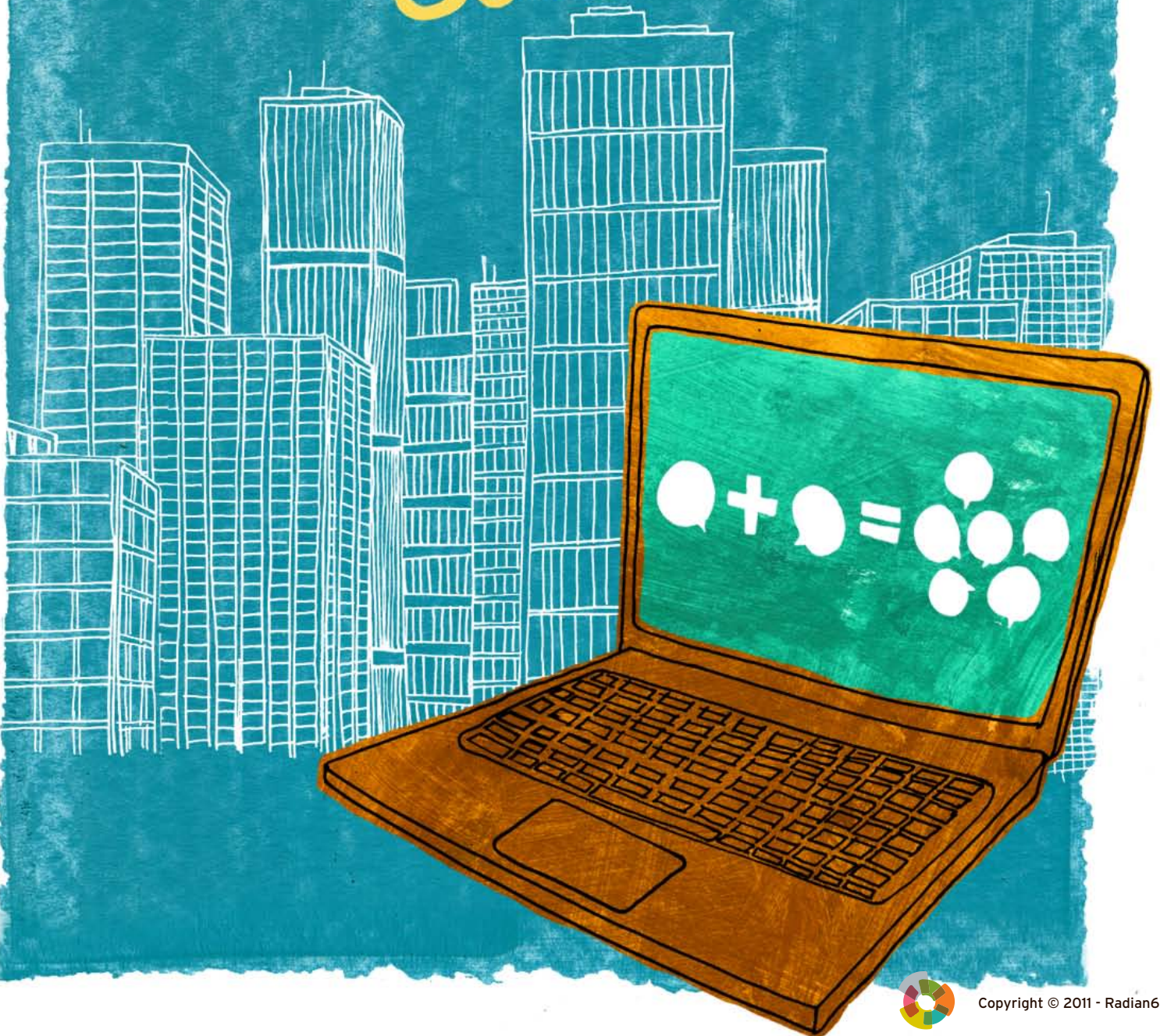


Training Your Company for Social Media



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Social media use is now such an automatic and frequent part of our day-to-day activities that it can be hard to understand the value and necessity of social media training within your organization. But personal social media use is quite different from social media use for business purposes, and as you integrate more teams into your larger social strategy, it's your responsibility to get everyone involved on the same page.

This means taking steps to help folks understand your business' bigger social media picture, how their use of these channels fits into that big picture, and how their online interactions impact the reputation of your company's brand (as well as their own personal reputation). And despite the ubiquity of social media, it's almost guaranteed that a small segment of your employee base won't be comfortable with even the basics of online social networks, so you'll need to account for them, as well.

