



Effective Social Media Marketing Planning – How to Develop a Digital Marketing Plan

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Abstract. Marketing planning is also undergoing rapid development as the way of marketing communicating has changed forever. The increasing popularity of blogging, podcasting, and social networks enable customers to broadcast their views about a product or service to a potential audience of millions, and the proliferation of Internet access gives everyone who wants to the tools to address issues with products and companies. The traditional communications paradigm, which relied on the classic promotional mix to craft Integrated marketing communications (IMC) strategies, must give way to an effective digital marketing planning framework which includes all forms of social media as potential tools in designing and implementing IMC strategies. Consequently, there needs to be a sophisticated process to develop and implement a digital marketing plan in the social media environment.

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Marketing management · Web 2.0 · Marketing 4.0
Integrated marketing communication · Social computing · Social media

1 Introduction to Marketing Planning

Marketing is the organization function charged with defining customer targets and the best way to satisfy their needs and wants competitively and profitably. Because consumers and business buyers face an abundance of suppliers seeking to satisfy their every need, companies and not-for-profit organizations cannot survive today by simply doing a good job. They must do an excellent job if they are to remain in the increasingly competitive global marketplace. Many studies have demonstrated that the key to profitable performance is knowing and satisfying target customers with competitively superior offers. This process takes place today in an increasingly global, technical, and competitive environment [1].

There are some key reasons why marketing planning has become so important. Recent years have witnessed an intensifying of competition in many markets. Many factors have contributed to this, but amongst some of the more significant are the following [2]:

A growth of global competition, as barriers to trade have been lowered and global communications improved significantly.

The role of the multinational conglomerate has increased. This ignores geographical and other boundaries and looks for profit opportunities on a global scale.

In some economies, legislation and political ideologies have aimed at fostering entrepreneurial and 'free market' values.

Continual technological innovation, giving rise to new sources of competition for established products, services and markets.

The importance of competition and competitor analysis in contemporary strategic marketing cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, because of this we shall be looking at this aspect in more depth in later chapters. This importance is now widely accepted amongst both marketing academics and practitioners. Successful marketing in a competitive economy is about competitive success and that in addition to a customer focus a true marketing orientation also combines competitive positioning.

The marketing concept holds that the key to achieving organizational goals lies in determining the needs and wants of target markets, and delivering the desired 'satisfaction' more effectively and resourcefully than competitors [3].

Marketing planning is an approach adopted by many successful, market-focused companies. While it is by no means a new tool, the degree of objectivity and thoroughness with which it is applied varies significantly.

Marketing planning can be defined as the structured process of researching and analyzing the marketing situations, developing and documenting marketing objectives, strategies, and programs, and implementing, evaluating, and controlling activities to achieve the goals. This systematic process of marketing planning involves analyzing the environment and the company's capabilities, and deciding on courses of action and ways to implement those decisions. As the marketing environment is so changeable that paths to new opportunities can open in an instant, even as others become obscured or completely blocked, marketing planning must be approached as an adaptable, ongoing process rather than a rigid, static annual event [2].

The outcome of this structured process is the marketing plan, a document that summarizes what the marketer has learned about the marketplace and outlines how the firm plans to reach its marketing objectives. In addition, the marketing plan not only documents the organization's marketing strategies and displays the activities that employees will implement to reach the marketing objectives, but it entails the mechanisms that will measure progress toward the objectives and allows for adjustments if actual results take the organization off course [4].

Marketing plans generally cover a 1-year-period, although some may project activities and financial performance further into the future. Marketers must start the marketing planning process at least several months before the marketing plan is scheduled to go into operation; this allows sufficient time for thorough research and analysis, management review and revision, and coordination of resources among functions and business units.

Marketing planning inevitably involves change. It is a process that includes deciding currently what to do in the future with a full appreciation of the resource position; the need to set clear, communicable, measurable objectives; the development of alternative courses of action; and a means of assessing the best route towards the

achievement of specified objectives. Marketing planning is designed to assist the process of marketing decision making under prevailing conditions of risk and uncertainty [2].

Above all the process of marketing planning has several benefits [3]:

Consistency

The individual marketing action plans must be consistent with the overall corporate plan and with the other departmental or functional plans.

Responsibility

Those who have responsibility for implementing the individual parts of the marketing plan will know what their responsibilities are and can have their performance assessed against these plans. Marketing planning requires management staff to make clear judgmental statements about assumptions, and it enables a control system to be designed and established whereby performance can be assessed against pre-defined criteria.

Communication

Those implementing the plans will also know that the overall objectives are and how they personally may contribute in this respect.

Commitment

If the plans are agreed upon by those involved in their implementation, as well as by those who will provide the resources, the plans do stimulate a group commitment to their implementation, and ultimately lead to better strategy-implementation.

