the logistical detail needed to make the social media strategy work, from its management structure through to governance, skills, IT systems and integration with other business functions.

At the heart of the operational framework are detailed proposals for how the programme will be managed and how the parties involved will collaborate. A typical management structure will comprise a steering team, a number of contributing stakeholders from across the organisation, and support services provided by agencies or internal departments.

Steering team: Establish who should be invited onto the steering team, their responsibilities (e.g. setting objectives, performance monitoring, managing resources, ensuring governance), and set out how the team will work together to achieve the programme's objectives.

Stakeholders: Set out which departments or groups (e.g. Marketing, PR, Branding) will be involved in the programme, what their involvement will be (e.g. defining messages, creating content, engaging on social media platforms), and how they will collaborate.

Support services: Establish which departments and agencies will be involved in providing support services such as editorial research and planning, content creation, buzz monitoring and reporting, and IT provision and support – and how those services will be managed.

The operational framework should also specify the policies, processes and governance mechanisms that determine how the social media programme will operate. Considerations here include:

Governance framework: A governance framework is essential to ensure consistency of messaging and brand positioning, as well as compliance with overall corporate policy. The framework will specify everything from naming conventions for social media profiles to escalation procedures for different types of comment (e.g. direct sales enquiries, customer complaints, reputational attack).

Skills and training: Define the skills and knowledge required of participants in the programme, and outline any training that is needed to ensure those skills are in place. This can range from coaching to providing simple 'how to' guides for specific types of social media activity.

Motivation: To keep people engaging successfully, ensure there are processes for communicating and sharing social media successes that have had a direct positive impact on the business.

Social media presence: Establish what social media profiles are needed by auditing the company identities already in existence, then carry out a gap analysis to identify what additional presences and profiles are needed in order to achieve the objectives of the social media strategy.

Integration: Specify how the programme will integrate with other marketing and communications efforts throughout the organisation, to ensure consistency of approach and optimal use of content.

IT infrastructure: Determine the applications and processes that will be needed to support the social media programme, and how they will be integrated with existing marketing systems. For example, you may well want social media activity to integrate with your CRM and analytics systems, in order to show how leads have been generated or nurtured through social media efforts. Intranet facilities may be helpful for day-to-day communication between people involved in the programme.

> Ensure there are processes for communicating and sharing social media successes that have had a direct positive impact on the business.

Implementation plan

Having gained the backing of the board and the buy-in of key stakeholders, and with a robust operational framework in place, the fourth and final pillar of your social media marketing strategy is the implementation plan.

This is a structured deployment plan that pulls together the various elements of the strategy, from the messaging platform and content calendar to your chosen success metrics, reporting framework, IT infrastructure and supporting resources. A typical plan might include:

Timeline: Your first venture into social media marketing should have defined start and end dates, with milestones in between, so that you can assess its impact and make any necessary adjustments. Reviewing the programme at defined points will also enable you to demonstrate performance against your original SMART objectives.

Messaging platform: Determine the messages that you want to communicate via social media, and how they will help to achieve your organisation's business and marketing goals. As well as marketing messages, you may also consider using social media for brand positioning, customer service, thought leadership and communicating your organisation's ethical, environmental or social credentials.

Content calendar: List the key business issues you want to cover and draft a calendar of relevant content you intend to create. This should tie in with specific marketing initiatives such as product launches, events and lead-generation campaigns as well as supporting your organisation's overarching thought leadership themes and lead-nurturing programmes. Remember though, that in social media, the customer drives the agenda, so content must be tailored to the issues and concerns they are discussing online.

KPIs and metrics: Your KPIs will depend on your marketing objectives and your organisation's overall business goals, but may include simple, measurable elements like numbers of mentions, sentiment, views/downloads of content assets, Net Promoter Scores or your activity vs. that of competitors.

Roles and responsibilities: Set out who will be involved in the programme, what their roles and responsibilities will be, how much time each person or team is expected to spend on it, what agency support is required, what training may be needed, and any budget implications.

Process framework: Define all the processes involved in the programme, such as those governing content creation and approvals; monitoring and reporting arrangements; and liaison with other relevant business functions.

Internal communications plan: Set out how you will communicate your social media marketing activities to the rest of the organisation, so that those not immediately involved will have visibility to the strategy and the opportunity to 'join the conversation'.

> Reviewing the programme at defined points will enable you to demonstrate performance against your original objectives.

The importance of social media monitoring

Social media monitoring – or 'listening' to relevant conversations taking place on social media platforms – can play a key role at every stage as you formulate your social media marketing strategy. In particular, it will provide you with valuable examples, facts and evidence to support your business case and strategy recommendations – typically including:

- **The current profile and perception of your organisation – and your competitors – on social media platforms, and how that compares to your ideal brand positioning**
- **Which employees are already engaging on your organisation's behalf, and what you need to do to ensure that activity remains in line with your business objectives and brand positioning**
- **The social networks and platforms where it would benefit your organisation to be more active**
- **The key influencers and blogs that your organisation should be engaging with**
- **The business issues that are preoccupying your target audience segments**
- **The content formats – e.g. videos, white papers, podcasts – that are most popular with your target audience.**

Without this insight, it is greatly more difficult to formulate a compelling case for a social media marketing strategy, or to devise plans that adequately meet the needs of your organisation and its key target audiences. There are many excellent social media monitoring tools available today – or ask your marketing, digital or PR agency about their 'listening' and reporting services.

> Social media monitoring will provide you with valuable examples, facts and evidence to support your business case...

Summary

B2B companies, especially larger organisations, may feel daunted by the complexity of creating and deploying an organisation-wide corporate social media strategy. However, as with any large-scale corporate initiative, detailed planning and senior executive endorsement hold the key to successful implementation.

By firmly establishing the four pillars outlined in this white paper, B2B companies will be in an excellent position to deploy a coherent, workable and successful social media strategy that will deliver significant financial, commercial and reputational benefits to the organisation.

About MOI

Marketing Options International have taken over 10 years' user-centric digital marketing and social media marketing experience in delivering effective and measurable customer engagement and demand creation. Our digital services range from HTML emails, website design, PPC and banner advertising through to social media consulting, social media engagement, search engine optimisation and mobile app development. We create digital marketing content that delivers real value to your target audience, through microsites, webinars, videos, iPhone/Android apps, virals, user polls, eBooks and much more.

For further information, please contact:

Chris Sanger
Digital Marketing Manager

e: chris.sanger@mointernational.com
t: +44 (0)1932 233000

Marketing Options International
Walton Reach
Manor Road
Walton-on-Thames
Surrey KT12 2PF

www.mointernational.com

marketingoptions
INTERNATIONAL

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