All this is to say that you will need to invest time, effort and do a bit of thinking outside the box to create a strong and comprehensive social media training program for your company.

If you're unsure where or how to start, or if you just want to make sure you're covering all your bases, this eBook is for you. In the upcoming chapters we'll talk about:

- *The specific reasons why training everyone in social media use is so important*
- *The preparatory steps you need to take during your program planning phase*
- *A loose framework to plan your training course programming*
- *Internal hurdles and considerations*
- *Ongoing education and post-training resource planning*

Creating a social media training programming is no walk in the park, but it doesn't have to be an exercise in back breaking, either. With the right information in hand, you can create a solid training program that gets your basic-level employees feeling comfortable and your advanced-level employees ready to use their social networking skills on your company's behalf.

So, are you ready to get started? Take a deep breath and let's dig in.

CHAPTER 2

TRAIN EVERYONE

All too often you hear that the marketing department of ABC Corporation has hired an intern to do their social media outreach. That marketing department is so excited they hired a “digital native” and they believe this intern is going to rock the socks off everyone with their social media prowess.

Then, the intern gets started and said marketing department finds themselves surprised and disappointed by their intern’s demonstrated lack of prowess. Sending Facebook messages while half-asleep? No problem. Getting an actual business return on his or her social media efforts for ABC Corp? It’s just not happening.

Why does that happen? Why does it seem like the people who “get” social media on a personal level, who grew up immersed in it, struggle to turn their acumen into an effective business skill? Because, while the social media world preaches often about how business relationships are like personal relationships, they’re just not. At least not yet.

Social networking and the concept of social business is new enough that many people entrenched in the corporate world are still skeptical of that comparison. They see business as requiring a handling and professionalism not present (or necessary) in personal relationships, and have a hard time understanding how the apparent casualness of social media can benefit business dealings.

So, couple that skepticism with a young intern who’s used to managing his or her social media interactions from a personal standpoint and you’re not going to see the results you’re hoping for.

The point of this anecdote is to say even the most “skilled” social networkers will need to be trained in some way or another. Let’s look at that truth a bit more, shall we?

Who and Why?

To avoid confusion we’ve come up with a few different archetypes of people as they relate to the adoption of digital tools. You’ll have all of these archetypes within your employee base, and will need to create training based around the various comfort and use levels of each.

Digital Native: The digital native is someone who’s grown up in a highly digital world. They’ve had access to various online social platforms most of their lives and are very comfortable using those platforms, as well as adopting any new ones that come on the scene. Digital tools are a part of digital natives’ daily lives, to such a

degree that many of them would be at a loss as to how to go on about their days if some of these tools were taken away.

Savvy Technologist: The savvy technologist is someone who, while not having grown up with them, feels comfortable using most online social platforms and digital tools. These people approach new platforms with caution and often let others fumble around before joining in.

While they lean toward using digital tools to manage their daily lives, savvy technologists have no problem reverting back to their analog ways if necessary, and sometimes even opt to maintain those analog habits that seem more efficient and effective (e.g., maintaining a written day planner).

Reluctant User: The reluctant user is someone who's aware of the digital world and social media but hesitates to explore and dive into the digital space. These people have heard of big-name social networks like Facebook and probably carry around a smartphone for work, but that is the extent of their digital adoption. They do not think about or use digital tools more than necessary and generally resist incorporating those tools into their lives.

Digital Contrarian: The digital contrarian is someone who's averse to the digital world. They've probably heard of social networking but they think it's a bunch of piffle, and they'll use email for work purposes, but if they have a personal email account, it was set up by a friend/sibling/child and is rarely if ever checked. These folks prefer and almost strictly use traditional communication channels to reach their friends, family and business partners. If you send them an email, they'll ask you why you didn't just give them a call.

Digital Newbie: Unlike the digital contrarian, the digital newbie isn't opposed to the digital world so much as they are simply unaware of it. While the digital native might feel these folks must live under rocks, digital newbies go on about their day not thinking or wondering about the online social world or the need for an iPhone. Their life and day-to-day activities go on just fine without any digital intervention, and they don't see the need to change their habits or behaviors.

One of the first questions that might come to mind after reviewing these digital archetypes is: If there are people who are opposed to or unaware of the digital world lurking in my business, should they be using social media at all?

