

The background is a solid blue color with a network of thin, white, curved lines. Scattered throughout are faint icons for Facebook (an 'f'), Twitter (a bird), and LinkedIn (an 'in').

20

WAYS TO SUCCEED
AT SOCIAL MEDIA
ENGAGEMENT

Table of Contents

- Introduction 3
- 1. Be transparent 4
- 2. Build trust 4
- 3. Create awareness 5
- 4. Be mindful of oversharing 6
- 5. Tell a story 6
- 6. Reach out to influencers 6
- 7. Respond to positive feedback 7
- 8. Respond to negative feedback 7
- 9. Have a clear focus 8
- 10. Show your personality 8
- 11. Share throughout the day 9
- 12. Go beyond Facebook and Twitter 9
- 13. Be proactive 10
- 14. Don't sound canned 10
- 15. Find, create and share content 10
- 16. Be innovative 11

17. Keep it short	11
18. Follow your following	11
19. Help your customers become more social	11
20. Act quickly	12
Conclusion	12

Introduction

If you're already listening to social media conversations, this ebook will show you how to successfully participate. Social media allows you to be in direct contact with your customers, potential customers and brand representatives about everything from products to challenges. Brands who are truly engaging use social media like a telephone, not a megaphone. They see that Facebook, Twitter and other channels can be used as more than just another platform to broadcast self-promotional messages at a passive audience. They're **listening to their community, crafting content** that serves their community's needs and interests, and both inviting and eliciting a response.

If you are engaging, how do you know if you're doing it successfully? It's not about the number of fans or followers, but who is actively responding. There's a whole range of responses you may be seeking, including Facebook likes, blog comments, retweets, and direct dialogue. After all, social media engagement can have many different goals:

- **Humanize your brand**
- Manage your brand's reputation
- Create brand advocates
- Generate leads and sales
- **Resolve customer service issues**
- Handle crises

Whether the conversations are on Facebook, Twitter, your blog or popular forums in your industry, there are many ways to jump in and say hello. Good conversations solidify the relationship, and your fans will feel a more direct connection with the brand.

This ebook shares 20 different approaches to successfully engaging in social media.

1. Be transparent

[Oil Can Henry's](#) does one simple thing to stand apart from other oil change franchises: customers watch the mechanics working over a video feed on custom TV screens. In his book [Personality Not Included](#), Rohit Bhargava observes, "If [Oil Can Henry's] customers are able to watch a mechanic work on their car, it automatically creates a feeling of ease and encourages trust."

It may be tough to convince your execs to share your secret sauce or a beta product with customers. But openness can go a long way in social media. Your community will feel involved in your company and appreciate the trust you put in them. They may become interested in your story, want to get involved in your product trials and stay in touch when it comes to updates. That hook may be what you need to generate new customers and keep them for the long term.

Here are some ways to be more transparent:

- Take your customers behind the scenes. Do a video walkthrough of the shop floor. [Livestream your all-hands meeting](#).
- Turn your CEO loose on Twitter. [Here's Salesforce's Marc Benioff](#).
- Read, act on, and respond to reviews. [Think of your critics as volunteer mystery shoppers offering valuable insights](#).
- Actively solicit feedback, like [My Starbucks Idea](#).
- [Introduce your team](#). Let your customers meet and chat with your employees online.

2. Build trust

In being transparent, you will build trust within your social media community. Trust is critical in online discussions. Over the last ten years the value of trust has emerged as a hot topic for consumers. The 2012 [Edelman Trust Barometer](#) showed a decline in CEO credibility by 12 points in just one year. The 2012 [CEO Social Media and Leadership Survey](#) by Brandfog released that 82% of respondents were more likely to trust a company with a CEO and C-Suite engaged in social media. Perhaps the answer is building trust via social media. Here's how.

