

nine RULES OF SOCIAL MEDIA



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There's something about the end of the year that makes it almost impossible for people to avoid reflection. Human nature? Most likely. The significant mark of a year ending inspires quite a bit of thought on what's transpired over the past 10 or 11 months, motivated by the (usually unspoken) goal that all that thinking will develop positive, progressive actions for the year to come.

To help out with your end-of-year business reflection, we've created this eBook chock full of ideas that we've seen turn into "social media rules" over the course of 2010. Those rules encompass social media application from the beginning stages of listening and information processing, to the more advanced stages of community engagement, and they've been organized into the categories of "Listening", "Measurement", and "Engagement" for easy browsing and reference.

Our goal with this eBook is to provide food for thought that gets you truly reviewing the social media programs you've put in motion thus far, and give you some tips for better adhering to these rules.

An important point to consider about "universal rules": There's little in the way of principles and rules that are truly universal. While we believe these ideas are vastly important in helping you move forward in your social media efforts, we won't force them on you (especially if you truly feel they don't apply to your situation).

The bottom line is that we advocate tailored social media programs that fit your business, which means generalizations only go so far. That being said, we absolutely encourage you to think over the principles posed here, and ask us any questions for clarification or to help you decide if one of these rules makes sense in the context of your work.

Ready to dive in? Let's get to it.



CHAPTER 2:

THE RULES OF LISTENING

When social media first made it big there was a lot of noise about the importance of companies listening to their customers talking on these channels. That dictate to listen is the foundation of everything you do in social media – at least, it is if you want your social media program to be successful. But there's more to listening these days than just putting the proverbial ear to the door.

Rule 1: Refine, refine, refine.

At this point in the game there's a good chance you've already got a listening program in place. How's it working out so far? It's probably going pretty well if you're regularly reviewing the program and making adjustments to your strategy as needed. If you're not making those regular adjustments already, heed the tips below.

- **Review your keyword search terms and phrases often.** *How often?* Well, that's something you need to decide, based on factors like new product releases, speed of your industry, the goals of your listening program, and the flow of conversation around your brand. There's no doubt you'll need to add, subtract, and tweak the terms you search for in your listening dashboard, but how often you do it and by what degree is up to you. To start, review your list of phrases and words once a month, and reduce or increase the frequency of that review based on results and those factors listed above.
- **Review the metrics and goals of your listening program often.** The speed with which social media conversations move directly impacts your social media program, which means you need to plan on adjusting your goals to account for the findings of your listening efforts. You'll also need to play around with the metrics you choose to use to measure your program's progress. Social media listening is an exercise in quick and fluid adaptation; if you keep that truth in mind, these adjustments will flow fairly naturally throughout your work.
- **Narrow your listening scope.** Companies often start off listening to everything about their brand and industry on the social web. The truth is, that kind of listening is overwhelming and sometimes useless because the sheer amount of information coming in is too much to process. After you've launched past that initial listening phase, use the data from your efforts to home in on the forward-thinking, future-driven conversations that will matter most to your company's progress. Don't feel obligated to listen to it all – sometimes that's just not possible.

Rule 2: Process what you hear.

It is too easy to set up a listening program, open your ears, and do nothing with what you've heard. The work it takes to make sense of what you hear and process it internally can sometimes seem to be too much, but if that information isn't being processed and acted upon, what's the point? We've pulled together a few ideas to help you streamline your listening and processing efforts and make the most of what you've heard.

- **Create seamless workflows.** Seems simple, right? In theory, it is. But creating new workflows to incorporate social media-acquired information can be a daunting task, mostly because social media comments and questions are not always posed directly to a company, don't always require immediate response, and often fit into a few different departmental buckets. It will be key to the upkeep of your social media strategy, though, to create simple but efficient workflows that steward comments

and questions into the right parts of your organization. For example, we operate by a **social media engagement playbook**, which lays out the who, what, how, when, where, and why of our responses to brand- and industry-related comments and questions.

- **Scale and broaden your listening efforts.** Scaling anything in social media is a bit of a hot-button issue, but to keep things from bottlenecking in your organization, it's important you create some processes for cross-functional listening. That might mean assigning one person in each department a social media listening role or task, or developing a listening strategy that gets everyone investing in your efforts.
- **Filter.** Depending on the size of your organization you might never be able to respond to all the questions, comments, and recommendations that comes your way. In a few cases, those recommendations might not make sense to incorporate into your business. To make sure you're acting on the stuff that matters most, create a database of feedback and recommendations and establish a rating system to identify which of those pieces of feedback make the most sense to act on. Acknowledge those who contribute to your brand conversation, but don't feel obligated to fulfill every product or feature request.

