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#Winning at Social:

4 STEPS TO ENHANCE YOUR
SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY



Introduction

Social media has evolved from a new way to reach young consumers to a full-scale mass communications and customer service juggernaut. If you need a reminder of social's importance, consider these numbers:

- Social media is the #1 marketing channel where marketers plan to increase budget in 2015¹
- 64% of marketers see social media as a critical enabler of their products and services²
- 53% of consumers expect a Twitter response within an hour – and 72% expect it when they have complaints³

Yet many brands haven't advanced their social strategy beyond passive social listening and posting sales-oriented messages. To fully leverage social as a powerful touchpoint along the customer journey, marketers must evolve their social media approach – adopting a focus on the customer above all.

This guide covers the four primary steps that will help your company reach its full potential on social media. Start by identifying which of the four steps best represents your current social approach, then follow the suggested next steps to take your strategy to the next level.

¹ 2015 State of Marketing, Salesforce, January 2015

² 2015 State of Marketing, Salesforce, January 2015

³ Millward Brown Digital, October 2013

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Step 1: Listening

For many brands, their first foray into social media is broad listening: finding out which social networks have communities who discuss their brand and industry most often. From there, companies often move to on-channel listening – checking a popular channel like Facebook or Twitter for direct mentions of their brand name, like an @-reply on Twitter.



You might also be in the listening stage if:

- ✓ You're listening on popular channels for specific instances of your brand name, but may not check other variations or misspellings.
- ✓ You're mainly concerned with listening to comments about your own company, not competitors.
- ✓ Any posting to social media is mainly reactive to what someone has said about your brand.
- ✓ You report high-level metrics about total number of company mentions on social media.

If you're in listening mode, you're already doing one major thing right: you're focusing on your customers and what they have to say. From here, try incorporating more sophisticated listening techniques and ultimately contributing your own voice to the conversation.

Only about 10% of brand mentions on social media happen through direct mentions. The rest of them transpire in other ways, whether it's someone searching for product recommendations or a blogger explaining an experience they recently had with your brand. Going forward, you'll want to develop a plan to expand the channels where you regularly tune in and how you'll respond.

These next steps can make your social listening strategy more effective:

Find out who your advocates are. One key benefit of social listening is discovering who posts most frequently and positively about you. These are your brand advocates and can be thanked and leveraged in a variety of ways: exclusive swag, beta testing, guest blogging, free or discounted products in exchange for reviews, and much more.

Listen in on competitor and industry discussions. Monitoring your own brand name is top-priority, but checking out the chatter about your top competitors (as well as their products and any important personnel) can also be valuable. Likewise, you should begin listening to social media discussions about your overall industry to get a heads-up on forthcoming trends and the latest news.

Have a clear focus. Depending on the size of your company, it may or may not be feasible to read every mention of your brand name or related products and services on social media. Decide what you'll spend time listening to, recording, and responding to so that you don't become overwhelmed with the sheer volume of social posts. For example, posts implying that your company has room for improvement or offering feedback on your new website probably merit your attention, while passing mentions by spam-bots do not.

Once you're getting the most out of your social listening, it's time to invest more efforts in publishing and sharing valuable content, as explained in the next section.

Step 2: Publishing



After you start hearing what your social audience is saying about you, you'll quickly start realizing the importance of contributing to these conversations. But that doesn't mean you should jump into every thread or publish every two hours – there's a better way.

Here's how to know if you're in the early stages of your social publishing strategy:

- ✓ You're publishing regularly on Facebook and Twitter, possibly publishing more of your own content than answers to customers' questions.
- ✓ If you scroll through your recent posts, they're mainly links to your website, product pages, or other social accounts.
- ✓ You occasionally publish the same message to multiple channels.

While there's nothing wrong with having a vocal social presence, you'll save time and avoid losing members of your audience if you're more strategic about every post. Here's the trick to advanced social publishing: sharing useful, valuable content that's in line with your brand's personality. Hopefully this plants the seed for future conversions, but that shouldn't be the primary goal for your social publishing.

Need more specifics on how to be a better social communicator?
Incorporate the following ideas into your publishing strategy.

Creatively respond to positive feedback. When you respond warmly and creatively to positive feedback, you make brand fans feel even more excited about your company. Consider unique ways of expressing thanks, like sending a relevant GIF or customizing your reply based on a personal tidbit they've shared in their Twitter bio.

Deal with negative feedback quickly and appropriately. You could be the most popular brand in the world, but you'll still encounter some negative feedback. It happens – so defuse the damage by responding swiftly and helpfully. Social media users expect a rapid response (72% expect a reply within an hour when they have a complaint), so prioritize replying to these posts and always offer follow-up assistance by phone, email, and so on.