Plans must be specific to the organization and its current situation. There is not one system of planning but many systems, and a planning process must be tailor-made for a particular firm in a specific set of conditions. Marketing planning as a functional activity has to be set in a corporate planning framework. There is an underlying obligation for any organization adopting marketing planning systems to set a clearly defined business mission as the basis from which the organizational direction can develop. Without marketing planning, it is more difficult to guide research and development (R&D) and new product development (NPD); set required standards for suppliers; guide the sales force in terms of what to emphasize, set realistic, achievable targets, avoid competitor actions or changes in the marketplace. Above all, businesses which fail to incorporate marketing planning into their marketing activities may therefore not be able to develop a sustainable competitive advantage in their markets [3].

2 The Main Stages in Developing a Marketing Plan

Marketing planning is a methodical process involving assessing marketing opportunities and resources, determining marketing objectives, and developing a plan for implementation and control. Marketing planning is an ongoing analysis/planning/control process or cycle. Many organizations update their marketing plans annually as new information becomes accessible. Once built-in, the key recommendations can then be presented to key stakeholders within the organization. The final task of marketing planning is to summarize the relevant findings from the marketing analysis, the

strategic recommendations and the required marketing programs in a report: the written marketing plan. This document needs to be concise, yet complete in terms of presenting a summary of the marketplace and the business’s position, explaining thoroughly the recommended strategy and containing the detail of marketing mix activities. The plan should be informative, to the point, while mapping out a clear set of marketing activities designed to satisfactorily implement the desired target market strategy [3].

Figure 1 illustrates the several stages that have to be gone through in order to arrive at a marketing plan. As illustrated, the development of a marketing plan is a process, and each step in the process has a structure that enables the marketing plan to evolve from abstract information and ideas into a tangible document that can easily be understood, evaluated, and implemented.

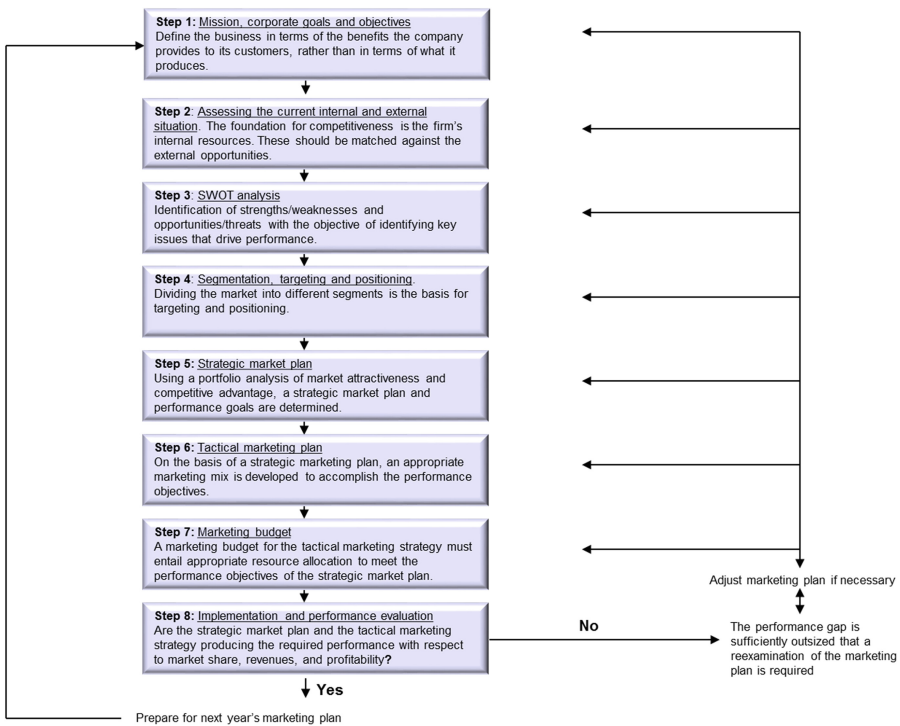


Fig. 1. The Stages of Building a Marketing Plan (Source: Hollensen and Opresnik, 2015)

3 The Main Stages in Developing an Effective Digital Marketing Plan

Against the background of the above-mentioned process of an overall marketing plan, a social media marketing plan is the summary of everything the company plan to do in social media marketing and hope to achieve for the business using social networks. This plan should comprise an audit of where the customers are today, goals for where

you want them to be soon, and all the social media tools that the company wants to use to get there [2].

In general, the more specific the company can get with their plan, the more effective they will be in the plan’s implementation. It is important to keep it concise. The plan will guide the company’s actions, but it will also be a measure by which to determine whether the company is succeeding or failing. Figure 2. illustrates the several stages that should be gone through to arrive at a digital marketing plan [5, 6].

