



Adapting to the New Normal

The Evolution of Social Media and What Success Looks Like Today



Yesterday, social media was *simple*.

2005, when social media became a term we knew and understood, things were much more straightforward.

You had time. Time to try things and figure them out. Time to explore different tools and their capabilities. Time to do a lot of experimentation. The stakes were low.

The price for a misstep was small. Not too many people were paying attention yet. In fact, if you were a business paying any attention to social at all, you were way ahead of the game. If you weren't doing anything with social media yet, that was okay too.

Your competition probably wasn't either, so your absence wasn't going to be noticed because social media was still largely an individual sport, with early adopters leading the charge to test new tools and technologies for their own purposes.

Fast forward a few years...

In 2007, Twitter was the darling of South by Southwest, a prominent tech event taking place in Austin, TX every March. Once the tech sector got hold of it and started to realize its potential (albeit through simplicity), brands and agencies alike took notice.

That same year, Facebook - to date a very person-to-person social network - launched Facebook Pages.

At about the same time, tech providers started to surface, calling themselves "social media monitoring" or "social listening" solutions.

The premise, of course, was to understand all of the activity

on social networks, including blogs and online community forums.

And if you were a company, there was a strong chance that someone was talking about you, or at least a topic you cared about.

So, "social listening" became the first imperative for businesses in a digital age. Brands needed to keep pace with those conversations, and technology was going to help them do that.

While they listened, others were intrigued:

- What if we did that too?
- What if we had a Twitter account?
- What could we do if we built and used a Facebook page to each our customers?

The business side of social media had arrived.

2.7 Billion

Number of social network users expected by 2019*

Source: Statista, 2016



Today, social media is complicated.

The landscape of social has truly and completely changed for businesses all across the globe. Let's talk about what that means.

Customer expectations have changed.

If we needed to sum up all of the modern implications for business around social media today, it would be that the digital world and its capabilities have changed the expectations that consumers have on the way they interact with companies.

Listening is a requirement - at a minimum.

People expect that you're paying attention what's happening on the web. And if you aren't monitoring what's happening on social channels, you aren't prepared for the impact that the web, social, and digital media can have on your brand and the groundswell of dialogue happening across the web that might be relevant to you.

Presence is expected. Response is critical. Gone are the days of "we'll get back to you within 24 to 48 hours." In fact, according to Jay Baer and research conducted with leading firm Edison Research, nearly half of surveyed customers (42%) expect a response from a company on social media within 60 minutes.

What's more: More than half of the people who've contacted brands on social channels (57%) say that they expect the same response times at night - and on weekends, too.

It's important you understand and speak the language of your customers.

Social media audiences see right through the "on brand" veneer and are incredibly sensitive to corporate-speak. The typical scripted talking points and "approved" messages just don't play well online - people want to interact with another person. What does this mean? That it's imperative you empower teams with the ability to infuse personality into their engagement, while providing guidelines and education about how they do so while staying within approved limits.

The noise is deafening online, too.

If you want to break through the noise, you have to provide an online engagement experience that stands head and shoulders above the rest.

We'll talk more in a minute about how your content can rise above, but remember that, generally speaking, your approach to social media should prioritize personality, helpfulness, and down-to-earth communication.

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You need a social methodology that's *future-proof*.

If your social programs are going to ensure the rapidfire changes in the industry - let alone the twists and turns that every business goes through - it helps to keep a few best practices in mind.

Social is not a strategy.

One of the primary mistakes many organizations make is trying to make social media "strategic." It's definitely important to ensure that social ties to business goals - and we'll talk more about that in a moment - but it's a mistake to think that social media is a strategy in itself.

Social media is a mechanism. It's completely inert on its own until it's employed to serve a purpose. Much like you don't have a phone strategy, you don't need a social media strategy.

You need a social media plan and flexible programs that you can then leverage within whatever business strategy it can impact most: marketing, PR, customer service, product development.

But the strategy comes first, and social media should support and drive that strategy depending on how it's applied. If you try to make social media your only marketing strategy, you're destined to fail the moment that landscape changes or shifts or something else takes its place.

Without tying social to business objectives, you're lost.

If social media isn't a standalone strategy, than it needs to align with the business objectives you have set for your larger

marketing, customer service, or other topline goals.

When it comes to marketing, social is great at building awareness and engaging existing audiences to drive loyalty (not so much for direct sales), so your goals for social media should reflect how you want to improve your brand exposure or how you want to connect with your prospects and customers and encourage them to get to know you better.