- Start with employees. Have an internal blog where you can share key thoughts and ideas and let your employees know first about major announcements and news. Giving your employees the heads up builds trust.
- Communicate with your customers/stakeholders and community via your blog. The Brandfog survey revealed that 81% of respondents believe that CEOs who engage in social media are better equipped than their peers to lead companies in the social environment.

- Show empathy and interest in your community. The more you do that, the more likely they'll respond and appreciate you.
- Be a helpful resource when you get questions from your community. This establishes credibility which can deepen trust and relationships.

You want your community to support your brand since support leads to new and long- lasting customer relationships.

3. Create awareness

If you don't have a highly-paid PR team or a big budget marketing plan you can still create strong brand awareness. Social media platforms offer the potential to increase your public profile. For instance, 2012 Track and Field Olympian, [Sarah Wells](#), began using Twitter hoping to engage Olympic fans, raise awareness of her quest for the gold, and of course, gain plenty of followers. Only a few days into her Twitter journey, Sarah hurdled over the 400 follower mark on the strength of plenty of support from her friends and family. It's an example of a grassroots social media campaign in its very early stages.



Read more about her story in this [post](#).

A key benefit of creating awareness via social media is its measurability. Here are some key awareness metrics.

- **Potential Reach:** the numbers of fans, followers, or “eyeballs”. It is more accurately seen as potential reach, as you'll never have all of those people paying attention to you simultaneously.
- **Mentions Per Time Period:** how many times your brand is talked about online during a given time period. This can give you a sense of overall awareness and chatter.

- **Inbound Links:** a solid indicator of the people that are aware of you and are telling others about you. Look at the sites and media types where the inbound links live to get a sense of the types of media that are driving consistent attention for your brand.
- **Share of Voice:** how much you're mentioned or covered in comparison to the competition.
- **Share of Conversation:** how often you are mentioned in context of the conversations that are most relevant to you. For a bit more detail about [how to calculate and measure Share of Conversation](#), read [Marcel Lebrun's post](#).

Learn more about these awareness metrics in this [blog post](#) by [Amber Naslund](#).

4. Be mindful of oversharing

While it's important to stay in the loop and maintain social relationships, posting too often, whether it's photos, status updates or frequent tweets, can turn off your audience. Our own [Melanie Thompson](#) gives some good examples of this in her post about "[over-sharenting](#)." Develop a calendar to organize what, when and where you're posting.

5. Tell a story

Are you an underdog? A hometown hero? A comeback story? Perhaps the story is something as simple as how a mom solved a household cleaning problem with your new product, or perhaps it's more involved – like the [stories Levi's shares](#) with their campaign. Whatever the case, the power of a good story can't be denied.

[Gavin Heaton](#) posted a presentation about [storytelling for social media](#), where he said, "It's about creating the coincidences that lead to an emotional connection. Something that you can share with the players in your personal playground."

Engagement is focused on the micro level. It's the follow-up to the story that was shared, including absorbing and responding to the reactions. It's the action of connecting with someone that was affected by your story in one way or another and the potential beginnings of a relationship with that person. Engagement can often unearth new stories, which then starts the cycle all over again.

6. Reach out to influencers

Influencers have long been part of marketing, and they need to be part of your outreach process. An influencer is not just someone with a large Twitter following, but someone who can influence someone to take an action. In social media, those actions can be to click on a link, share a post or sign-up for a product demo.

Once you have identified the influencers, start reading and sharing their social media content from your social media accounts and those of your company. This way when you reach out to them and introduce yourself, you are very familiar with what interests them. If they are in your industry, they may or may not already be familiar with your company. Since you are in the same industry, there should be plenty of common points of discussion. After establishing an online connection, look to further it in person at industry events. Once this relationship is established, ask them if they would do a webinar for your company or agree to be interviewed for your company blog. If you can create valuable content that they will share with their network, it will drive awareness of your company that can be converted to actions.

7. Respond to positive feedback

Positive feedback offers your brand a chance to turn casual fans and admirers into full blown fanatics, the people we refer to as “[brand evangelists](#)”. These superfans aren’t simply sharing your latest blog post or video, they’re actively touting your organization both online and off, advocating for you and sending new business your way.

