
How B2B Companies Can Get The Most Out Of Social Media



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The effective use of social media is still something that few companies in the B2B sector seem to have fully mastered. Conversely, the majority of B2C companies have developed sophisticated social media strategies very quickly and are now reaping the rewards. However, any companies taking the view that there is not a need for social media amongst B2B audiences are doing themselves a real disservice.

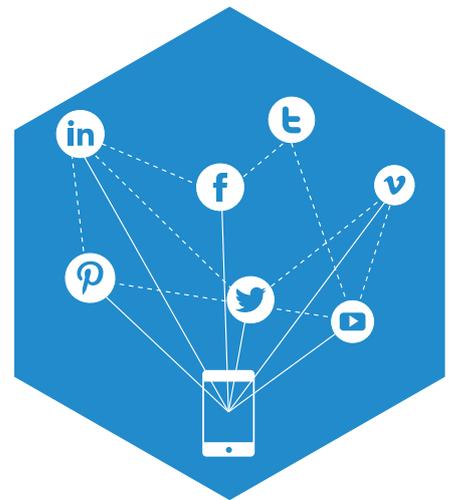
We already know that a digital presence is vital to generating leads – studies suggest, for instance, that more than 90% of research done by engineers into new products is via Google. But digital also encompasses social. YouTube is an increasingly important research tool for engineers, ranking second only to Google as a platform for retrieving information. Furthermore, over 80% of engineers use LinkedIn in a professional capacity, not to mention a variety of forums to interact and share knowledge with their peers.

It is clear that if B2B companies ignore social media they do so at their peril. They risk missing out on an indispensable way of growing their business commercially. Just like their B2C counterparts, they need to explore a more expansive scope of channels by which they can connect with customers and prospects as well as branching out into other spheres where there may be untapped potential (either geographical or in terms of new applications). By generating greater sales the resultant increase in revenues means that companies with the foresight to push ahead with social media can easily justify the investment made.

What stops companies getting the most from social media?

Publitek has identified a series of reasons why B2B companies may fail to capitalize on the value that social media can bring. The most common of these are:

1. Social media is often viewed as a single entity, with marketing managers coming to the misguided conclusion that if one element of it is not suitable for their needs they can simply discount all of it 'wholesale'. For instance, if they consider that a presence on Facebook or Instagram is not required they may then go on to disregard other options such as Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube or Vimeo, some of which might work really well for them. This lack of understanding of the subtleties of the social media landscape is one of the reasons that expert guidance is needed.
2. Marketing managers are afraid that if they go ahead with a social media campaign they won't be able to keep it under their control. This may be because of a lack of real understanding of what's involved and inexperience of how social media activities need to be managed. Just because a company has bought in to using certain social media platforms, does not automatically mean that it's the green light for everyone in the company to start broadcasting material. Content needs to be dealt with in an organized and professional manner via a skilled team.



3. Marcoms teams can sometimes have the impression that they are actually already doing a pretty good job of social media, when in fact they really need the help of professionals. In some cases there can be a sizeable gulf between what the marketing manager assumes the company's social media effort accomplishes and what it is achieving in reality.

Effective social media – Some key questions

There are a few simple questions that will allow marketing managers to carry out a basic audit of their social media presence and identify where there is room for improvement. They are as follows:

1. Are you using the right social media channels for your purposes?

This is an important point to contemplate when planning out your overall social media strategy, and will help you to maximize the impact of your efforts. You need to identify on which social media channels your audience will be found in greatest numbers and where it spends the most time.

2. Is your content well aligned with the characteristics of the social channel you are using?

For example, the sort of content that will work well on Twitter or Facebook might be considered to be over-promotional for LinkedIn groups. Here comment or thought leadership pieces or links to white papers are likely to be more suitable for attempting to reach out to group members.

3. Are you posting often enough?

Very few companies can honestly say they are doing as much as they should when it comes to generating and distributing content via social media. The trap that many companies fall into is initiating a social media presence then subsequently failing to follow through with it. Far too many companies, with the best of intentions, have created the platform – setting up a Twitter feed for example – then given someone nominal responsibility for it (alongside their 'day job'). This person may have created a few tweets initially but ultimately other things get in the way and the feed slowly becomes dormant. Not only does this mean that social media channels are not being exploited, it affects how the company is viewed by the outside world. Few things look worse for branding than a Twitter feed or Facebook page that has been left for a year without any new material being added.

4. Are the correct people involved in the process?

Inexperience of how social media activities can be managed can result in procrastination. Just because a company has decided to start making use of a social media platform does not mean that all of a sudden it becomes a free for all - with everyone in the company posting all manner of material. Creation and dissemination of content must be handled with the utmost professionalism. That is why it is critical that it is left in the hands of a skilled, highly proficient team, rather than a bunch of keen but inexperienced amateurs.

5. Are sufficient resources being allocated?

Companies will generally find that the biggest challenge they face is having the available 'bandwidth'. If a member of the team is assigned with blogging, tweeting, posting on LinkedIn, or uploading videos, then they need to do so on a regular basis. What can happen, however, is other tasks end up taking priority. Social media activities get placed at the bottom of the pile. The problem is that if posting is erratic, the ability for a company to make any real impact is significantly reduced.



6. What is the nature of the content?

One of the key problems is a failure to produce the right content. This sometimes happens when marketing managers recruit someone with a good knowledge of social media but no knowledge of the company's technologies, applications or markets. No matter how well-intentioned, such individuals will almost certainly not be able to comfortably post or tweet content that is going to engage an engineering-oriented audience. The quality of the material produced is, therefore, poor and unable to attract the desired interest. In this case it is better to outsource, blogging, tweeting and other digital content generation activities to a third party that has a good knowledge of the company's technology, complemented by a strong background in social media.

7. Is the content created actually reaching the right people?

Before investing the resources needed for content creation, it is important to get people's awareness. This last element should be broken down into two separate parts. Firstly the company has to ensure it actually has a sizeable audience to interact with. Any effort posting content is going to be wasted if nobody gets to see it! Building a substantial Twitter following is one thing - actually having the appropriate individuals in that following is something else. Often social media experts will use fancy tricks to build up your social media audience, but if the people they attract are not going to be in a position to specify or purchase the company's products then that following will prove itself to be worthless. Based on this, the second element is compiling a social media community made up of people that fit the proper profile for your company.

Summary for social media success

To ensure that B2B social media efforts attain the results they should it is vital to:

- Identify the channels that work for you and those that don't
- Set goals for what constitutes a successful campaign on these channels
- Choose competent individuals – or outsource to a suitable third party – for the generation of content
- Develop content that is relevant to both the target audience and the channels
- Put together a content plan that drives the generation and sharing of content regularly and frequently
- Build the audience for the channel in a strategic way – with a focus on relevant individuals rather than headline numbers
- Measure the results against the goals

To learn more about how to better implement your social media campaigns feel free to get in touch with the specialist, B2B engineering-orientated team at Publitek Marketing.





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