If you're leveraging social for customer service, your goals for social media should be to impact and influence metrics like customer satisfaction scores, resolution time for calls or inquiries, or whatever other measurements you've put in place to determine how good your customer service is.

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It's fine to have goals for social media's contributions to these metrics, but ultimately, social is the means to the end, not the end itself.

Social is a cultural shift more than an operational one.

Sure, it's challenging to get all the moving parts of your social initiatives aligned and working together. But solving for operational pieces before you've addressed the cultural ones, is putting the cart before the horse. One reason many organizations struggle with social media is the mandate for openness, for personalization, and its spontaneous, real-time nature. It can make it difficult if not impossible to predict what's going to happen next.

That means you have to do two critical things.

First and foremost, you need to hire people that you trust to work on your social programs. That's kind of a given, but the second piece is that these people also need to be good at collaborating with and convincing others to see the value.

Part of the job of today's social professional is internal education, and articulating the value proposition of social from within a larger business plan. Don't underestimate how important it is to have those discussions up front: what are we expecting social to do for us? What are we worried about? How do we feel about engaging our customers in this way? Preparing for the cultural shift that's needed to embrace the customer-driven nature of social media is a crucial piece to laying the groundwork for successful programs.

Crisis isn't a matter of if, but when. So plan.

Too many organizations get tossed into the deep end of social media because a brand reputation crisis or customer service fiasco puts them in the line of fire. Even if you don't think you're in the type of business likely to have this kind of problem, it's a good investment to plan around the scenarios that could take place anyway.

Think of your worst case scenarios, from customer service gone wrong to employee misbehavior to a reputation scandal of some kind. Get them on sticky notes, and categorize them in groups.

Then get your best and brightest minds around a table to play those scenarios through, and come up with "What if?" plans for each:

- Who would be the first line of defense on social media? What should they say?
- Who would you need to scramble to get messaging and responses together in short order?
- What about approvals or escalation paths?
- Who else would need to be in the loop if something goes awry?
- How will you follow up with customers during or after a crisis?

If you're not experienced at crisis planning, consider engaging your agency or finding an agency or adviser that can help you through the process objectively.

Consider this part like social media insurance; you hope you never need it, but you'll sure be glad you have it if you do.

Yes, you need people.

Now that you're getting an idea of how well integrated social media needs to be in your holistic business planning, you're probably thinking that this is going to take some investment of people to get right.

And you'd be correct. Don't relegate your social channels and planning to the intern who happens to like Snapchat. The skills and technologies can be learned, but the guiding principles behind them are what's most important, and for that you want experienced input and execution.

Today, there are plenty of professionals with several years of digital work under their belt, so take social as seriously as you would any other marketing or customer service channel, because it's not going anywhere anytime soon.

Technology matters, but it should follow, not lead.

You have probably looked at or already own a few different pieces of social and marketing technology in your midst. Maybe you have a listening platform, or a content management and publishing tool, or an analytics solution or two.

You may also use marketing automation, web analytics, programmatic media buying...the possibilities for marketing technology today are really endless.

So ensure that you're laying out the goals and objectives for your programs before you invest piecemeal in technology solutions to address one part of the process. Today's technologies can do some things well and not others, and sadly, there is no Magic Platform that can do it all and get it right.

Look to scalable solutions that relate to other functional areas you need to address, that integrate with other tools you have, and that are user-friendly enough to put in front of your practitioners and encourage them to use them. There's nothing worse than shelfware that looks pretty on the desktop but never gets used.

Content needs to be about them, not you.

We talked about needing to break through the massive amounts of noise online, and when it comes to content marketing, the only way to do that is not to contribute to the piles of mediocre content on the web and instead create something worth sharing.

Look at your content through the eyes of your customer. Is it a thinly-veiled sales pitch or marketing piece that just says it's "content"? Or is it something that's useful, inspiring, entertaining or educational?

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Great content is about helping people, not pitching to them relentlessly or trying to rework your marketing messaging into a bunch of different formats. Put yourself back in your consumer shoes for a moment; is this piece of content something you'd be glad you spent your time consuming?

If not, head back to the drawing board. It's far better to come up with one really solid, useful piece of content each quarter that you can use to inspire additional materials, and do it really well than to crank out piles of meh content that doesn't deliver any value.

If you want to be successful with content, you have to think above and beyond your brand and into stories, solutions and the challenges your customers face.

Your critics are the canaries in the coal mine.

So many companies live in fear of someone saying something bad about them on the internet. Don't be one of those companies.

Criticism online can be hard to hear, but it can also make you infinitely better. The things that your customers won't bother to take to a 1-800 number or a focus group are the things they will say to their friends on Twitter or on your Facebook page.