That's a good question, and the answer is, probably not. But just because these folks won't be using social media doesn't mean they shouldn't have a general understanding of your reasons behind using these tools. It doesn't mean they shouldn't understand how those employees who are using social media are portraying themselves and your brand online. It doesn't mean they shouldn't be aware of the rules and guidelines you've placed around corporate social media use.

People change their minds all the time, and if one of your currently digital contrarians has a change of heart, it's in your organization's best interest to educate them before that switch so you're not scrambling to make sure they know how to handle themselves out in the big, bad online world.

Of course, differences in technological adoption rates isn't the only reason you need to get a social media training program up and running.

As your social media program expands, the use of online social channels will differ among teams. Your Customer Service team might be using Twitter to answer customer questions and assist with product issues, while your Product Management team might be involved in some key discussions within your brand community to gather feedback and plan for important product updates. Social media use is as diverse as the platforms that make up the online social space, and as you see the results of your social strategy start to pour in, new opportunities and uses will develop that require teaching and training.

If you want to actually see the results of your efforts, you need to track your activity and the outcomes they produce, as well as report on those findings on a regular basis. We know it would be much easier to wave a magic wand and have six months of strategy results appear on your computer desktop, but technology hasn't developed that far yet. Until it does, you'll have to use social media monitoring and measurement software to keep track of your work, and that software requires, you got it, training.

Social media can be overwhelming in a number of ways. First, there's loads of information coming at you at any given time, more than you could ever sift through or process quickly. Second, anyone with an Internet connection can search for and find your public social media posts, which means millions of people can see what you've written/snapped a picture of/videoed and, thus, make judgments about you and the company you're affiliated with at any time. If you, as an organization, provide training, you can combat the overwhelming nature of too much information by creating methods for your employees to manage that information, and you can save them and you the pain of embarrassing posts and inconsistent brand messages.

Whatever reason above resonated with you, it's reason enough to begin outlining a social media training program and researching the resources you'll need to make it happen, and we'll help you get started in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

TRAINING PROGRAM PREP AND FRAMEWORK

There's some due diligence you need to do before starting to map out your social media training program. Much of that due diligence will be discussions surrounding the specific social media needs and expectations of each team within your organization and seeing how those needs and expectations fit within the boundaries of your current social media strategy.

Above all, it's important you create a training program that ties to your company social media plan and addresses the various needs of those who will be participating.

So, what are some specific steps you can take to cover your planning tracks? Well, we were just getting to that.

Conversations

As we first mentioned, the most time consuming and important piece of this pre-planning step is sitting down with your teams to discuss their expectations and needs for getting into social media. Depending on the culture and size of your organization, you might want to hold these discussions with entire teams or limit them to include only team managers.

That latter option isn't to leave people out of the loop but allow for the majority of the communication regarding this program and its development to come from managers. Again, that choice is entirely relative to your company's culture and how you feel these discussions will be most effective. It's important to remember that this training program is steeped in organizational change, so you'll need to be strategic about your communications beforehand and throughout the planning phase.

With these discussions you'll want to establish a few different things:

- Who within each team is going to be using social media
- If there will be a single point person to oversee department social media activities or if everyone will have a fairly even distribution of tasks
- Which social media tasks each team has been assigned to perform, or which tasks you believe they should be performing
- The social media comprehension levels of all team members (not just general use, but understanding of how social media can be applied in business settings)

The findings you glean from these meetings should give you a clear view of the various user levels you must accommodate, as well inform you as to what sorts of conversations have already happened around the company's social media initiatives and how people are feeling about those plans.

Social Media Training Team

So, you've gathered all the information you can about the current levels of social media adoption and understanding within your company, and now is the time to use that information to your advantage. The folks within your organization who are enthusiastic about social media and "get it" could be a great help in planning and stewarding this training program.

Create a cross-functional social media training team that can act as both a point of contact for coordinating training course attendance and employee benchmarking, and as a resource to answer questions and provide constructive feedback. They can - and should - tweak the training program as necessary.

Why Should You Develop a Social Media Training Team?

People often feel better learning about new things from those who are enthusiastic to teach. You can, of course, leave program development and execution to your HR or product training teams, but they will rarely have the same level of understanding or excitement as a group of people specifically chosen because of their attitude toward social media. If your social media training team is made up of folks from all around your company, accessing the team will be much easier for employees and less intimidating than if the team were from a single department. Also, when you develop a cross-functional team comprised of people from all walks of your organization, they will be able to share varying perspectives and departmental needs. This ensures your training program will be as comprehensive as possible, and will address concerns and questions from every nook and cranny of your company.

