ORACLE CLOUD

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Managing the Social Media Mix

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Introduction

The growth in social media has overwhelmed many marketers. Things are moving so fast that many brand managers stay busy keeping tabs on the latest developments and trends, with little time to look at the mix of social media being put into the market.

The term *marketing mix* refers to how a company allocates resources across the four *P*s of marketing: placement, price, product, and promotion. The *social media mix* approach outlined in this white paper applies the same resource allocation concept to social media to determine how a company should allocate information to Twitter, blogs, Facebook, e-mail, and other social marketing outlets. This white paper provides a step-by-step guide for determining your strategy—and the proper mix of marketing channels—in social media. With it, you can use the time you have to efficiently define a balanced social media mix.

Eight Steps to a Better Social Media Mix

Social media is a continually evolving realm with amazing potential for business communications, but it doesn't have to be overwhelming. By following the eight steps outlined in this white paper, you can clearly make decisions about your social media mix and online communications strategy.

1. Gather Your Portfolio

Start by doing a quick inventory of the social media channels that you already use. If you are like most businesses, you will find that you already have different channels set up and managed by different people. Write each channel name on a Sticky Note: one for Twitter, Facebook, the company blog, e-mail, and any other online communications channel you use. (For the moment, don't worry about social media channels you want to use in the future. Those will be covered in a later step.) Having this data in front of you can help you organize you channels by overall reach.



Figure 1. Gather your portfolio.

2. List Your Content

Inventory the kinds of information that you distribute through your social media channels, such as white papers, status updates, case studies, event information, customer service, and industry discussion. List each content type to make the first column of a table. As you make your list, keep in mind that—beyond different information—there are also different types of conversations you're trying to foster with each piece of informational material.



Figure 2. List your content.

3. Look Through Four Social Media Lenses

Four lenses—frequency and formality, the condensing funnel, the waterfall, and subscription size—offer different ways for you to look at your communications to generate new ideas and understanding about how social marketing works.

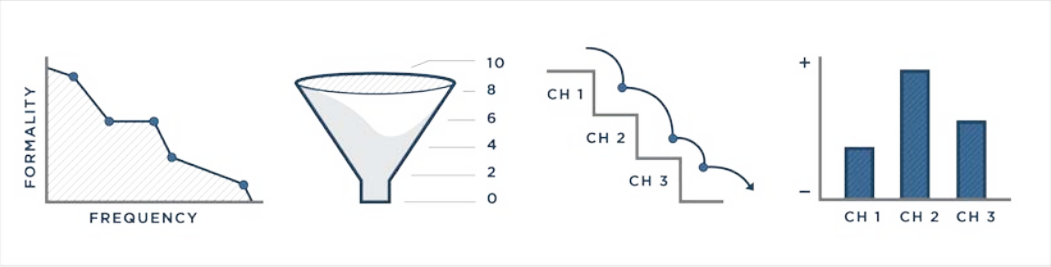


Figure 3. Look through four social media lenses.

Lens 1: Frequency and Formality

On the content list from Step 2, add two columns, "Frequency" and "Formality."

Frequency means how often you send a communication. *Formality* means the general level of resource investment the communication requires, how conventional it is, or perhaps how geared toward a strategic audience, response, or result. Frequency and formality tend to be inverse: formal messages go out less often; informal messages, more often.

Rank all your content by frequency and formality. For example, if you have 10 content types, rank each from 1 to 10. Your most frequent communication—say Twitter posts—ranks a 1, second-most frequent ranks a 2, and so on.

Now, rank the formality of each channel 1 through 10, as well. Formality is perhaps tougher to gauge than frequency, but remember, it's a relative scale. Deciding whether e-mails are more formal than blog posts can start a good, strategic discussion with your team.

Lens 2: The Condensing Funnel

Consider whether or not your content funnels through your communication channels. For example, your organization might tweet everything, blog about industry trends, and use a newsletter mostly for promotions. Thinking of that content in a funnel that leads toward a business goal will highlight how and where content gets redistributed.

Overall, where does your funnel lead readers?

Lens 3: The Waterfall

As you think about the funnel, begin to think of content as a waterfall that runs through it. For example, some tweets may lead to blog posts, and some blog posts may lead to white papers. You want to highlight this flow, because it leads to better content development once you have an online communications strategy in place, as shown in Step 8.

As this relates to the first lens, you'll see that formality often increases as you move down the waterfall.

Lens 4: Subscription Size

Ranking social media channels in terms of subscribers has a huge impact on your communications strategy, too. It takes time and effort to transition communities across social media, and attrition happens all the time.

