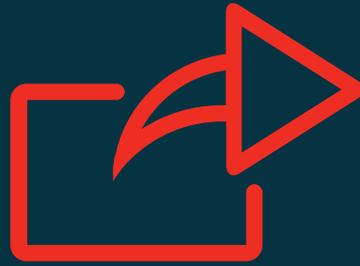
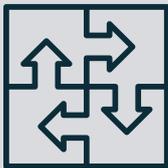


SHARED MEDIA: BEING B2B SOCIAL



INTEGRATED COMMUNICATIONS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW



Thinking of 'PR' simply in terms of media relations is a thing of the past.

In today's multichannel marketing environment, brands can't rely on media relationships or focus all their energies on pursuing editorial coverage.

Influential, independent media are still as important as ever. But they're just one of many communications platforms which need to come together seamlessly and consistently to tell your brand story.

This is what we mean by Integrated Communications: using all relevant channels to reach your target customers, command their attention, engage them with your messages and provoke a response.

This requires a joined-up strategy and a rich mix of relevant, interesting content that works across every category of media – earned, paid, shared and owned.

Here we consider the role of social media in the B2B communications mix, exploring how this medium is changing and offering tips for a more productive social strategy.

SHARED MEDIA

The world of social media is constantly changing. The platforms change how they serve content and to whom. Users' behaviour evolves as they become more mature or bored of the same old stuff. Businesses need to be aware of these changes to keep their audiences engaged. One positive change is that the world of B2B has converged with B2C. B2B social media content now needs to be as interesting, engaging and as personal as B2C.

There's a growing awareness that B2B businesses need to engage with the individual on a personal, rather than a corporate, level. Content has to be interesting and personal to the user. This sounds simple, but many brands still broadcast their social content with little attempt to engage or to start a conversation. They post something without any context, additional information or reason to read more.

This leads to a useful, if slightly clichéd term: Why care, why share?

WHY CARE, WHY SHARE?

Put simply, why should someone care about your content? Why should they stop scrolling through their newsfeed, engage with your post and then share it with their own audience?

If your content can't answer this question, then why are you posting it? If your narrative has no point or context, then why are you saying it?

A few years ago, social media was about volume. The mantra then was: "Post as often as you can about whatever you can." Now, users are far more selective in what and who they engage with. It's about quality over quantity.

Businesses need a social media strategy to determine what they are going to say consistently and how that helps their audience.

Only when you have decided what you are going to say and what you want your audience to do, should you start to think about where you are going to say it. What type of content is best suited to your narrative? Which social media platforms would be the most suitable?

The main platforms:

- **Facebook** – The world's largest social network, Facebook claims to have over 2 billion active monthly users. The rise in appeal of long-form content, such as longer posts and video, has seen Facebook become more attractive to businesses.
- **Twitter** – With 330 million active monthly users, the micro blogging site remains popular. You can, and should, post images and video content on Twitter. Videos are currently limited to 2 minutes.
- **LinkedIn** – This platform is business focused and has 500 million users. Although many have used LinkedIn as a digital CV, the platform is seeing an increase in personal connections and conversations, becoming the place to follow and connect with other users directly.
- **Instagram** – Highly visual and driven by images and videos, Instagram has 1 billion monthly users and is becoming more viable as a B2B platform. Instagram is visually led, even more so than the other platforms, so factor this into your strategy and content.



SEVEN TOP TIPS TO MAKING SOCIAL WORK HARDER FOR YOU

1. OWN THE NARRATIVE

Social media is a fantastic way of engaging with your target audience, but bear in mind it is your conversation. Yes, you should use reporting insights to help you determine how your content is doing and what you should talk about in the future. But there is a difference between listening to what others are saying and deciding how to use that, and allowing others to actually shape your narrative for you.

A simple example is ALDI Australia, who asked Twitter users to "Fill in the blank!"

The results were predictable. Responses like 'napalm in the morning' and 'sweet, sweet, vengeance' were sent before ALDI took the posts down. As one user said, "What could go wrong?"



What went wrong was that ALDI released control of the narrative and couldn't regain it. There is nothing wrong with asking customers a question; indeed customer stories work very well. But if you promote a free-for-all, the internet will respond and you may not like the results.

2. KEEP IT CONSISTENT

Define what you want to say – what unique voice, opinion or service you offer. Then keep saying it. This is different to simply sharing the same single piece of content repeatedly. It's about finding different ways to re-enforce your core narrative.