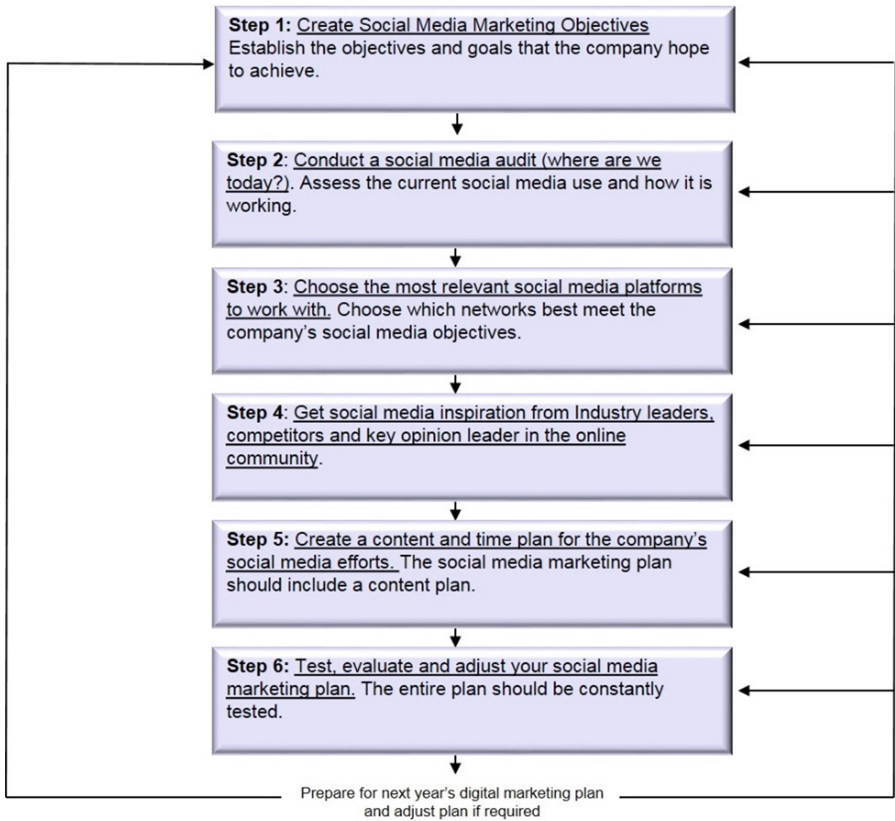


Fig. 2. The stages of building a digital marketing plan (Source: Hollensen and Opresnik, 2017)

Step 1: Create social media marketing objectives

The first step to any social media marketing strategy is to establish the objectives and goals that the company hope to achieve. Having these objectives also allows the company to quickly react when social marketing media campaigns are not meeting the company’s expectations. Without objectives, the company has no means of evaluating success or proving their social media Return On Investment (ROI). These goals should be aligned with the broader marketing strategy, so that the social media efforts drive toward the business objectives. If the social media marketing plan is shown to support

the overall business objective, the company is more likely to get executive and employee buy-in and investment. The company should try to go beyond popular metrics such as Retweets and Likes. Focus should be more on advanced metrics such as ‘number of leads generated’, web referrals, and con-version rate. The company should also use the SMART framework when setting their objectives:

- Specific* – target a specific area for improvement.
- Measurable* – quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress.
- Achievable* – Agreed and aligned with corporate goals.
- Realistic* – state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources.
- Time-related* – specify when the result(s) can be achieved.

Example: ‘In Social Publishing we will share photos that communicate our company culture. We will do this by posting a total of ten photos a week on any of the photo sharing social media sites. The target for each week is at least in total 100 likes and 30 comments.’

A simple way to start the social media marketing plan is by writing down at least three social media objectives.

Step 2: Conduct a social media audit (where are we today?)

Prior to creating your social media marketing plan, the company needs to assess their current social media use and how it is working. This means figuring out who is currently connecting with the company and its brand via social media, which social media sites the company target market uses, and how the social media presence compares to the competitors. For this purpose, the following social media audit template can be used [2].

Presence on Social media platform	URL	Internal responsible for maintaining social media	Social media mission	Current number of followers	Main competitor’s number of followers
etc.					

Fig. 3. Social Media Audit template (current situation) (Source: Kotler, Hollensen and Opresnik, 2017)

Once the audit is conducted the company should have a clear picture of every social media platform representing the business, who runs or controls them, and what purpose

they serve. This audit should be maintained regularly, especially as the company scale up their business (Fig. 3).

It should also be evident which social media platforms (accounts) need to be updated and which need to be deleted altogether. If the audit uncovers for example a fake branded Twitter profile, it should be reported. Reporting fake accounts will help ensure that people searching for the company online only connect with the accounts that are managed by the company itself [1].