Rule 3: Don't ever stop listening.

There are no tips and tricks for this one. Social media listening (or monitoring, or whatever more apt title you want to put on it) is a non-stop endeavor. It's fairly obvious that social networks and online conversation are here for the long haul, which means you need to create a listening strategy that lives in the land of the ongoing. Will it need amending? Yes. Will it change? Yep, it might not even be recognizable in a year (heck, it almost inevitably won't be). Should you push it aside for bigger and better? Well, have you pushed your telephones aside for email?

Everyone has their own preferred method of communication, and many folks are turning to the social web to share their thoughts and ideas about life and about your business. Social media is just another piece of the communications puzzle, and it's become a regular part of our existence.



CHAPTER 3: THE RULES OF MEASUREMENT

The measurement piece of social media programs is the one we hear most often about. People struggle to put into (words and) numbers what it is they're getting from participating in social media from a business perspective, and that struggle starts with being unable to decipher how, exactly, social media activity and results should be measured. If you're having a tough time working through social media measurement, or just want to make sure you're on the right track, below are a few rules to mull over.

Rule 1: Measure what matters, not what everyone else is measuring.

We (and many others) have told you countless times **what to measure in social media**. Or, at least, we've shared some basic metrics you might want to track to get started. But no matter what we say, the only way you will truly be able to track your social media program's success is by selecting metrics that tie to your goals.

Everything that you look at, all the numbers you aggregate and trends you identify, should be selected to show the most accurate view of your program's progress. Don't

select metrics because they sound good, or because everyone else is using them—pick the metrics that make the most sense. How do you identify those metrics: Well...

- **Map the path of social media activity that your community takes to interact with you (and hopefully purchase your products).** To figure out exactly where your customers and community members are taking the actions you want them to, you need to watch them. Not like a hawk, mind you, but it's important you identify some paths of activity that your market takes to get to your website, get their questions answered, and buy your products and services. Look at the social graphs of your influencers and see where they interact most with you. Employ web analytics tools like Google Analytics and listening dashboards like Radian6 to see where people are spending their time on your website and social media outposts.
- **Do your research.** If your company has been in business awhile, it's likely you've got some market research lying around somewhere waiting to be reread. Pick up that research and look at the profiles of your market segments. Look back at how you capitalized on that knowledge, what you measured then, and where you went right and wrong with those measurement tactics. Translate the insights you glean from reviewing this information to your social media efforts. It is possible, and if you'd like to talk more about how to do it, you can **give us a holler**.
- **Track backwards.** Sometimes we need to start at the end and work backwards to make sense of things. So, start with your goals then carefully walk back through how you're going to reach them. A simple, effective way to get started.

Rule 2: Give your numbers context.

Okay, numbers can be great fun, but they're fairly fun-less without context. More importantly, though, they're fairly meaningless without context. Numbers need color and substance; they need a story to give them meaning. Really, the story needs the color of numbers. One cannot live without the other. So, how exactly do you make that story (and your numbers) pop?

- **Review (and report) more than stats—look at content.** Social media listening dashboards like ours allow you to dig into your numbers and see what's really behind them. If you see a spike in mentions of your brand or a particular product line, dig into that spike and look at individual mentions to see exactly what people are saying to cause all the buzz. Use these individual mentions and content trends to build a case for future social media tactics, support your recommendations for strategy adjustment, or justify your current program.

- **Tailor your reporting.** In very few instances will you want to share every number and result of your social media program with your team. Make sure you're sending the right numbers and results to the right people.
- **Measure consistently.** The only way your story will fly in the long term is with consistent measurement and reporting practices. Track the same metrics to identify short-term highlights, long-term trends, and new opportunities. If you're inconsistent, nothing will add up.

Rule 3: Invest the time into measuring your social media efforts well.

This rule is applicable to your entire social media program, but it is absolutely essential to the success of your measurement practices. There is an inevitable gap in the speed with which social media moves and the time it takes to make sense of social media data, and you have to account for that.

