8 Tips for Social Business
A HootSuite White Paper

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Social is now a pivotal point for business transactions. It's no longer new and is mature beyond the point of being an enjoyable way to pass the time or play games. Social media is, however, young enough that best practices for social business are still being carved out – the standard for enterprise integration of social media has yet to be drawn.

The future of business engagement on all levels, whether it be from a sales, HR, customer service or marketing standpoint, is inherently social. It's where your customers dwell and is now the first language of the next generation of customers and employees alike. Your business is becoming social, and understanding how is the key to success. This paper outlines the path to success in eight simple steps that you can use to implement and evaluate social within your various teams and departments.

Understanding Social Business

What is social business, exactly? At the simplest level, social business is when any organization engages with an audience either internal or external, maybe both, using one or many social platforms. This principle applies to businesses of all manner, including boutique fashion designers using Twitter to let eager bloggers and shoppers know that next season's pieces are en route to retail outlets. Or maybe you're a globally distributed corporation using multiple social platforms to prospect for sales leads, amplify your corporate culture to support HR, and allow teams to collaborate inter-departmentally, across time zones and diverse cultures. Both examples could be described, reasonably, as practicing social business albeit they occupy positions on either end of a spectrum we define as the **Social Media Maturity Model**.

It's important to state there is no correct level of Social Maturity. It's not a competition. You don't win by reaching the Social Enterprise stage of the Social Maturity Model, nor are you necessarily a better practitioner of social business by being there. We've merely observed that these stages exist and some organizations pass through them sequentially on the way to being a fully engaged Social Enterprise. Others will stay at the Social Team or Advocate stage permanently as the size and scale of their needs simply don't justify the expansion and necessary provision of resources that goes along with it.

We do find it's helpful for organizations to define where they are in their Social Maturity in order to better understand their present situation and, in cases where it's appropriate, to prepare to scale and expand a social offering. Ultimately it's about knowing where you're headed so you can do a little groundwork before you get there.

Social Advocate: This is social engagement at its simplest stage. At this stage, social is in the hands of a single individual within an organization. This person usually has strong personal social involvement and may have emerged from within the organization as a logical leader in social, or perhaps hired specifically to tackle social for the organization – the social expert.

Social Teams: A Social Advocate can only do so much. Enter the social team. Typically the Social Team is departmentally focused. In the early days of social, these teams were nearly all centered around marketing or PR, but more recently we're seeing the spread of social teams throughout an organization.

Social Business: Once you have a number of social teams operating in separate departments, you're on your way to the Social Business stage. A more telling and significant sign is the way an organization handles the socially native concepts of openness and transparency. Is your organization having open dialogue in front of its customers, partners, and even competitors?

Social Enterprise: A Social Business operating across time zones or cultures. You have good policy governing social engagement that empowers your teams to engage customers directly. You're turning the tools you've used to engage outwardly with customers inward to foster better internal collaborative practices.

The numbers support the increased application and scaling of social in business, particularly at the enterprise end. A McKinsey Global Institute study that looked at applying social across the consumer packaged goods, retail financial services, advanced manufacturing, and professional services sectors estimated social could contribute up to $1.3 trillion in value in those areas. A full two-thirds of that value lay solely within improving communication and collaboration across enterprises, an area which is hugely under-developed with the same report stating that only 3 percent of enterprises are currently fully socially networked. But with over half, 52 percent, of managers confirming the importance of social to their business today and 82 percent agreeing to its importance within the next three years, good preparation and planning for the growth of social business, both inside and outside the firewall, is now top-of-the-to-do-list critical.

Tip 1: Evaluate:

After taking stock of your organization's position on our Social Maturity Model, it's time to ask a few questions. First, where have you already or where do you plan to deploy social programs and against which goals? In either case, avoid considering social in a vacuum. Take the time to understand where it best fits your organization and how to integrate it into existing organizational and departmental goals. You're not reinventing wheels for social, just using it to make the ones you have turn faster.

Where will it allow you to reach the customers or stakeholders who most crave deeper, richer dialogue? Perhaps it's the marketing department, the traditional home of social media in business, but that's not a given. Perhaps it's HR? Maybe you're better to consider developing a robust internal social ecosystem, harnessing the power of inward-facing social before you look outward? How are you going measure and quantify the success of social programs? Look beyond vanity metrics such as Likes and Follows and try, for example, to find a direct link between conversation and conversion. Focus on influence and analytics over inflating a group size or follower base.

What can you reasonably afford to dedicate to social in terms of time and tools? The allocation of human resources is far and away the most significant cost tied to social. What will your team(s) look like? Identify leadership within your organization or begin the hunt to find it from the outside. With your team(s) in place, educate and cross-train team members so that they can be rotated across different areas of specialization. Empower your people. We practice this at HootSuite as a way of providing our people the ability to engage our customers multi-dimensionally rather than silo-ing expertise department to department.

