



The Business of Social

Ten Things You Need to Know to Build a Social Business

Overview

Seemingly overnight, social has become one of the primary pillars of marketing. Every organization from large global banks to local businesses are involved with opinion sites, Facebook fan pages, tweeting and building online communities of their own. Many are also investing in internal social collaboration tools to drive better employee productivity and knowledge sharing.

There's no question social is hot right now. But does it work? Early primary research to measure ROI is encouraging, but inconclusive. Social communities turn customers into advocates and evidence is mounting that successful customer communities contribute to lower support costs and improved

undertaking social media efforts. Why? Because social simply makes sense. And let's not forget that employees entering the workforce and new customers buying from your business expect to be collaborating socially; that's how they interact in their personal lives. Email is so last century!

Social is here to stay, but success or failure depends on the approach and strategy employed. We've worked with thousands of organizations that have built a robust online presence. We've also created (from the ground-up) an online community of our own with one million members. What have we learned? Here are 10 things you need to keep in mind as you invest in social.

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loyalty, retention and engagement. Internal social collaboration gives employees a better way to communicate, collaborate and take action, which drives improved productivity and efficiency.

Despite an abundance of hard evidence, many organizations are investing in social. According to the recent studies, social media is no longer the latest 'shiny object;' 79% of corporations are

1 Social Communities are About Shared Passion

So how do you get customers to engage and talk about your products with each other and to you? People gravitate to social tools because they want to give advice and to get advice from people they trust. According to Zuberance, a brand advocacy company, brand advocates are worth 10 times

more than regular customers. Why? According to Forrester Research, 94% of people trust “word of mouth” recommendations versus only 14% that trust advertising. People want to join in conversations about shared passions. It really is as simple as that. Find the passion in your customers and give them a place to connect with each other.

community members can easily get help from other members. If you want to build a community that offers premium subscription services, (perhaps for digital entertainment) you’ll need an easy-to-use e-Commerce capability that allows you to accept payment and assign members to roles with the right to access specific content. If your goal is to improve



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Determine the Kind of Community You Want to Build

There are many different types of online communities. There are internal communities that enable employees to communicate and collaborate within an organization. There are also external communities that enable customers, prospects and fans to interact. The first thing you’ll need to do is determine what kind of community you want to build and what your objectives are for the site. For example, your goal may be to reduce support costs by forming an online community of product experts who can answer questions and provide guidance to new users. For this type of project many customers chose to add a wiki, discussion forums and a question & answer application so that

employee productivity with a social intranet you’ll need to offer a simple way to share documents and publish content from document management solutions like Microsoft SharePoint.

No matter which type of community you are building, a robust and flexible web content management platform is critical because community content made up of a set of web pages and web applications with information, photos, videos and other web functionality that must be managed by multiple content editors with varying levels of access and edit privileges. That platform should be highly scalable to support your growing community and highly extensible so that you can easily drop in new services. You will also want to have access to a large marketplace of applications to choose

from as well as the ability to develop any type of new functionality yourself.

3 Mobile isn't an Afterthought

We've all seen the statistics; mobile is now the primary web access channel for many people, especially in emerging geographies. Taking a desktop website and 'squeezing' it onto a mobile device simply won't deliver a very compelling experience in most cases. Creating a tailored mobile experience for your customers is paramount. Fortunately, adaptive rendering techniques and responsive design tools are making this easier and faster. In order to drive social engagement, make sure that the mobile experience for your customers and employees is easy, simple and obvious.

4 Don't Build Social Silos

There are many enterprise social solutions on the market now. Most of them do a great job at one thing; creating a place where employees and customers can interact and share information. The problem is, that's ALL they do. Using these tools, social conversations are isolated from the rest of the business in their own silos. If you want enterprise social products to operate with the rest of your business, it takes lots of money and time to create custom integrations, which then have to be supported forever. Most organizations simply cannot afford this strategy.

Instead, take a look at a Web Content Management System (WCMS) that fully integrates social tools and functionality with the rest of the offering. Social CMS makes good business sense for a number of reasons:



Your website is already the hub of your business. Integrating social conversations with your most important business asset, built on a WCMS, provides opportunities for better communication, collaboration and engagement. Sharing content becomes a whole lot easier.