Take them seriously, reach out to them, respond professionally, and take that feedback to heart. One comment might be an outlier, but two or three is a trend, and more than that is a legitimate problem you should look at in your business.

We're pretty quick to forgive a company that messes up and owns it, or acknowledges the input they've received at the very least. But we don't like to be ignored, and long term, doing that to your customers is much more likely to do reputational damage than graciously accepting and acknowledging critique when it shows up. So use it to make your business better.

Engagement playbooks keep you on track.

Worried about engaging those critics online? Don't be. A good playbook helps you present a consistent, professional image online while empowering your teams to do what they do best: work with your customers. It doesn't need to be complicated to be effective, either.

A solid social media playbook tells your teams:

- What you're trying to achieve with social media
- How you'd like the company to be viewed online, and what your tenets of good online citizenry and presence are
- What to do in the event of a problem, challenge or crisis and how to escalate
- Important processes or checklists that need to be followed

Good playbooks help good social programs scale; they insure that nothing slows down or changes when team members move on and off the front lines, and that partners like agencies can help act as an extension of your team but with a consistent voice and approach.





Let's talk about the *measurement thing*.

It's difficult to encounter a single conversation about social media without also encountering the question of ROI, or return on investment. The problem is that when it comes to social media, ROI is the wrong question. ROI is a very specific metric that asks about the financial upside to a dollar investment. But with so many soft inputs and outcomes in social media – conversation dynamics, good will, advocacy, engagement, cultivating a brand impression – hard ROI is a difficult ask.

What we really want to know is whether our social programs are effective and successful. And we do that by tracking the 5-7 metrics that illustrate and indicate momentum and progress toward our overall business goals (yes, the very ones we talked about earlier in this eBook).

Those metrics will be different for everyone; one company might care about how social supports customer retention programs

while another might want to help correct brand misconceptions or outdated impressions.

The social media metrics themselves – fans, followers, likes – don't mean anything really unless you can answer the “so what” question. If I have all those fans or followers, what does that mean to me? How is that improving my marketing outcomes? How am I activating them to become advocates or brand champions? How am I engaging with them to get solid feedback for our product teams?

Only then can you really start answering questions about the worth and value of social media, beyond a single ROI metric and in a way that makes sense in context for your organization.

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Social is a business imperative. *Sorry, marketing.*

We made a mistake in the early days of social by labeling it media and sticking with it. It's an accurate characterization – the outputs of social networks could be considered media and the networks themselves have media-like qualities since they reside in digital space – but it's also incredibly misleading in regard to their ultimate use.

Social is an agnostic tool, not a birthright.

Marketing and PR don't have to own social by birthright just because of the “media” part. It's perfectly applicable to many other areas of the business (we'll talk about those in more detail in the next section).

As we mentioned before, social media itself as a tool is inert. It has zero innate value until you apply it to something meaningful. Just like a phone sitting on the desk has no value until you use it to place a call, and the call's purpose could range from dialing a friend to brokering a massive business deal. Email is the same. So, for that matter, is the web as a whole.

Social is a job today, but someday it will be a skill.

For today, it's natural to have people who are more versed and interested in these tools than others. Remember in *Mad Men* how we had a typing pool of women in a room whose only job was to type because they'd been taught how?

Then typing became a fundamental skill as typewriters then word processors then PCs took over and using a keyboard became something everyone needed to know how to do.

Social media will be that way in the not too distant future. You'll have functional social media people, and you'll have more sophisticated users, but they'll be peppered all across your company in every department, and will use social in whatever way is most advantageous to them.

Social data in a silo is useless.

One of those skill sets today is often “social media analytics”, a person who is really good at taking the outputs of data and tools and turning them into meaningful insights that the business can act on.

The trick is that even today, social media data on its own is actually rather useless. We talked above about vanity metrics such as likes or shares and how they only mean something if you can answer “so what” about them. The same goes for all social data as a whole.

If I don't understand how social data correlates with other data in my business, I'll never truly be able to quantify its business impact and therefore its overall value to my organization beyond marketing.

We need to aspire to more. We must take social data and mash it up with sales data, with customer loyalty and satisfaction metrics, with our web analytics, with our business intelligence and competitive data. There's a goldmine of information about our customers, business, industry and competition online, but it's only valuable if we can understand it in context, and we need multiple data points to do that.

Think of social data like one chapter in a full novel. Any chapter can only give you part of the story, but together, they can inspire so much more.



Natural allies for social exist across the business.