Look for a reliable and scalable social tool that centralizes control over your social platforms and puts the power to listen, engage, collaborate and analyze in the hands of your do-ers, practitioners and experts. Make decisions about which platforms you will be active on or where you may need to consolidate existing accounts. Observe the largest organizations in your industry vertical and learn from their successes and mistakes. Engage them in conversation about the future of social in your industry. Look deeper than the usual social suspects like Facebook and Twitter to other platforms like Quora or Get Satisfaction where you may have existing communities of powerful unpaid social advocates already at work on your behalf.

Tip 2: Organize

While you want to centralize control over your social platforms with a social tool like a dashboard, you want to de-centralize the conversations you have over them. To do that, you need to empower your practitioners and teams to engage your customers in conversation directly. Imagine the opposite of the hub and spoke model – fully distributed content creation arising from each point of contact independently. The City of New York (CNY), in moving toward achieving their goal of becoming the world's leading digital city, embedded a Social Advocate in each of its agencies allowing autonomous control over departmental messaging. Empowered autonomy of this kind becomes particularly relevant on a global scale where a centralized approach may not respect or understand cultural differences at the micro level.

Consolidate your efforts. Each CNY Social Advocate also belonged to a center of excellence run by the CNY Digital Media team that fostered collaboration, co-ordination on messaging and sharing of learning around best practices. Hearst Publishing and Time Inc. have digital leadership that identify top performing social properties, and share stories of success crafted by the teams that run them. Transferring knowledge and best practices from digital leaders to team members further educates and empowers your Social Team to contribute to the conversation. Should the need or the desire to scale your social program arise, you have pre-trained your next generation of social leadership. Your social tools should also be able to grow along with you, enabling growth by being modular and flexible to facilitate even further decentralization, expansion, and conversation.

Tip 3: Listen & Learn

> "The conversation is happening about your brand whether you're a part of it or not."
>
> **Seth Godin.**

There's no question. People are talking about your organization. And if by chance they're not, then they're talking about your competitors and starting a conversation you'll have trouble being a part of. Don't let your organization get left behind. Amazon founder, Jeff Bezos once described your brand as, "what people say about you when you're not in the room." Today, not only do you have an opportunity to be in the room but to take an active role in the conversation itself.

Good search practices start with monitoring for mentions – the good, the bad and the ugly – of your organization, but can also focus on topics related to your business where you may wish to become an influencer. At HootSuite we monitor for off- as well on-brand messages in order to assist users who may not spell HootSuite correctly 100 percent of the time. Undoubtedly Hilton adjusts its search parameters to exclude mentions of either Paris or Perez. With social, it is also possible to monitor certain users or organizations closely without them knowing you're listening.

Gather your feedback. There are some interesting disconnects between consumers' and businesses' perceptions on why people engage with organizations via social media. 73 percent of businesses feel consumers want to learn about new products while only 51 percent of consumers give that as a reason. 61 percent of businesses think consumers want to be part of a community. Only 22 percent of consumers support that thought while 61 and 55 percent of consumers want discounts and to purchase something respectively. Better monitoring, listening and analysis of conversation and feedback could lead to programs across departments from advertising to customer service, HR or sales to close these gaps and build more empathetic, customer-centric relationships.

Tip 4: Engage to Build Community

While each brand will have it's own communication style, there is a right way and a wrong. The most important thing you can do is to acknowledge the voice of the customer, really hear and respect what they are saying. If what you're hearing is a complaint, let them know a resolution is being sought, then follow through on that resolution to the best of your

organization's ability. Once again, don't consider social in a vacuum. Integrate your response with existing channels and let the most appropriate channel lead the way to resolution.

Listen and pick your moments. If sales are a priority, nurture potential leads with relevant and helpful content. Make sales through engagement. The age-old sales maxim, "Make a friend first, a sale second" still applies to social, only even more so due to social's ability to amplify positive, or negative, experiences.

Give advice. Hilton Hotels takes an entirely non-sales oriented approach with @HiltonSuggests by taking an engagement for engagement's sake position. Hilton monitors online conversation for travelers looking for recommendations all over the world. Acting as a quasi global concierge, @HiltonSuggests steps in to offer accommodation advice to travelers whether a Hilton is a viable option or not.

Perks don't hurt. As mentioned above, 61 percent of consumers use social to look for discounts. Social is obviously a great way to highlight promotions and deals, but make them appropriate and relevant to your brand. For example, why would a bakery give away an iPad? Promotions of this kind are common and can build vanity metrics such as Likes or Follows, but those need to be balanced with engagement. How engaged are iPad fans with bakeries? Fans of customized cakes are much more likely to be highly engaged and even influential to a fledgling bakery. Fewer more influential followers trump hordes of deal hunters every time. With HootSuite's custom URL parameters, our bakery could even track conversions arising directly from their posts to Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn and put that iPad to use around the office.

Tip 5: Collaborate

Share learning internally. Encourage your Social Teams to distribute new learning both within the Team and your organization as a whole. Keep an ongoing loop of discovery and dissemination where best practices, positive messaging or common questions are put forward for comment or collaboration. A social platform like Yammer is an exceptional tool for supporting secure internal conversation and exchange of ideas.

Ultimately better internal collaboration supports improved external engagement, keeping messaging consistent, intelligent and brand-appropriate. The New York Public Library @NYPL uses HootSuite to coordinate a decentralized team of experts.