Social conversations are just another form of content, including shared documents, images and videos. Managing content is what a WCMS does best. If you take this approach, social content can be woven into the fabric of your site seamlessly and to maximum benefit for your customers.



No expensive customizations are needed. Your social site is up and running in days, not months.



The social CMS site can be tailored with off-the-shelf modules and designs, further cutting implementation time and cost.



Essential features like robust permissions models are built-in making the social CMS solution scalable for a wide range of user roles.

5 Start Small, Iterate Quickly

Many customers ask us; “How do I get started?” when launching a new social site. The best answer is: start small, get something out there and then iterate quickly as you get feedback from your community. Launch your community site as a beta to a small group of people before you open it up to a wider audience. This gives you an opportunity to work out the kinks in a low risk model. It’s also best to seed content in your first iteration; customers and employees may be reluctant to participate if they see a ‘blank’ slate with no content.

6 Focus on the Essentials

Designing the perfect community site with all the bells and whistles can turn into a giant effort, extending project deadlines and introducing extra cost. Focus on the essential ingredients that most people expect in a modern online community today:

- Activity feeds for sharing content and having conversations
- Social groups and forums that encourage shared interests
- Facebook, Twitter and Google+ authentication for easy login
- ‘Friend’ and ‘Follow’ controls that encourage social relationships
- Ratings and comments extend conversations
- Search capabilities enable new employees or community members to find content easily

- Private messaging gives people an alternative to public conversations
- Interactive user profiles with detailed personalization options
- Member directory that makes it easy to find and connect with other people

7 Everyone Participates

Getting employees or customers to start using social can be a challenge. People often get set in their ways and are reluctant to move to a new paradigm. Encourage employees to move away from email by responding to questions on the Social CMS site, not in email. Provide content that is available exclusively in the social channel, which promotes usage and eyeballs. Run contests to help seed social conversations and engagement. Make it fun for people to participate. Make sure that the content is fresh. Over time, people will see the benefit of moving from traditional email exchanges to a more open, social style of communication and collaboration. When more conversations are happening socially than on email, you’re on your way.

TIP!

Encourage employees to **move away from email** by responding to questions on the social CMS site, not in email.

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Social is Just One Channel; Don't Stop What You've Been Doing

Just because you launch a social site, don't expect employees, partners and customers to use it exclusively. Continue to invest in more traditional support networks but encourage community members to help each other solve problems. Consider adopting gamification strategies to reward participation. In the case of internal social networks, you won't be able to move employees completely off of email, but drive eyeballs to the social site by posting answers to common questions there. You will have to continue to monitor and grow other social channels like Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook, but link back to your community whenever it makes sense. For example, continue to invest in Facebook Fan pages as a branding strategy, but own your own conversations. At the end of the day, your community is just one channel that needs to integrate with the rest of your branding and communications strategy.

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Measure, Analyze and Iterate

How can you tell if your investment in social is working? To start with, decide on a small number of metrics to track and then measure them consistently. Obvious metrics are the rate of new member registrations, number of new posts, comments, ratings and groups. As your external community grows, track the number of customer support cases being handled by your team and

see if this drops as social engagement increases. For internal social sites, track the amount of email traffic to see if it drops as social activity increases. Measuring overall productivity and efficiency gains related to social investments is a bit more difficult, but many organizations that adopt formal process methodologies should be able to go there.

The important point is to try different approaches to see what works best for your use case. Experiment with contests, incentives and gamification. Make sure that your customers, partners and employees know about the social community tools that are available, which means you need to market them effectively to drive traffic and usage.

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Don't Forget the Offline Community

Building an online community can produce tremendous results for your business by bringing together people of similar interests from across the globe. And increasingly people are spending more and more of their time socializing online. However, that doesn't mean that people no longer need to meet and engage face to face. Consider launching user groups, conferences, training and social events to give your online community the chance to build even deeper personal relationships. Your online community can help you promote and manage those events with social calendaring, announcements, blogs, photos, video and messaging.

About DNN

DNN provides a suite of solutions for creating rich, rewarding online experiences for customers, partners and employees. Our technology is the foundation for 750,000+ websites worldwide and our customers include True Value Hardware, Bose, Cornell University, Glacier Water, Dannon, Delphi, USAA, NASCAR, Northern Health and the City of Denver. In addition to our commercial solutions, DNN is the steward of the DotNetNuke Open Source Project.

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