As we mentioned in that first bullet, it's definitely not necessary to pull together a separate social media training team to get a social media training program up and running, but there are benefits to this method worth considering, and, like many of the other suggestions we've made and will continue to make throughout this eBook, it might be a great set-up for your company's culture.

External Training and Training the Trainer

While many of the social media platforms that exist today are easy to pick up given enough time, there is some supporting technology that you might need to use

that won't be as easy to understand. Technology like social media monitoring and measurement solutions can take external training to really understand and use properly. And that's okay! The plus side of this fact is that you're probably not going to have every person using social media in your company tracking and measuring the outcomes of their efforts in these platforms – that task will most likely be assigned to a few measurement and reporting-savvy folks, and you can limit your external training for these platforms to them.

And then there's training the trainer. For all the new social media platforms that come out, for all the changes to the company wide social media strategy, you must have a system in place to update and train your internal people who will be leading your training courses. This "Train the Trainer" program will not need to have as many classes or even be organized the same way, but you will have to regularly check in with your trainers and provide them any updated information or external resources they'll need to continue training the rest of your employees like pros.

Of course, there are independent agencies out there that provide social media training, and you can look into hiring them to assist with your training needs. If creating an internal training team isn't feasible, or if you're just more comfortable outsourcing that training and have the budgetary means to do so, hiring an external group to do all of your training might be a better option for you. Do your research beforehand and make sure to really look at your potential expenses against your potential savings before making a decision.

Building Your Training Program Framework

When the time finally comes to begin building your training program, you'll need to make sure it includes these things:

- Clearly stated purposes for why the company is adopting social media and why a training program is in place
- Clear goals and measurable objectives for each piece of the program
- Different course levels to account for different levels of adoption as well as create multiple opportunities for achievement and break the process into easily digestible mental bites
- Tactical how-to training, as well as conceptual training and example scenarios
- Testing or benchmarking to gauge the progress of employees as they move through the program
- A review process for assessing the effectiveness of the program, the effectiveness of your trainers and when your program needs updating

- A library of published educational resources that employees can access before, during and after training

This list is a general list that covers those larger aspects of your program you'll have to establish up front, but what about the specifics of your courses? What subjects should you cover? And how should your courses flow and be structured?

Social Media 101 Topics: Your basic social media training courses will cover the what, why and how of social media. So, you'll want to create curriculum that answer questions like: What is social media? Why does social media matter (to me, personally, and to this company)? How do I use social media? What are the big social networks? Which social networks does our company use? These courses should lay the foundation for social media use within your organization and explain the hands-on side of social networks.

Social Media 201 Topics: In this next level of courses, you should begin elaborating on the direct benefits businesses reap from using social media. These courses should focus on how specific departments and even individuals can use social media to achieve the goals of your company's social media strategy and larger business objectives.

Social Media 301 Topics: This set of courses should probably be reserved for the departments most heavily involved in your organization's social media plans. Those departments are often your Marketing, PR, and Communications departments, but not always (it, like everything else, all depends on that company social media plan). The 301-level courses will tackle social media use from a social business perspective, covering the nuances of social media engagement like long-term relationship management, identifying and responding to new business opportunities, community management and collaborating with other internal teams using social networks.

If you want to expand your course levels, or create a variety of courses tailored to your various departments, feel free to do so. The bottom line is to create a program that satisfies your company's social media learning needs – your program needs to help employees climb that learning curve so they can take off the training wheels and get started quickly and without too many hiccups.

CHAPTER 4

TAKING OFF THE TRAINING WHEELS

Ok, so you've followed all the above guidelines: crafted a social media policy, determined your company's best practices, zero'ed in on which staff members are going to play key roles in executing and facilitating your social media strategy, had multiple meetings with those key players, and instituted and followed through with an in-depth social media training program. Well, just like when you were learning to ride a bike for the first time, the training wheels have to come off. That comforting hand at your back is ready to let go and set you flying.

Nervous? Of course. One of the things that hesitant executives find most difficult about social media is surrendering control. Will there be bumps in the road? Yes, most definitely. So let's take a few moments to talk about how to feel comfortable with your employees engagement on social media platforms, as well as what you can do to ensure that you don't end up with a PR disaster due to a shortsighted tweet or Facebook post.

First things first. You have to trust your employees. Presumably you have hired people to work for your corporation for a reason. They are skilled, intelligent, professional and have a healthy grip on common sense. Add to that the in depth training and social media guidelines you have set up as we discussed in previous chapters, and you should have an army of company advocates spreading the good word about your products and/or services.