Rather than impose a centralized Social Team to respond to inquiries, @NYPL tapped into the existing, extraordinarily deep knowledge base of librarians by training and empowering them to use social.

As the largest online public library in the world, @NYPL receives a very high volume of inbound requests. Using HootSuite, the @NYPL experts are able to, through a shared dashboard, assign inquiries to the appropriate area of expertise, collaborate departmentally on a response, share and edit as necessary and schedule the response to go out at a time their audience is most likely to receive and read it. Visits to the library's website coming from Twitter increased more than 350 percent in one year.

Tip 6: Secure

Fear over losing control is an understandable barrier to implementing social media across an organization. It is important to note that mistakes are preventable. While perhaps confusing personal and branded accounts, an employee of Chrysler's social media agency with access to the @ChryslerAutos account tweeted using questionable language to comment on the driving abilities of fellow Detroiters. A Red Cross employee, in a similar slip-up, professed her love for #gettngslizzerd with her favorite Delaware beer brand on @RedCross. In each case, the missteps were handled well and the damage to each organization was more along the lines of temporary embarrassment than anything permanent, but why not stop them before they occur?

HootSuite developed Secure Profiles specifically in response to instances like these to put a solid measure of prevention in place. This provides an extra prompt when publishing to important branded accounts, preventing errant posts intended for personal accounts.

Limited Permissions is another unique security feature. HootSuite offers multiple levels of account access and places limits on which team members

can participate in outbound social conversation directly. The Limited Permissions puts control over publishing firmly in the hands of those who are most trusted. Your social tools should too.

Team members are also easily added and removed as organizations expand and contract. Removal is instantaneous in the event that a team member isn't exiting on good terms. The now infamous @MarcJacobsintl intern meltdown where CEO, Robert Duffy was described as a "tyrant" by an over-worked intern would have been prevented by using HootSuite's Limited Permissions setting to limit his access to publish without approval.

Tip 7: Measure ROI

It's important for social data to be relevant to stakeholders within organization, but often they speak only to the practitioners. This makes it difficult to communicate value, or to make important decisions related to the use or investment in social media for the organization. It does not need to be so. Tie social to the big picture by linking it to organizational and departmental goals. Users can start with tracking the Like, @mention, Retweet or Follow, but tap in to the power to go much further and deeper. Build the capacity for measurement into every social action. Use URL shorteners, like our own ow.ly links, to track your click-throughs. Integrate Google Analytics and Facebook Insights to track on-site conversions or drill in to geographic disparities in data.

One of the more powerful, recent integrations at HootSuite is our partnership with Adobe SiteCatalyst. For the first time ever, you're able to track the path from social message to conversion and attach a dollar value to individual social messages against Key Performance Indicators. You're able to see which social platform performs best against certain kinds of messaging, analyze which of your Social Advocates is driving more revenue per message and understand what times of day work best for which kinds of communication. MediaLeaders, working on behalf of The Palms Hotel in Las Vegas, ran a compelling pilot study of this capability in 2011 where they were able to directly link room reservations to individual tweets.

Reporting is important. With HootSuite you can use data gained from Adobe SiteCatalyst, Facebook Insights, Google Analytics, Google+ Pages Analytics, Twitter Profile Stats, our own custom ow.ly Click Stats to generate easy, drag and drop social analytics reports shared easily by email. More importantly, you can analyze that data to optimize future programs and messaging.

Tip 8: Amplify

Double down. One of the benefits of good measurement and understanding of your data is the ability to hone your messaging and understand what did and didn't work from a content perspective. Organic social is testing your content for you. Paid social allows you to commit dollars with data-backed belief in your programs and messaging. Invest in promoted tweets, accounts or trends across social platforms or accounts that have already demonstrated the highest yield. Invest in social tools that allow you to scale your programs effectively across teams, departments, geographies, brands etc. in order to build social media success into your strategy.

Conclusion

With these 8 Tips, you're better positioned to go forward and succeed in social business, whether you're at the Social Advocate, Teams, Organization stage of Social Maturity. With the next generation of consumers and employees adopting social as their media of choice, the future of business and the future of social are inextricably linked.

The time is now. One day, in the not-too-distant future, there will be no more social business. The adjectification era of social as it relates to business will be past as social's integration into business completes itself. Social will simply be business, business will simply be social. Today you have eight more ways to get you there.

To find out more, vist enterprise.hootsuite.com

About HootSuite Enterprise

Partner with HootSuite to enhance your social organization with our value-driven solutions:

HootSuite for Social Media Management

HootSuite for Social Marketing

HootSuite for Social Customer Service

HootSuite for Social Selling

HootSuite Enterprise is designed for organizations that want to drive, and connect, business goals with social media efforts. Securely deploy broad social programs that empower employees to participate in social, regardless of department, function or geography. Provide executive insights on your entire social media footprint, and feed social data into existing systems for CRM, customer service and compliance.

Beyond tools and features, HootSuite Enterprise enhances the value that social media provides by seamlessly integrating all social media efforts with existing systems and structures.

Request a custom demo today by visiting enterprise.hootsuite.com

Top Brands Trust HootSuite