3. #USERELEVANTHASHTAGS

Hashtags are used primarily on Twitter and Instagram, but can also be used on LinkedIn and Facebook. In essence they are a form of metadata that can be a very useful way to link social posts across a campaign or to organically reach new followers by joining their conversation. It may sound obvious, but don't use them needlessly and, just because the hashtag is trending, don't blatantly try to take advantage of conversations that have nothing to do with you.

You may get increased exposure, but it's unlikely to be from the right people. It also looks desperate and won't reflect well on your brand.

4. USE INSIGHTS TO INFORM FUTURE CONTENT

A lot is made of reporting and measurement and rightly so. Understanding what formats and topics your audience engages with helps you to shape your future content. Does your audience like video or share your infographics? Where are your followers? You may even find that one type of content or topic works well on one platform with one audience, but not on another. So amend your future content accordingly. Understanding what resonates with your audience can also help you identify influencers in that field.

5. CONSIDER HOW INFLUENCERS COULD HELP YOUR CAUSE

The rise of influencer marketing on social media looks set to continue with some caveats following recent legal developments. Experts in their field, influencers provide a third party opinion on your narrative. Influencer marketing also builds trust and can add credibility to your brand. Influencers enable you to talk to their followers and amplify your narrative to people you might not otherwise reach.

While influencers tend not to work for free (there needs to be a "value exchange", which can be financial), this may still be beneficial, depending on what your chosen influencer can add to your narrative or social reach.

6. PLAN PROPERLY FOR MULTI-TERRITORY CAMPAIGNS

Executing a social media plan across multiple territories and languages brings challenges all of its own. For global corporations with sizeable budgets, a global/local strategy, with local teams owning and running local accounts, can support a global strategy by sharing a mixture of centrally created and location-specific content, all working together to push the same consistent, core messages. Every market is different, so to get maximum results local teams with knowledge of those markets are best placed to engage.

If you're operating on a slimmer budget, targeted promoted posts by region are a useful alternative. These posts need to direct to a lead-capture webpage or landing page with useful, interesting and insightful information that is relevant to people in that market.

7. CONSIDER THE ADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL SELLING

Social selling is the process of using LinkedIn and other platforms to connect with relevant individuals, establishing a relationship and sharing ongoing useful content.

"In social media, content leads to conversations, conversations build relationships and relationships result in ROI."

Robert Caruso - Founder and CEO Bundle Post @fondalo

"Social selling is when salespeople use social media to interact directly with their prospects. Salespeople will provide value by answering prospect questions and offering thoughtful content until the prospect is ready to buy."

Sam Kusinitz (HubSpot)

Most users, quite rightly, use their LinkedIn profile as a digital CV. However, there is now a new way to use your profile. Rather than a CV talking about yourself, instead explain how you can help prospects achieve their goals.

Social selling is summed up in three words: Personal, Relevant, Timely.

As the collective influence of corporate LinkedIn pages decreases, prospects are far less likely than ever before to follow your company page or join your group; but they will connect with you, the individual. They'll do that because of your **personal** outreach, your **relevance** to them and how you can help them at the **time** they need it.

Not many businesses are using social selling yet, so there is an excellent opportunity to gain a lead on your competitors.

THE ONLY CONSTANT IS CHANGE

We end where we began. The social media landscape is in constant flux. Remember MySpace? Or Bebo? Did you ever use Google+? On Twitter, the 140-character Tweet limit was once set in stone. On Facebook, companies now have to pay to reach people they could previously reach for free. LinkedIn corporate pages and groups are increasingly irrelevant – but personal LinkedIn pages are being used now for much more than job hunting and recruitment.

Instant messenger services are rising in popularity. Video is huge and continuing to grow. It is also increasingly being viewed on mobile platforms without sound. Have you planned for this?

HOW CAN AD COMMUNICATIONS HELP?

Social media is no longer the optional extra it once was. If you're wondering whether your customers are on social media, they probably are. How they are using them is changing all the time. Your social media strategy must change with it – and that's where we can help.

AD Communications runs successful social media lead-generation campaigns for clients across multiple platforms. We work closely with clients and with partner agencies to devise a social strategy that works seamlessly within their wider marketing objectives. With considerable in-house experience, expertise and tools at our disposal, we have a proven ability to boost awareness of your brand, improve its perception and put you in contact with real business leads.

Interested? If so, please get in touch – we'd be happy to propose a tailored social strategy and content delivery programme to help you achieve your goals.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TO WORK CREATIVELY AND ACHIEVE TANGIBLE RESULTS, PLEASE CONTACT HELEN TOLINO:

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