Make social a resource for your customers, not yourself. A curated social presence can establish your company as the go-to resource in your industry. Share content that helps your audience learn and grow (hint: not just product links), providing a value-add for everyone who engages with you. As you write and share, you'll learn what generates the most interest and conversation.

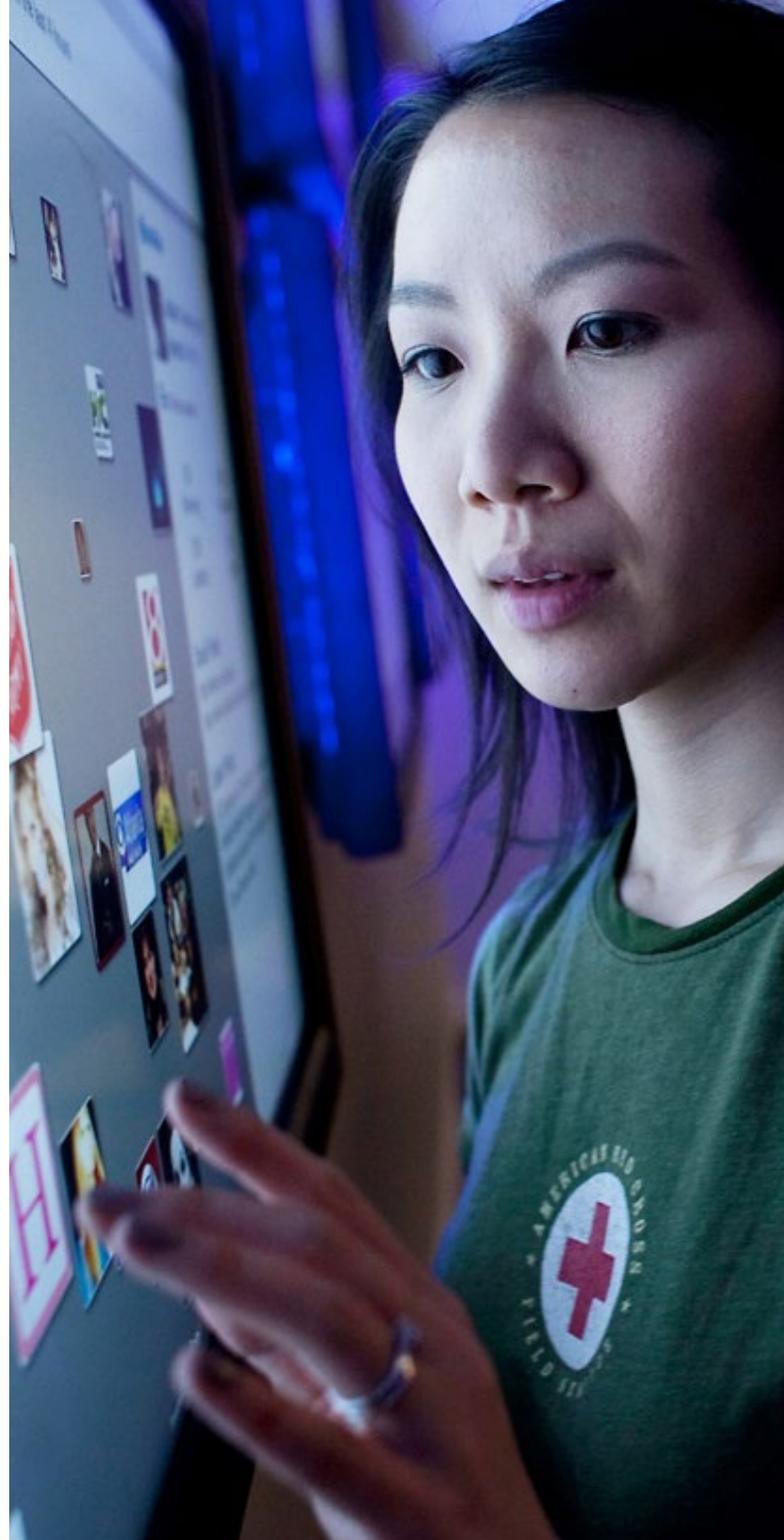
With the combination of listening and publishing, you're on your way to a holistic social strategy that grows your audience organically as you keep it up. Next, we'll look at evolving your strategy through community management.

Customer Spotlight:



American Red Cross

People are everything to the American Red Cross. The country's leading emergency relief and preparedness organization serves hundreds of millions each year. Much has changed since the days when the telegraph was the main method of communication. Today, the American Red Cross uses social media and the Salesforce Marketing Cloud to get the word out during emergencies.



The background of the slide is a blurred photograph of an indoor event. In the upper left, the American Red Cross logo (a red cross) and the text "American Red Cross" are visible on a wall. The rest of the background shows people in a dimly lit room, possibly a conference or meeting.