Rank your channels by number of subscribers. Write the rankings on the Sticky Notes you made for each channel in Step 1.

4. Connect Content with Channels

In this step, try to figure out what content is best suited to each channel. Make a Sticky Note for all of your content types, including the rankings for frequency and formality. Group these content types with the channels that use them.

If one content type goes under multiple channels, make duplicate Sticky Notes for it, but aim for no more than three duplicates of any one content type. Resist the urge to put every content type under every channel.

People respond best when receiving specific information from one specific channel. Many organizations use Twitter to send out information about events, share industry links, and solicit customer service questions—all valid purposes. But Twitter is often most effective when used consistently for one purpose, offering an experience that subscribers can rely on.

During this step, it's likely that one social media channel will emerge as a potential digest, containing content about all other channels—or *metacontent*, which is content about content. Having a digest can be a helpful marketing tool.

Figure out whether your digest is a blog, Twitter stream, newsletter, Facebook page, or something else. By limiting each kind of content to two or three channels, you can focus content on the digest and one other channel, without watering it down and producing inconsistencies.

User-generated content and application experiences:

Organizations are not limited to leveraging branded content to engage the community. They can also use engaging application experiences. In fact, application experience can create user-generated content that is even more effective than brand content because it is more personal. For example, running a contest is one of the most popular ways to drive user-generated content into the stream.

5. Distill the Essence of Each Channel Through Consolidation

Now you should have groups of content under every communication channel. Add up the rankings and calculate the average formality and average frequency value for each content group.

Organize the content groups in order of their averages, with informal on the left and formal on the right. If there are two rankings that are the same, place the group with the greater frequency ranking to the left.

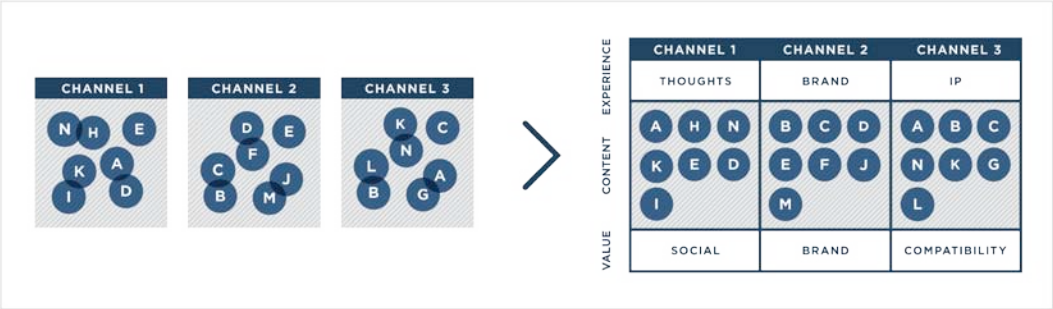


Figure 4. Organize the content groups in order of their averages under every communication channel.

For example,

- Twitter posts might be mostly about "industry thoughts."
- A blog might explain product features, analyze industry publications, and tell product stories. Thus, it could be about "product ideas."
- Ideas are less formal than white papers or case studies, which may be better suited to a Website about "intellectual property."
- A newsletter might feature summaries and links to your organization's best content, serving as a "metacontent digest."

Now, distill a communications goal or value and apply it to each channel. For example,

- Twitter: "fostering community"
- Blog: "strengthening brand awareness"
- Newsletter: "establishing credibility"

Now that you have your channels organized from formal to informal and labeled with distilled descriptions, it's time to compare them for overlap. If you find significant overlap, you should consider combining the channels into one.

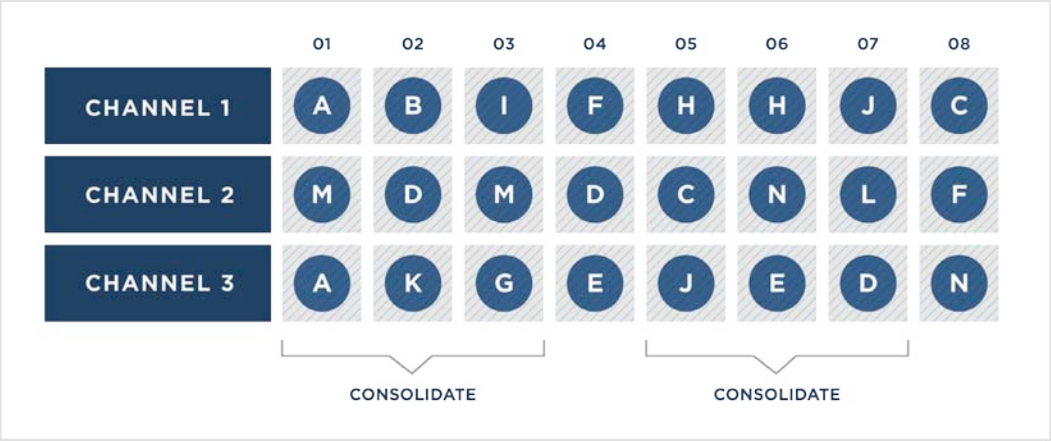


Figure 5. Compare your channels for content overlap.

