

Best Practices

Social Media Listening and Engaging



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Listening and engagement is an important component of an overall digital media strategy. Proactive planning while leveraging knowledge from experienced sources along with established best practices is critical for success.

The following list comprises 10 Best Practices for your Listening and Engagement team.

1. Listen First

It sounds simple, but this is the biggest mistake that organizations make. Even though you may already have a presence in various social channels, to fully build an effective social media engagement strategy requires you to stop and listen. With active listening your engagement professionals will learn about the community and differences of each channel. Listening helps you to identify Thought-leaders and influencers in your particular industry or market. There are, of course, obvious differences in how people use social channels. However, there are often subtle nuances that make a difference in how people communicate, share and build relationships.

We all love good listeners. Remember that in social, you might be using a computer to engage with someone, but remembering that you are communicating with a human is fundamental to building your community. When in doubt, always go back to listening.

2. Define your Brand Voice and Tone

A picture is worth a thousand words. It is the same for a brand. What words come to mind when your prospects, customers or stakeholders picture you? How do you want them to think of you? Subject Matter Expert? Helpful? Innovator? Thought-leader?

Define your Voice and Tone to reflect what you want to be known for. Be consistent and ensure that your entire team understands the voice and tone. All communications must be in the brand voice.

3. Establish Engagement as a Corporate Culture

Be sure to align engagement objectives to overall corporate objectives and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). It is important to remember that social media is disruptive and cuts across the entire organization. It is not about one department or one functional area. Good engagement breaks down silos and brings an organization together in thought, deed and action. Every department or group has a stake in its success.

Determine how many official channels the organization will have. For example, will there be one Twitter account? Or, will your Support team, for example, have a different handle? Who can respond on behalf of the brand? Ensure that your entire team has access to your Playbook and is trained.

With full buy-in, the C-Suite will want to have defined processes. How are you work flowing posts? How will you escalate, to whom and when? What are you measuring for?

4. Create Brand Awareness

Engaging in social media and following the best practices outlined above can help your organization increase brand awareness. Sharing branded content that is useful to your community will also help. Be sure to have a fully developed content strategy managed by team members who understand Inbound Marketing and the power of story telling.

5. Remember Personalization

Remember your brand. How do you interact with prospects, customers or stakeholders? Do you say the exact same thing to each group? Of course not. You speak the language of your audience staying true to your brand. So, don't treat your social interactions any differently.

Don't cut and paste. Treat each interaction like you would treat the person if he or she was on the phone with you, or in a meeting sitting across the table from you. While listening for and responding to brand mentions can sometimes be overwhelming for Community Managers, the brand voice must be maintained. Your community will notice. Influencers and Thought-leaders will notice. Having Community Managers that are PR savvy, and strategically minded and have good people skills will go a long way. People have to want to engage with others in order to make it extraordinary.

6. Responding to the Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Social media, like any media, is not all kisses and butterflies. There will be occasions when people don't like what you have to say or what you are doing. While none of us like to hear negative comments, we need to listen and hear them. In some cases they will be warranted and our community is telling us that we messed up. Other times, the commentary is neither warranted, nor deserved.

The key is understanding how to respond. Positive comments are easy to address. Negative ones take a little more finesse and patience. If it is a customer service issue, take the issue off line. Have the person call or email you the details. If it is not a customer service issue, determine if the person is a troll and remember to never feed the trolls. Giving someone an audience, in this case, is exactly what he or she wants. Your Playbook is essential for determining what you will and will not respond to and how you will respond. The human element is important here. You need team members who can evaluate situations and take appropriate actions based on your Playbook.

You may be tempted to remove complaints, but don't. This could result in a backlash that you had not anticipated. Be sure to state your terms of conduct on your social channels. Include the conditions under which you will remove a post and possibly block someone. For example, if someone uses threatening language, personally attacks another, or uses profanity, these are all good reasons for removing comments from a Facebook Page.

7. Communicate Effectively

By listening first you have learned what works well in what channel. Short succinct communications work best. Research has shown that messages with less than 100 characters have greater engagement. This is equally true for Facebook.

8. Let Conversations Emerge Naturally

Conversations in social ebb and flow just like they do in person. Don't feel compelled to over share in order to increase the volume of conversation. Also be cautious about jumping into conversations. Think about conversations the same way you would if you were at a restaurant. You might hear a conversation taking place, but it wouldn't be proper for you to join in. Judge the conversations with the same level of rigour. If it feels like two people chatting amongst themselves, don't jump in.

9. Act With Integrity - Always Remember You are Communicating With People

Keep conversations respectful. Don't trash your competitors or any other party. Act with integrity and demonstrate leadership. Remember that any person or organization is a prospect. Respond with respect and always take the high road. It will protect you over the long run. Taking the steps to build the foundation of a relationship could pay off in spades in the future.

10. Define Your Metrics

What gets measured gets managed, so be sure to define your metrics carefully. As a part of this process revisit your corporate objectives and select social media metrics that support those goals. Understanding how things change over time is important in order to make adjustments to what is and is not important. Begin with benchmarking.

Sentiment is one measure of interest. Others include Share of Voice, Share of Conversation, Network Growth, Shares, etc. Be open to changing your metrics if they aren't meaningful to your organization. What might be important today might not be next year. Metrics need to reflect what matter.