“Marketing Cloud gives us ways to measure the effectiveness of our community outreach. It helps us to gather and analyze information so we can focus on turning what we learn into actionable strategies.”

Laura Howe
Vice President of Public Relations,
American Red Cross

Nearly a quarter of the general public and a third of the online population say they would use social media to let loved ones know they're safe in an emergency. People also use social media during disasters to get updates and give help. With this in mind, the Red Cross unveiled Digital Operations Center, a command center dedicated to monitoring and staying in touch with the public using social channels.

This innovative center uses Marketing Cloud to listen to social media conversations – gathering invaluable information during a disaster, or monitoring public preparedness for a serious situation.

Step 3:

Community Management



By this stage, you have a firm grasp on listening and publishing on social. You've probably developed a consistent cadence for posting, and you're taking note of the typical types of conversations happening about your brand.

Now is the time to become more strategic and thoughtful about your digital audience as a whole, and also refine your collaboration with other teams internally.

Here's how to spot areas for improvement in this stage:

- ✓ You publish content that aligns with broader marketing campaigns, but only after you see an email newsletter or banner ad about them.
- ✓ While posting and listening happen regularly, reporting on performance metrics does not.
- ✓ You're spending a great deal of time thinking about what to publish next.

If this sounds familiar, it's time to broaden your definition of a social strategy to include community management. The people in that community include everyone who touches some part of your social strategy: internal stakeholders who plan marketing campaigns and discounts, industry influencers, top brand advocates, and even those who ask a quick question and never interact with your brand again.

Use these ideas to grow and mature your social presence, which is more than just another marketing channel – it's a community in itself.

Collaborate with employees in all areas of your company. As your social strategy evolves, start thinking about ways to incorporate voices from beyond the social team. You could coach your CEO on building her social presence or work with the content team to create highly shareable visual assets. Be sure to collect social metrics regularly (once a month is a good rule of thumb) and share with other employees so they can track progress over time.

Follow, like, or otherwise acknowledge all community members. It's not appropriate for all brands to follow or retweet their customers, but depending on the size of your brand and audience, you can acknowledge community members in other ways. Maybe that takes the form of favoriting a tweet, liking someone's post, or following them on a lower-visibility channel like Instagram. These simple acts make people feel like a part of the community, not just another follower.

Let community members dictate the conversation. Remember: social strategy should center on your customers' thoughts and needs. As your community grows, you can begin sharing content from top community contributors and even rely on them to guide your social strategy. Do you have a community member that shares great tips for how to use your product? Retweet them and possibly recruit them to create long-form content. Your content marketing team will thank you.

There's one final frontier to explore: social customer care. Combine community management with impeccable customer service, and your social strategy will be one of your industry's best.

Step 4:

Customer Care



Listening to your audience across social channels: Check. Publishing useful content on a regular basis: Check. Tapping into internal and external resources to grow your social community: Check. We've reached the last stage in this guide to social media success, and once again, it's all about the customer.

You've heard the saying, "Great customer service is great marketing."

Nowhere is this truer than on social media, where either positive or negative comments can spread like wildfire.

Self-assess your social customer service by gauging if these statements apply:

- ✓ You know how to handle questions on social media, but can't route all issues through the proper customer service channels.
- ✓ Customers don't know when they can expect a social media response about an issue.
- ✓ Social media disasters haven't been addressed through an approved playbook.

When combined with everything else you're doing on social media, reliable and efficient customer care can be the jewel in your crown. Start with these ideas as you refine your social approach to include customer care.

Develop a playbook and center of excellence. Prepare documents that answer common questions and guide overall voice and tone. Make sure these documents are readily available to anyone who might post on social. What will happen in case of a hack or cyber attack? Do we sign tweets with individuals' names? What are the grounds for blocking someone? These questions should be answered, plus many more.

Share a service level agreement (SLA) with customers. There's nothing worse for customers than asking a question that falls on deaf ears. Maybe there's a good explanation – like they asked the question at 4 a.m. on a Saturday, but your social accounts are staffed during business hours Monday-Friday. Whatever level of service you decide on, make sure the schedule is clearly visible on all social accounts and stick to it. Of course, the longer you can staff social, the better.

Consider a system that integrates both customer service and social. The holy grail of social customer care is having all customer queries in a centralized location and being able to respond to them with a full view of the customer. For example, social media marketers can use Salesforce Service Cloud and Marketing Cloud to address issues on a single platform. With inquiries routed to the proper channel and visibility into customers' individual preferences, your customer care will be a well-oiled machine.