We've talked a lot in here about how social can impact an organization beyond just marketing. But how, exactly? Let's look at a few examples of how and why social can add value beyond the communications department.



Product & Service Development

The social web, in a nutshell, can behave like the world's largest, fastest (and sometimes messiest) focus group. But while people in focus groups or in surveys tend to unconsciously slant their answers when they know they're being asked direct questions by a company, people online often have their filters dialed back to zero.

Want to know what people like and dislike? Spend time listening, and they'll tell you. We worked with a technology provider who wanted to put a new tablet product out, but before their launch, social media told them that users hated a particular feature of the tablets they owned already...and it was a feature that this company was planning on including in their own tablet. Uh oh.

So they took that feedback to the product department, went back a few steps, adjusted the product and then put it into market. Talk about ROI: how about all the potential sales they could have lost had they repeated the mistakes of the competition?



Supply Chain Management

Getting the right products into the right markets at the right time is part art, part science, and part responsiveness to trends. There's nothing more real-time than social media to tell you what's happening and be positioned to respond.

A household goods company uses social data to look at emerging health trends – like when the flu is appearing or more colds are being talked about – and adjusting supply of cleaning and disinfecting products into those markets. Pharmaceutical companies can do the same thing with cold and flu medications, or even vaccine supplies.

Emergency responders have also been able to use social media chatter to respond to weather situations, natural disasters, or other emergencies and ensure that they're deploying the right amount of resources (and the right type) to address the situation efficiently and as soon as possible.



Customer Care

We've mentioned several times how important social media is and can be to respond to your customers in realtime and in or on the media they've chosen to use to reach out to you.

With customer expectations running high, organizations need to consider social inputs as one of many critical paths from customer to company, and find a way to integrate those channels into their processes.

One of the biggest challenges for many companies today is still aligning their online customer service – often handled through marketing teams or an agency – with their existing customer care channels like call centers or email and chat support.

Increasingly, social technologies are working to integrate with existing solutions for these business areas, and companies can get out ahead of these challenges by developing communication processes and protocols to get social data points into customer profiles and to ensure that handoffs between frontline social teams and core customer care professionals are seamless.



Sales

You might have heard somewhere that sales and social don't go together. And while it's true that social media isn't a great direct sales channel (unless you're in the eCommerce sector), it can be a great sales lead-in to identify opportunities.

Customers online are constantly expressing research activities or buying intent. Think of all the times a friend or colleague online has asked you for a recommendation for a great car dealership or a local dentist who's good with kids or a store in the area that carries gluten free products.

With the right listening strategies and technologies in place, sales and marketing teams can identify these opportunities and engage with prospects to offer helpful information, contact details, or links to more materials that can help them with a decision (social is not the place for a hard sell).

Moreover, ongoing engagement with customers after purchase can increase loyalty and likelihood for them to buy again, foster goodwill and build relationships that can provide value beyond just the original sale (especially in B2B!).



Talent & Recruiting

Finding talent online has to be one of the most under served use cases for the social web. We're all familiar with LinkedIn, and have probably either found talent or been found there. However, great recruiting goes beyond that.

Think of the intelligence that's out there about your competition, their teams, and the information they're sharing. What groups and communities are they part of? Who do they influence? Who influences them? The ability of the social web to show us how and why people are connected is by far one of its most powerful capabilities.

What about uncovering the unexpected experts in your field? Discovering new and upcoming talent in the market that may not have the visibility yet but that could make a huge difference to your company? Social data is capable of helping you find them.



We live and work in an amazing era. *Let's do it justice.*

It's easy to get jaded sometimes, to hear the hype around digital and social media and chalk it up as the next shiny thing to happen quickly to be replaced by something else.

But make no mistake. The tools – the Twitters and the Facebooks and the Snapchats – will come and go. They always do. (Remember, Yahoo dominated search until as recently as 1995).

In spite of that, the character and nature of a real-time, personalized and individually-driven web is with us for good. Without hyperbole, we truly live in one of the most exciting, transformational times in business in our generation, and it's not likely we'll see a shift this significant again in our lifetime. It's that big.

When you're in the trenches of your latest ad campaign or video project or Twitter chat, remember that we are, quite literally, changing the world with our work. We're changing the way people communicate, the way companies function and work with their customers, the way that information drives us both personally and professionally and how we interact with the world around us. That's pretty incredible.

We've all been given massive opportunity here to leave a legacy behind us of business transformation, of embracing digital for the world-changing force that it is. We should be passionate, enthusiastic stewards of all of this for our generation and the ones beyond.

It's up to us. Let's get to work.





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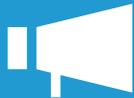
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