Allow them to find their voice and tone. We've talked a bit about this in previous blog posts, and it can mean many things to many people. Generally speaking, a writer's 'voice' allows them to express feelings and have opinions when writing, and it gives them the power to have those opinions and feelings heard and considered. While each employee's voice and tone should fall within each company's individual corporate framework of course - some will lean more conservative while others towards playfulness - they still factor directly into your company's social media execution, and employees need to have concrete guidelines as to what you expect their voice and tone to be. How far can they go? How humourous or cheeky can they be? How opinionated? And what exactly are they allowed to say? Whether on Facebook, Twitter or your company blog, having clear and concise knowledge of what your company voice is will help your employees talk to your customers with clarity and confidence.

Of course, even with all of the above taken into account, employees are human beings, not robots. Mistakes and errors in judgement are bound to happen. And of course, the very things that make social media advantageous to organizations using it for business purposes - transparency, immediacy, and enormous reach to the masses - are the same

things that will ensure a negative message or an inappropriate tweet will quickly be spread 'to infinity and beyond'. Just ask Kenneth Cole. But an honest slip up by an otherwise respected employee is not the end of the world. The key thing is to deal with it immediately and openly. Nothing smells worse than something that's been swept under the proverbial carpet. Don't forget that while your freshly trained employees are now social media savvy, so is everyone else, in fact probably more so. Social media users value the openness, contact and relationships they've built with organizations, and tend to not respond well to PR spin. If you've made a mistake, or caused offense in any way, deal with it. And deal with it via social media. If it's explainable, explain it. If there's any way to fix it, do so. Ignore it - or worse, try and spin it - at your peril.

So, glaring mistakes aside, there are other ways you can ensure that your position on the social media playing field is a positive one once those training wheels are off.

Whether you're a large, multi national conglomerate, or a small mom and pop startup, one of the key things to remember when engaging with your community is to be human.

Content may be king, but customer service is rapidly become the element that will differentiate your company from all the others. Think of your community as a beehive: it may be a living, breathing, responding entity as a whole, but it is made up of thousands of individuals, and they all deserve first rate one on one treatment. And while there are myriad ways that you can reach out and engage with your customers, if you make a point of following these three key tenets, you will be well on your way to keeping your community happy:

Listen to your community and make sure you quickly address problems while providing effective feedback. After having your team trained and your strategy in place, this might be the most important thing you do. Your customers are talking to you and they are talking about you - or your brand. The most shortsighted thing a company can do is ignore that. And we're not only talking about negative sentiment. Listening and learning from your community not only allows you to gauge when you are doing it right, it also allows you to pick up important clues and ideas regarding what you should be doing next. If you want to know what consumers want, it always pays to go to the source.

Ensure that employees from within your company with the appropriate skill sets for social media are at the helm, and if they aren't there, hire them. As we mentioned earlier it is vitally important to have experienced people manning your social media space. But experience isn't everything. By now, your employees will have been through your various social media training programs, and you should be able to easily determine which of them have the skills and personality traits needed to help you succeed in the social media landscape. They should have a detailed understanding of and firm belief in both social media as a whole, and your social media campaign; be fierce and knowledgeable promoters of your goods and services; have a natural 'way with words'; an instinct for best business practices; and a firm grasp of what's

appropriate and not appropriate to say while they are in the public eye as the 'face' of your organization. Your community will grow to trust and respond well to skilled social representatives. And a cool head will always prevail.

Keep engagement natural, effective, and dare we say it again, human. It's almost impossible to track and chart everything being said about your company without using some sort of social media analysis technology. You might even auto-schedule the odd tweet or update. And that's ok. People can't be at the helm 24/7. Just keep tabs on it, and make sure that your responses to your community don't start feeling robotic, or that you don't miss something important during that downtime.

CHAPTER 5 WRAP-UP

The last four chapters have covered a lot, but believe us when we say that it would be impossible to touch on every piece of social strategy information out there in the cloud. It is an ever changing beast, with new apps, platforms and startups appearing virtually every day. Some will become the next big thing for awhile, and quietly fade away, while others will become the next big thing...and really be the next big thing! That's why keeping your finger on the pulse of social media is so important. Knowledge is power, and it's never too late to join. And while it's impossible to employ everything social engagement has to offer, that, friends, is part of social media's appeal, as well as its never ending possibilities! And while your head might be spinning a little, we hope that we've left you with tips and guidelines that help you feel confident, and maybe most importantly, excited, about starting up a social media plan for your organization.

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