



# The First Social Media Conversation

You're the one that knows social media is something you need to be paying attention to. Not because Twitter is the coolest thing, or that YouTube is going to make you a million dollars, but because you need better ways to open doors and windows for your customers, ways they can connect with your company and understand the work you're doing.

When you're preparing to have that initial conversation with the boss (or your client, or your team) about why social media matters, keep in mind these topics and areas to address.

## Goals and Objectives

When you're approaching social media for the first time, it's super important that you start by explaining, in very clear business terms, what you hope to accomplish by introducing it into the communications mix. Your focus doesn't necessarily have to be marketing - social media has lots of purpose throughout the organization - but by keeping your discussion focused on the bigger picture of what you hope to accomplish, you'll have the attention of folks who share those goals. (Big hint: if you can do some internal research on your global organization vision and goals overall, your localized goals will be that much more refined.)

Examples include:

- Raising awareness for the brand with online audiences using social networks
- Capturing competitive or industry intelligence to improve product and service offerings
- Taking the pulse of your brand across online channels
- Improving customer service by offering access through new online channels
- Giving the company new platforms for contributing thought leadership
- Recruiting or discovering talent

Most importantly, keep the conversation focused away from specific tools to start with. Selecting those comes last, after you've determined where your audiences and communities are, and what tools make sense based on your established goals.

## Do Your Research

Spend some time in social media before you pitch it to the decision makers. Set up your own basic listening station with available free tools, and pay attention to what's happening out there so you can build a business case. Some things you might want to research:

- Statistics for social media usage (and specify in your industry, if you can)
- How your competitors are (or are not) using social media
- Whether there are conversations happening about your company. If there are, are they good, bad, or indifferent? If not, what do you think could improve that?
- What are the current hot topics in your industry, and how are they being discussed online?



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When you're talking about social media, skip the jargon. "Joining the Conversation" isn't a business case in itself. Your boss, team, or clients want to understand what the effect will be of doing so, and how that's going to grow their business. Use business terms to articulate value and impact whenever possible, and don't reference terms like ROI or CPM unless you mean specifically those things.

## Form Some Educated Hypotheses

If you need to rely on case studies to make your social media case, do so sparingly, and with the ultimate goal of translating that use case into terms that are relevant to your business. If you can draw parallels between varied elements of other people's social media efforts and use them to craft your own unique strategy, you'll be delivering something of real value to your business. Talk with your stakeholders about these things:

- If we can find examples of successful social media usage in our industry, what do we like about them? What would we do differently?
- How does our company resemble the ones that have achieved what we want to achieve? Do we have the same structure, resources, culture? If not, can we attain those things, or do we need to take a different approach?
- Does our community seem like it would be receptive to our participation in social media? Why do we or do we not think so? Do we have any evidence or feedback to support that?
- Do we believe we can support revenue growth through social media if social media is not the sales channel itself? How and why? What parts of the education and sales cycle can we positively impact through use of social media, beyond just reaching more people?

Coming into a meeting prepared to discuss these things, along with having a solid idea of the areas you can and should impact with social media (backed up with as much research as you can muster) is a big step in the right direction, and will give your strategy a sound foundation.

## Have A Plan

Based on your hypotheses, sketch out a simple plan that talks about how you'll approach your social media project. It's at this point that you can begin to consider which tools you'll use to accomplish your goals, but only after you've determined why they're the right fit based on your research and listening. The plan you present should cover things like:

- The goals and objectives for social media, and why it's the right fit
- Your overarching strategy and roadmap
- Risk Assessment: what are the potential downsides?
- The resources you'll need to execute it, and over what timeframe (including human and capital)
- What tools and tactics you'll explore
- Training needs
- How you'll measure and report on progress



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- What you'll do with the information you learn to improve future plans
- A Plan B if things don't go as planned (what's your exit or contingency plan if this doesn't work?)

A great way to build a plan is sometimes to ask your boss up front what they'd like to see in order to consider a new business initiative. Tell them that you'd like to discuss social media as a potential strategy, and ask what questions about they have up front. Then you can come to your meeting prepared.

## Negotiation and Diplomacy

Rarely is making the case for social media a single shot success. Often it entails several discussions, negotiation, and compromise. Baby steps matter, so consider what small steps in the right direction would count as progress for you, and work toward those in turn. If skepticism or culture issues are really what are standing in your way, consider refocusing your goals toward internal education and dialogue about social media to get the conversation started, and address those issues or misconceptions first.

All in all, adoption of social media isn't as light as just adding another tactic to the toolbox. True, it's a new set of communication tools, but the implications for how it impacts business, communication, and culture run deeper than Facebook or Twitter. Taking the time to prepare for a substantive conversation with your boss, clients, or team out of the gate can set you up for a solid social media implementation that's sustainable, measurable, and effective.