This might mean agreeing on delivering high-level and in-depth reports on different timeframes, or coming to another reasonable compromise that gives you enough time to really dig into your data.

You won't find any workarounds or shortcuts here. Track the amount of time it takes you to dive into your data and make real sense of it, then set reasonable expectations with your teams for when you will deliver reports.



CHAPTER 4:

THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

As fundamental as interaction and connection are to our everyday lives, it seems that on a large scale, in a business context, and through social media channels, interaction and connection are much more difficult to manage. There's something about interacting with customers and prospects over the web that makes companies big and small shake in their organizational boots. Well, shake no more.

Rule 1: You don't have to talk directly with people to be engaged.

Being an engaged company and connecting with your community doesn't necessarily mean talking directly to people. Engaged brands show that they're listening, that they understand their customers wants and needs, and that they care about the people who like and buy their products. The demonstration of these things can take many forms. Unsure what we mean? See below.

- **(Quality) Sharing is caring.** Possibly a little cheesy, but very true. Sharing valuable, useful information with your community via blog post, video, presentation, or

podcast is a clear sign of engagement. How? It's a sign you care and want to help them improve their lives and/or fix their problems. We do the same thing for our friends and family, right? We share advice and information to help our loved ones lead better lives, and this content sharing is similar to that action.

- ***Beta testing, feature requests, and the like.*** The people who choose to spend time interacting with your company online are almost certainly more interested in you than the folks who passively poke around your website. Engaged community members are often engaged because they believe in the value of your products, and many of them have great suggestions for product improvement and development. Whether you absorb their suggestions on a passive level or actively seek out feedback, do something with what those folks give you, and show them that you want to create products that help them.
- ***Provide a communal table.*** People from all walks of life come to your business for help solving a problem of theirs or making their lives better. Despite the disparate backgrounds, all these folks have your product as a point of common interest, and almost invariably have other common interests, as well. Give your customers and fans a place to come together to talk with and help one another. Whether you get involved in the conversation or not, you'll have given them common ground to connect.

Rule 2: Social media engagement policies and guidelines are a must.

Extremity in anything will never net positive results. How does that truth apply to social media engagement? Well, if you try to keep your employees from using social media during their work hours, they'll resent you and find ways around your rules and network blocks. On the other hand, if you let everyone run free on the social web, there will be a few folks who'll abuse their privileges, make questionable comments, and maybe even unknowingly misrepresent your organization.

You'll find your happy medium by creating a list of guiding social media engagement principles and communication policies for your employees to live by. Rather than list out the things you should consider including in your policies and guidelines here, we're just going to ship you over to [this blog post](#) by our VP of Social Strategy, Amber Naslund, which gives you a fantastic rundown of the basics.

Rule 3: Be kind, be social, and be consistent.

It sounds simple, but being social as an organization takes a level of faith and trust, in employees and the community, that many companies just don't have yet. That's okay—adapting to these open communication channels takes time. But adaptation is a must, and talking with people (rather than talking at your market) will eventually be a crucial piece of your social media program, if it isn't already.

While you don't need to maintain daily casual conversations with your fans and customers, it is important that, when you do talk with them, you address them as people with hopes, needs, and ideals that your company can have a positive (or negative) impact on. You impact their lives, and they impact the success of your company, so treat the relationship you have with them with respect.

In conjunction with that respect you show your community, make sure your interactions are consistent. Mind you, you shouldn't automate your engagement, but you should strive to have your team interacting regularly and maintaining a tone consistent with your brand and with your program.

Here at Radian6, employees are encouraged to be themselves and connect with others, but there is also a style and tone we adopt when speaking with customers about service issues, or when answering questions. And many of us are active on choice social networks on an almost-daily basis. It's part of our role to be open to and even seek out industry and casual conversation—this activity is part of how we build business relationships.

CHAPTER 5: WRAP-UP

Again, while we believe these rules to be fairly universal for social media business application, it never hurts to question the rules and decide for yourself if it really makes sense for you to abide by them.

The rules and ideas outlined in this eBook touch on the basic premises of social media use; there's much more to discuss, think about, and put into action in the months and year to come.

The shift we'll see social media go through, from a novel communication medium to becoming part of the fabric of personal and business communication, will give us a new list of rules to live by, and we'll make sure to share those with you as they develop. If you've got questions about the here and now of social media application, though, please feel free to reach out to us—we're happy to help.

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