Three good rules of thumb for responding to positive feedback include:

- Thank them. Thank your audience for the kind words they leave on your blog post, Twitter or Facebook wall.
- Return the favor. Is someone sharing your original content on Twitter? Take note of their latest post and share it with your network.
- Add them as a guest contributor. Take note of those individuals who really have the voice and passion to contribute something of value that your community will relish.

8. Respond to negative feedback

In the social media realm, negative commentary around your brand will happen, whether you are participating in social media or not. By listening carefully to your online community, you’ll easily spot [customer complaints](#) as they arise and quickly defuse those situations. Consider these approaches when addressing negative feedback:

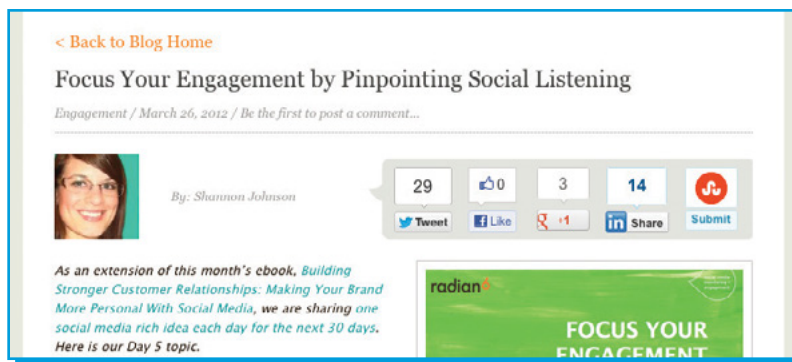
- Respond quickly. Social media users have come to expect a rapid response, an observation supported by [this article](#) from InformationWeek.
- Don’t delete. As Hive Strategies notes in their [ebook](#) on the subject, “Avoid the urge to purge”. Your customers may take that as a sign that your brand is uncaring and in social media, disappearing feedback can still be posted elsewhere, and that won’t reflect well on your brand.

- Don't feed the trolls. Stay focused on the constructive criticism. As John Hall, CEO of [Digital Talent Agents](#), states in this [Washington Post article](#), "This is a great chance to support your position and gain respect by communicating it respectfully. You never want to leave negative feedback out there that makes a good point."

9. Have a clear focus

Focus your engagement on the social media channels and conversations that make sense for your brand and your community. For instance, look for conversations that include:

- Someone searching for a recommendation.
- Phrases that imply your product or service has room for improvement to find why people aren't buying. If everyone's hung up on the same thing, you'll know exactly what to fix.
- Preference of your brand or brand loyalty. These conversations are likely spearheaded by your advocates.



For more on pinpointing conversations with social listening, look at this [post](#).

10. Show your personality

Don't get all stiff and corporate. You're having a conversation, not publishing a news release. The simple act of responding like a normal human being will delight your community.

And don't be merely human — have some personality. Your unique presence will separate you from your competitors. Respond with enthusiasm, empathy, creativity and warmth. What do you want people to remember about your brand?

A great example of personality is the clever comedian and filmmaker, [Mark Malkoff](#), based out of New York City. Mark modestly describes himself as, "Just a wacky guy making videos about my crazy stunts." However, his resume includes YouTube videos teetering on the one million-view mark. Mark

has tapped into the incredible resource of social media as a way to gain awareness and interest in his creative and bizarre ideas all while showing his true personality.



Learn more about Mark's story in this [post](#).

11. Share throughout the day

Social media as a marketing and engagement channel needs to be targeted from a time standpoint, as well as targeting the right audience with the right message. Share at various times of day to determine the best times for your content. Consider a global audience too. Posting content at times when your primary audience is asleep will not generate any traction for your messages.

12. Go beyond Facebook and Twitter



Learn more in their [case study](#).