You may find that frequency and formality are not the best organizing criteria for you; organizing by description may work better for finding opportunities to consolidate. Either way, when you consolidate channels, you save resources that you can apply to underserved parts of your community. Knowing the number of subscribers is critical.

For example, it may not make sense to have two community channels if there is a great deal of overlap, especially if the subscriber base is significantly larger for one channel. You will probably get more return on your investment if you use the smaller channel to direct people to the more active channel, gradually getting rid of the smaller channel altogether.

Now your social media mix is starting to take shape.

Don't be afraid to experiment and gather data. One easy research tool: put an online survey in your existing channels. Everything you ask should tie to changes you can make in your mix. For example,

- What types of content are your subscribers interested in?
- Are they aware of your other channels?
- Do they subscribe to more than one channel?
- Would they consider migrating from one channel to another?

Using application experiences to listen to your community:
Polls are a great way to use an engagement application to gather information from your community. Alternatively, if you use a support community like Get Satisfaction to collect customer ideas, praise, questions, and support requests, bring that experience onto your fan page or Website to gather information.

6. Fill in the Gaps

With consolidation underway and data from an online survey in hand, you will discover that parts of your community stick out as underserved (or not served at all). Most of the time, your community will tell you what kinds of social media they like and where you are falling short. Make sure you listen to them for clues.

Use that community feedback in a brainstorming session with your team. Here are two quick pointers for brainstorming:

- **Be crazy.** Ideation works when participants feel free to throw out any idea, no matter how silly or impractical it may seem.
- **Be prolific.** Encourage divergent thinking, go for quantity of ideas, and remember that the best ideas arise after you've generated lots of them.

Look for similarities and differences in the ideas your team generates. Converge on the ones that fit best with your brand and organization. By the end, you should have a good list of ideas for where to take your social media mix.

The next step is to prioritize and structure them into a strategy.

7. Build Your Strategy

Strategy allocates limited resources by prioritizing what activities return the greatest investment value over time. The best strategies say "no" more than "yes." In other words, there are many options you could pursue, but only one that you will. The hard part is sticking to your decisions.

Two strategy tools can help: a prioritization tool, which helps you make a decision, and a management tool, which helps you stay on track.

Strategy Prioritization Tool

The prioritization tool allows you to visualize potential strategic initiatives based on their feasibility and importance. You can begin this process by listing all your initiatives in the lefthand column of a table. Then you can assign a feasibility and importance rating to each. Use a standard budget of points for each column (in the example in Figure 6, there are five points per step). Graph the results to understand which steps to prioritize.

INITIATIVE	FEASIBILITY	IMPORTANCE
1	6	1
2	2	2
3	1	3
4	6	4
5	5	5
6	6	6
7	9	7
TOTAL	7 x 5 = 35	7 x 5 = 35



Figure 6. Use a strategy exercise to prioritize which social activities give the best return on investment.

In the example, there are seven initiatives, each with a ranking from 1 to 7. As you rank them, plot them on a chart—feasibility versus importance—with three priority zones: high, medium, and low. Only consider high-priority options (in the example case, #6 and #7).

Strategy Management Tool

The management tool helps you figure out which short-term strategic goals will advance your long-term strategy. Visualize the tactics you can use to support each strategic step, and understand how they are dependent on each other and what resources are required to complete them.

Strategy is the overarching plan that guides organizational effort to define and move toward a goal in the most efficient manner possible. Tactics are the set of interlinked steps that contribute to the progress toward the goal. The dots on the arc in Figure 7 represent strategic steps, which tie down to a set of associated tactics that mark progress toward their strategic step. The boxes below the arc represent tactical implementations; size indicates required effort, and the dashed lines indicate dependencies on previous tasks being completed first.

