

Social Media: From Buzz to Brand Loyalty

Q&A

- **What are the ways to measure success with social media?**

It all depends on what you want to accomplish. Do you want to directly create leads? Do you want to increase your brand penetration? Do you want to be looked at as a thought leader? Social media is malleable enough it can be used for all of these things, but whether it works or not depends on which one of these you pick.

This will also have an effect on the tracking you employ. If you are looking for clicks from your social efforts, you will want to use the same click tracking that you would on a paid search campaign. If you want discussion, count the comments and mentions of your brand on other profiles within that system.

For example, you might use Summize (now search.twitter.com) to check for mentions of you on Twitter.

- **How do I promote my profile?**

A profile is always promoted either directly or indirectly. That is, you chat up other people on their profiles using your own profile. (directly)

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You can also put out press releases and mentions on other sites about your social profile, inviting people to come see what you are doing. (indirectly)

Both work, and both should be employed. However, the quality of what you are doing and saying, and your dedication to posting often and well, is what will keep people tuned in. After all, flooding traffic onto any site is very easily done. Keeping them afterwards, however, is the real art of any online marketing.

- **If a freelancer, should I have a separate public and private profile for social sites?**

This depends largely on your own want of privacy. If you use these social products on your own time, and what you do there could reflect badly on your clients or business, then yes, keep a separate existence. Many college graduates in the last few years have already learned the hard lesson of potential employers seeing them drunk on Myspace, even after a good job interview.

That having been said, any profile you use to promote should be *you*. This is a point that was made by Richard at Dell: “People want to communicate with a person – not a company.” When using social, people can sniff out insincerity very very quickly, and they are unforgiving when they find it.

Your best bet, whether you use a separate profile or the same profile, is to use one that really is *your* profile.

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- **Where do you find the next “big thing” in social?**

If you are active on whatever is big and new, you will see all of your contacts generally drifting to whatever else is popular. Also mainstream media usually lets people know what everyone is using.

Basically, if you have to dig too deeply to find these new services, they aren't big yet. Bookmark it and come back when you see the name popping up more often.

- **How often do you need to update?**

In theory, you should be updating every time you have something new to add, and if you don't have much to update with, you don't need these sites.

Which is all well and good, but for us grown-ups the real answer is once a day. If you don't have something to update with, go looking for others to create conversations with. Post links to news stories related to your field. Keep in mind, solutions like micro blogs are designed for bloggers who have neither the time nor patience to write a full post. So coming up with 140 characters or less is much simpler than writing an entire article every day.

So every day is best. Every other day isn't too bad. Every week is pretty bad. Any length of time longer than that and you stand a good chance of having people think you've abandoned the project altogether.

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- **What are the demographics of some of the most popular social sites? Where can I find out more about the types of people I can reach on the various social networks?**

Frankly, both demographics and metrics for social media are still in their infancy, because they must be handled in a completely different way than we have dealt with media in the past.

Does this mean there is no way of telling which site 21-35 year olds use the most? No, but so far there isn't one site that is exclusively about 21-35 year olds, to the exclusion of anything else. For example, blackplanet.com is specifically geared towards a black audience, per their name. However, it is debatable whether they have as much traffic in this demographic as Myspace, which simply has more users.

If you are on the hunt for this kind of specific information, however, Forrester Research is probably doing the best work on this. Also Quantcast and AdLabs do research on this. Visit their sites to peruse their articles and purchasable reports.

Just don't trust any information that comes from the site itself. If you were to ask Myspace, they would tell you that every human being on the planet has set up a page, with newborns creating one before their first nap.

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- **Does it make sense to associate a cost per twitter or blog comment? How do you track ROI from engagements in social media?**

Yes – while it is difficult to assess the ROI of social media, this doesn't mean it should be ignored. No one should ever engage in a tactic to improve their business without knowing what it will cost them. (Social itself is free, but the time you or your employees will spend on it is not.)

Therefore, you should start with the cost of your product, lead, etc. You then need to start using the social service, and determine what the ultimate conversion rate for your product is. (They may not buy a product because you wrote a tweet saying to do so, but you may start getting more traffic from Twitter generally, eventually leading to a sale.)

Once you know your conversion rate (this time not in terms of “clicks to actions” but “hours spent to actions,”) look at how much that use of time cost, by whatever metrics you use internally or personally.

If you made more money as a result of Twittering than you lost in time you could have spent doing something else, keep on Twittering.

On the other hand, if you post every day to Twitter, and you are losing money because of that time spent, stop.

However, I cannot think of anything that requires less time to update than these sites, which do not cost any money to begin using. While you can determine the ROI easily enough, frankly, we are still talking about a miniscule investment, without any real set-up or subscription costs to speak of.

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- **How do you find people to follow (or to follow you) on social sites like Twitter? What are some of the best ways to build your user base?**

Building an online profile is a time intensive, long-term effort. The time you put in to it will directly reflect the both the quantity and quality of the relationships made on social sites. That said, there are some tools to help you jump-start the process of building a user base. Use sites like Summize (search.twitter.com) and Tweetscan (www.tweetscan.com) to tap into Twitter's real-time conversations.

When following new people on microblogging sites like Twitter, or requesting to follow others on social networks like Facebook, always accompany those invitations with a welcome message. People don't want to follow robots (unless of course you happen to be @MarsPhoenix) so let a little bit of your personality come through. And don't feel like you absolutely need to follow someone to communicate with them. Most sites allow you to join a conversation in progress without being followed.

Finally, make sure to grow your online relationships. Don't simply follow someone and then never interact with them again. Because most messages on sites like Twitter happen out in the open (displayed publically) you will find that new followers will often times find YOU through someone else.

- **“Not so much a question but a comment on social media planning. It often helps to select some key bloggers in your ‘niche’ and make sure you engage them on their blogs and forums. When you join the discussion and become part of a community it helps with your credibility.”**

And so say all of us! 😊