12 Keys to Successful Social Media

Thinking about building a conversation, sparking innovation, creating collaboration? Here some of the essential characteristics for building sustainable, impactful social media that aligns with and supports your organization's vision.

1. Vision / clear outcomes	▪ Is there a clear sense of what needs to be accomplished? ▪ Is there a business reason for this initiative? ▪ How will success be measured?
2. Cultural alignment	▪ Are the organization's values and culture in alignment with web 2.0 values? If not, consider introducing social media slowly, or not at all.
3. Target participant intimacy	▪ What is known about the people with whom you'd like to have a conversation? What are the demographics? Psychographics? Technical ability? Language similarities / differences? ▪ How trusting are these people of open messages and / or conversation? ▪ Who will care -- *really* care -- about this conversation, information? Why? What's their stake? ▪ Plan the social media technology and information to integrate with your participants' work day. Don't make people go out of their way to participate in the conversation. This is especially true for busy managers. Create awareness about how this makes their jobs easier.
4. Clear sponsorship & champions	▪ Given the clear business reason (see 'vision / clear outcomes' above), is there a sponsor who is willing and capable of offering the time and resources to champion the effort? If not, keep looking. ▪ Who are the champions to build awareness and excitement?
5. A clear brand focus	▪ Consistent branding can align people emotionally, signal an important change, build pride and boost professionalism. Talk to your internal branding team about how to best keep the message, look and feel 'on brand'. Your vibe should be consistent with the organization culture, but different enough to signal something that fresh is afoot. ▪ How change-weary is the organization? Be sure to acknowledge any current realities in your messaging.

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6. Scope and conversational parameters, integration with existing communications

- Not *everything* should be a two-way conversation. What key messages are top-down? Which topics are open for input and conversation? Be definitive and vocal regarding the difference: avoid being perceived as asking for input when you're not.
- What other communications vehicles exist? Which are successful, and why? Cross-promotion boosts awareness and effectiveness, while allowing each communication channel to target deeper vertical segments.

7. The right team with the right talent

- A project leader is absolutely essential. Generally social media involves a cross-functional team. A savvy project leader will know when and how to involve each key team member.
- Your technology team will offer insights on what's possible given your organization's current platforms, software, support staff and security policies. Ideally the team will also know something about social media, and will be able to recommend compatible platforms for your goals.
- Branding / Marketing will offer key insights regarding brand standards and how to make your project shine.
- Internal Communications are your gurus for existing communications channels, messaging guidelines, ADA standards on communications and online readability.
- Organization development will provide vital information regarding the organization's culture and values, as well as key change management insights.
- Human Resources, Sales and Customer Support teams will generally have a wealth of information for measuring success.
- Legal will offer vital input on risk mitigation associated with online conversation.
- Knowledge Management will have expertise on building consistent a taxonomy so that the conversation not only collects information, but the information is accessible so everyone gets smarter.
- A 'street team' and/or customer / audience feedback team are great ways to stay 'on message' and on track while building awareness and buy-in.
- Community development managers are conversation stewards and facilitators. They keep discussions going and filter essential information both vertically and horizontally across the organization.
- Sponsors and champions are crucial. Enough said.

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8. Sufficient resources	▪ No need to over-buy: there are plenty of free or inexpensive social media technologies available. But be sure your social media tools are scalable, data is secure and the user interface is simple and clean. ▪ Is the IT organization staffed, willing and ready to offer support? ▪ Do you have a community development leader to keep the conversation fresh and relevant? ▪ Do you have enough time to collect success measures?
9. Scalability, integration, sustainability	▪ Start small, with a contained pilot that's focused on an urgent business challenge. ▪ Use technology that can eventually be fully integrated with the organization's current (or planned) technology. ▪ The best blogs and discussion forums offer fresh content several times weekly. Plan the time and resources to foster conversation, offer fresh insights, ask provocative questions, align conversation with senior leadership messages and organization vision. ▪ Time your implementation to support -- not compete -- with the organization's business cycle. (For example, introducing a new retail leadership blog between Thanksgiving and Christmas isn't the best idea.)
10. Legal	▪ Recent changes in discoverability laws have made some organizations skittish about online data. Outline your communications policies to encourage openness *and* responsibility. ▪ Your organization's current employee code of conduct may serve as a guide for online conversation. ▪ Check with the legal team regarding any regulatory communication restrictions -- both domestically and internationally. ▪ Avoid 'anonymous' conversation participation. Encourage full responsibility for actions and words.
11. Global considerations	▪ Will multiple languages be important, or is there one organization language? Avoid idioms and slang. ▪ Be cautious about when you release sensitive information: those in time zones that are 'dark' when you make key announcements may feel excluded. ▪ Many cultures outside North America are less comfortable with 'flat' hierarchies and egalitarian conversation. Be aware of the 'top down' vs. 'horizontal' communication balance required to engage all cultures.

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12. Measures

- Social media is eminently measureable. But short-term measures (generally focused on anecdotal feedback and activity-based measures such as click-throughs) don't present a strong business case. Be sure your sponsors are aware of your measurement plan and the resources required to execute the plan.
- Ensure sufficient time to collect pre-implementation baseline measures, so that you can build a 'before and after' business case.

Summary & Your Project:	Got it covered	Mostly handled	Whoa! Need some help!	Next Steps
1. Vision / clear outcomes				
2. Cultural alignment				
3. Target participant intimacy				
4. Clear sponsorship & champions				
5. A clear brand focus				
6. Scope and conversational parameters, integration with existing communications				
7. The right team with the right talent				
8. Sufficient resources				
9. Scalability, sustainability				
10. Legal				
11. Global considerations				
12. Measures				

Want more detail? Interested in a toolkit to activate each of these keys? Please contact Jacqueline Prescott at jp@areyoufrank.com. The online community and toolkit are coming in Spring 2009. Until then, check out our free social media resources at www.BizBehindTheBuzz.com.

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