We receive a good number of shout-outs in blogs and on forums. Most often those mentions are embedded in posts lauding the value of social media monitoring. For instance, GNC built a strong community of customers, thought leaders and fitness professionals by finding and engaging in conversations on relevant forums.

13. Be proactive

Monitor general feeds in your industry, for instance, we monitor “social media” to pick up a variety of posts that don’t mention our brand but are still valuable. This will reveal new conversations and enable you to establish new relationships.

14. Don’t sound canned

Say ‘thank you’, say ‘how can we help?’, but say it in your own words. A human tone and emphasis on individuality among employees is important. The simple act of responding in a non-robotic way can surprise and delight your community.

15. Find, create and share content

[Find, collect, and share content](#) that is relevant to your industry and engages your audience. Maintaining a curation feed will not only help you stay up-to-date on industry trends but will keep you top of mind as a resource. Sharing and learning with your audience sparks conversations and generates leads in the process. Producing and sharing your own content is a great way to add your voice to the conversations about your industry. This demonstrates increased commitment to your industry and showcases why people should pay attention to your brand. Whether you write a corporate blog, engage in industry-specific Twitter chats or forums, or create video content is up to you. Here are some things to keep in mind when sharing and creating content.

- Be the brand people look to for great finds.
- Avoid pet topics you enjoy ranting on.
- Be thoughtful and thought-provoking.
- Ask questions.
- Get your audience's mind racing.
- Show them that their opinions matter.
- Share industry-specific information.
- Be interesting and innovative.
- You don't always have to write brand-related content.
- Have fun. A Friday video will make them smile.

- Share content they need. Don't know what they need? Ask them.
- Consider discount codes, coupons or other benefits.
- Share your knowledge. Even if it's the best way to make Chicken Cordon Bleu.
- Use different media types — ebooks, whitepapers, infographics, videos, etc.

As you write and share, see what works. Ask your community what they like. After all, just like with any trend, what they enjoy one moment could be a turn off the next, so keep your eyes peeled.

16. Be innovative

While Obama has incorporated town hall meetings on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn during his presidential campaigns, he marked the first ever [Google+ Hangout with a President](#) and a [Q&A session with a President on Reddit](#). Talk about catering to your audience and encouraging dialogue. You too can be innovative if you know your audience and find a way to connect with them.

17. Keep it short

According to the Buddy Media report, [Strategies for Effective Tweeting: a Statistical Overview](#), “tweets containing less than 100 characters receive 17% higher engagement than longer tweets.” While Twitter limits your messages with their 140 character limit, Facebook, Google + and others do not so keep the 100 character limit in mind.

18. Follow your following

Not only is following those that follow you on Twitter a kind gesture, but it will grow your overall following. When you follow back, you might get some public responses, which will give you added exposure. Think about it: if a large brand with 30,000 followers on Twitter starts following you, you'd probably get excited and want to know what they're all about. Get that ball rolling and work your way up to 30,000 followers!

19. Help your customers become more social

Even if you don't think of yourself as a social media expert, you can share what you learn with your customers and community. It's easy to start a blog. Then let your customers know about it through your regular channels, like your email newsletter or website. Here are a few approaches:

- You don't have to sound like an expert. “We've started this blog to share what we're learning in social media. We hope you'll share the journey with us, let us know what questions you're trying to answer, and what's working for you.”

- You don't have to answer every question. You can share the questions you're asking and the goals you want to achieve. Then when you answer them, you'll have even more to share.
- Your customers already know you. They like you. They trust you. They're all wondering about social media, and they would love for you to help them figure it out. And they will thank you for it.

20. Act quickly

Gone are the days of getting back to your clients in 24 hours. Today you've got to make every effort to get back to them within the hour — even if that reply can only be, “We're working on a solution for you right now.”

Conclusion

Remember there is no right or standard way to engage. The right type of engagement for you is defined by the goals you set for your social media program. Establish guidelines for engagement that give those on the frontlines enough freedom to be themselves while still properly representing your brand.



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