As part of the social media audit the company may also want to create mission statements for each social media platform (network). These one-sentence declarations will help to focus on a very specific objective for Instagram, Facebook, or any other social media network. They will guide the actions and help guiding back on track if the efforts begin to lag [2].

Example of Mission statement for a presence on the Snapchat platform: ‘We will use Snapchat to share the CSR side of our company and connect with younger prospect customers among 15–40 years old.’

The company should be able to determine the purpose of every social media platform it has, for example Snapchat. If it cannot determine the mission for each social media platform, the platform & profile should probably be deleted.

Before it is possible to determine which social media platforms are right for the business, the company should find out who the audience is for each platform and what they want. The company should know which tools to use to gather demographic and behavioral data, and how to target the customers it wants.

Step 3: Choose the most relevant social media platforms to work with

Once you’ve finished with your social media audit, it is time to choose the online presence. Choose which networks best meet the company’s social media missions and objectives. If there is not already a social media profile on each network/platform the company focuses on, it should build them from the ground up with the broader mission and audience in mind. Each social network has a unique audience and should be treated differently. If the company has some existing platforms, it is time to update and refine them to get the best possible results [2].

Optimizing profiles for SEO (Search Engine Optimization) can help to generate more web traffic to the company’s online social media platforms. Cross-promoting social platforms can extend the reach of content. In general, social media profiles should be filled out completely, and images and text should be optimized for the social network in question [1].

Step 4: Get social media inspiration from Industry leaders, competitors and key opinion leader in the online community

If the company is not sure what kinds of content and information will get the most engagement, then the company, for inspiration, can look to what others in the industry are sharing. The company can also use social media listening to see how it can distinguish itself from competitors and appeal to an audience it might be missing [2].

Opinion leaders among consumers (‘market mavens’) can also offer social media inspiration, not only through the content that they share but in the way that they phrase their messages. The company can try and see how its target audience writes Tweets,

and it could strive to write in a similar style. It can also learn their habits - when they share and why - and use that as a basis for the social media marketing plan [2–4].

A final source of social media inspiration is industry leaders. There are giants who do an incredible job of social media marketing, from Red Bull and Taco Bell to Turkish Airlines. Companies in every industry imaginable have managed to distinguish themselves through advanced social media strategies.

The company can follow industry leaders and see if they have shared any social media advice or insight elsewhere on the web.

Step 5: Create a content and time plan for the company's social media efforts

The social media marketing plan should include a content marketing plan, comprised of strategies for content creation, as well as an editorial calendar (time plan) for when the content should be shown online. Having great content to share and the right timing will be essential to succeeding at social media marketing [2].

The content marketing plan should answer the following questions:

What types of content the company intends to post and promote on social media?

Who will create the content?

How often will the company post content?

What is the target audience for each type of content?

How you the company promote the content?

The editorial calendar lists the dates and times the company intends to publish blogs, Instagram and Facebook posts, Tweets, and other content that is planned to use during the social media campaigns.

The company can create the calendar and then schedule their messaging in advance rather than updating constantly throughout the day. This gives it the opportunity to work hard on the language and format of these messages rather than writing them on the fly whenever company employees have time. The company should make sure that the content reflects the mission statement that are assigned to each social media profile/platform. If the purpose of the LinkedIn account is to generate leads, the company should make sure that it is sharing enough lead generation content. The company can establish a content matrix that defines what share of the social media platform is allocated to different types of posts [2].

Step 6: Test, evaluate and adjust your social media marketing plan

To find out what adjustments need to be made to your social media marketing strategy, you should constantly be testing. Build testing capabilities into every action you take on social networks. For example, you could track the number of clicks your links get on a particular platform using URL shorteners. Furthermore, it is possible to measure track page visits driven by social media with Google Analytics.

Record and analyze your successes and failures, and then adjust your social media marketing plan in response [4].

Surveys are also a great way to gauge success - online and offline. The company can ask their social media followers, email list, and website visitors how they are doing on social media. This direct approach is often very effective. Then ask your offline

customers if social media had a role in their purchasing. This insight might prove invaluable when you look for areas to improve [2].

The most important thing to understand about the social media marketing plan is that it should be constantly changing. As new networks emerge, the company may want to add them to their plan. As the company is attaining missions and objectives for each social media platform, it will need to set new targets. Unexpected challenges will arise that is needed to address. As the company is scaling up its business, it might need to add new roles or grow the social presence for different products or regions.

The company should rewrite its social media marketing plan to reflect its latest insights, and make sure that the team is aware of what has been updated [1].

4 Conclusion

As digital communication becomes an increasingly dominant way for people exchange and share information, a digital marketing plan becomes an essential tool for any company and organization. The process of creating a digital marketing plan will help organizations and companies clarify what they want to achieve, understand how to engage their target market online and outline the key activities they need to take to market your business digitally and measure the effectiveness of your actions.

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