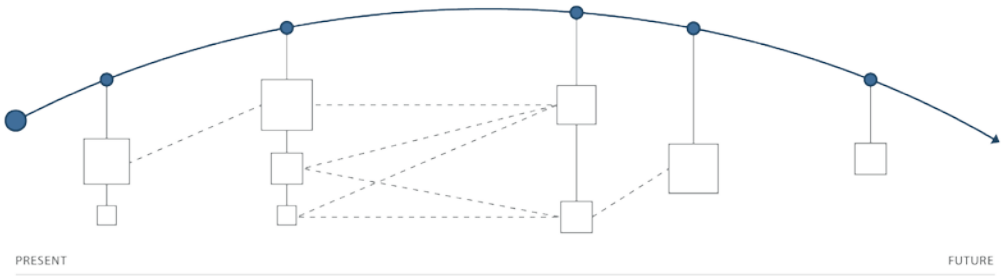


Figure 7. Visualize a strategy arc and the supporting tactical implementation flow to help your plan stay on track.

The arc in Figure 7 represents a timeline for managing projects. Each point along the arc marks the completion of a step toward the end goal. Each step is tied to a set of tactics. The dotted lines connect the tactics, showing which must be completed first. Use relative size to indicate resources needed for each tactic, showing where you need to staff up or down. By visualizing tactics, it is possible to move their placement along the timeline to even out workflow and resource requirements. As with all timelines, it may be helpful to work backwards from the end goal to the present.

If you use the prioritization and management tools, you'll end up with a solid roadmap for your online communications strategy.

8. Sketch Your Content Flow

This is the final—and perhaps most important—step that puts all your hard work in a visual, understandable layout. Think again about the waterfall lens in Step 3. Which channels feed into each other? This is *content flow*, and now is the time to sketch what it looks like in detail.

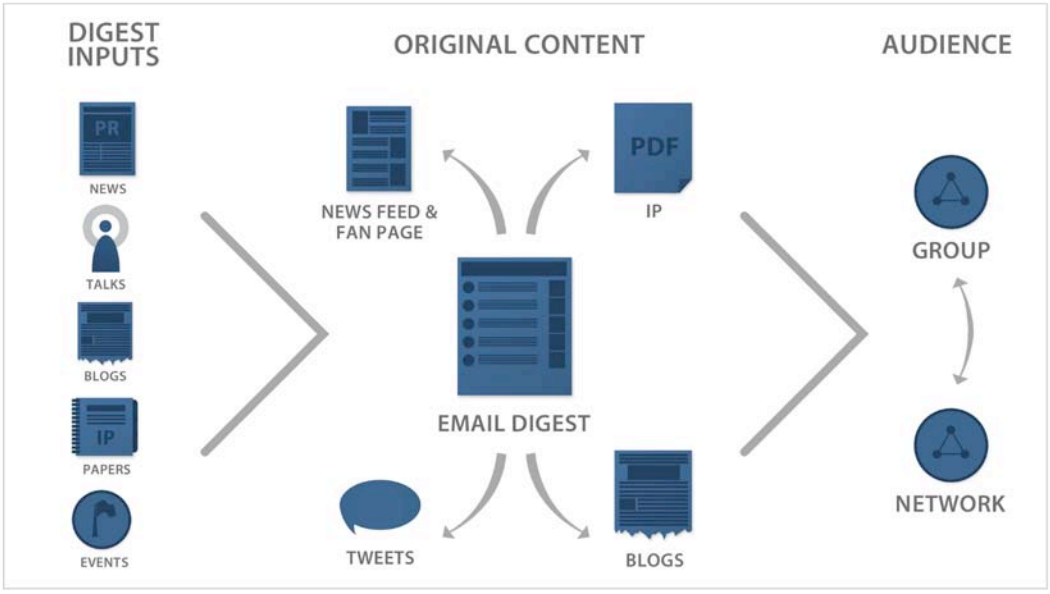


Figure 8. Sketch your content flow.

Start by putting your "digest" channel at the center and work out from there. Think about these questions:

- What are all the inputs (such as PR, blogs, papers, events) to the digest?
- How does it drive to the original content?
- How does it spur conversation?
- Where does intellectual property (IP) get spun off?

As you make your content sketch, aim to keep all the content accessible on an ongoing basis for your community. Making the content accessible will improve search engine optimization, as well.

Changes in your social media mix require changes to format and design of your communication outlets (Website navigation, newsletter layout, and so on). You can further refine those design changes through A/B testing or variance testing as you continue to implement your new strategy.

Conclusion

This white paper shows you how to stay true to your brand strategy as you devise a social media mix that works for your company. If you treat these steps as an iterative process, you will be able to experiment with channels and content types, brainstorm new approaches, gather data and feedback, and then refine your mix. From the best strategy comes the best mix; likewise, from the best mix come the most satisfying rewards.



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Hardware and Software, Engineered to Work Together