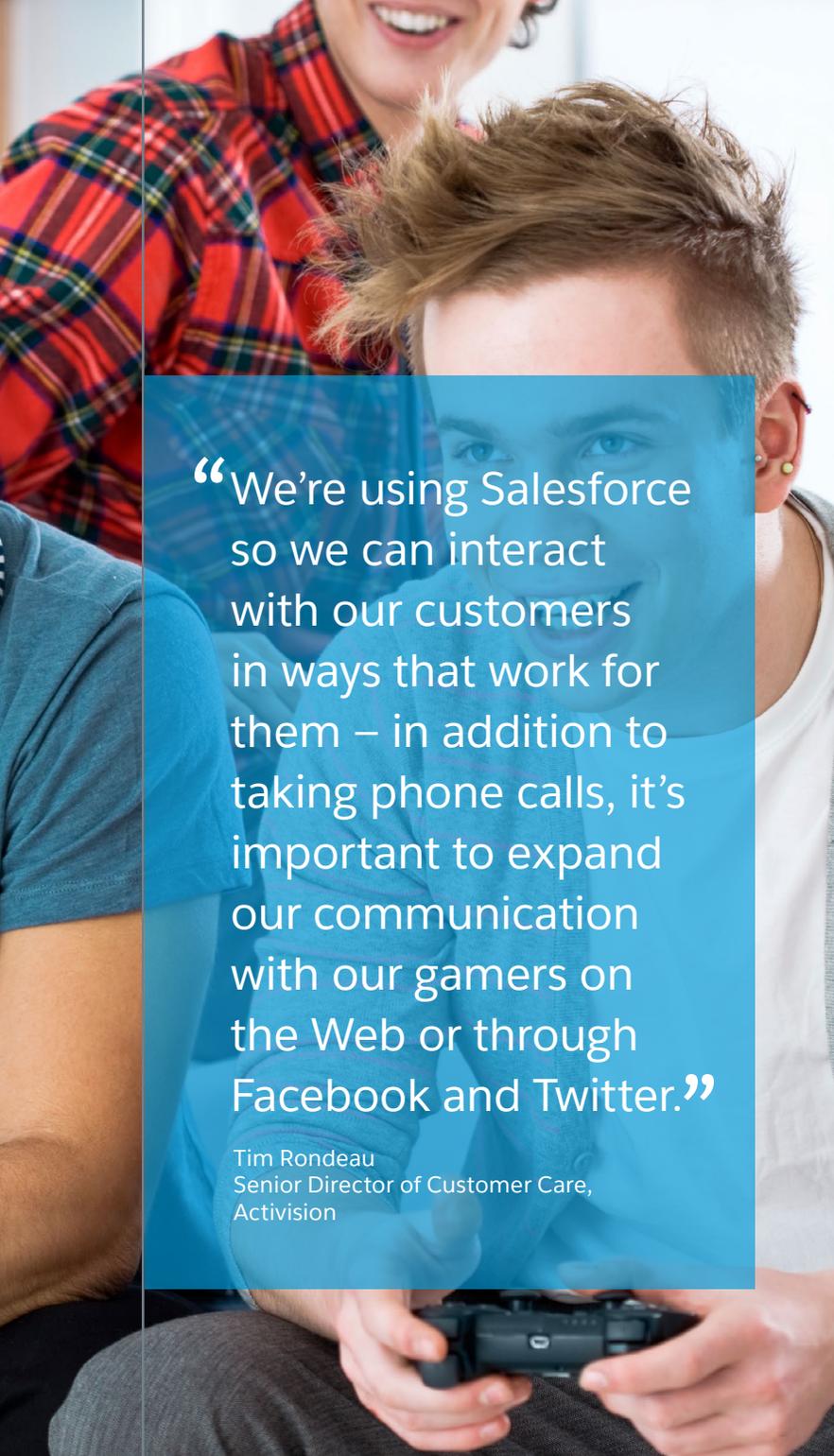
There's no out-of-the-box strategy that works for every social brand. But no matter who your customers are and what services you provide, you can be sure that they'll appreciate timely customer service on whatever channel they choose – including social. With a brand-specific playbook and frequent check-ins between social and services team members, you'll have a strategy uniquely tailored to your audience.

Customer Spotlight:

ACTIVISION®

Activision is behind some of the most popular games of the past 30 years, from Pitfall!® for the Atari 2600 to Guitar Hero® and Call of Duty. When Activision wanted a seamless way to monitor social conversations about top games and follow up with customers who need support, they turned to Salesforce Marketing Cloud and Service Cloud.





“We’re using Salesforce so we can interact with our customers in ways that work for them – in addition to taking phone calls, it’s important to expand our communication with our gamers on the Web or through Facebook and Twitter.”

Tim Rondeau
Senior Director of Customer Care,
Activision

Activision has found that delivering customer service in social channels costs less than half as much as traditional phone and chat support. The combination of high performing self-service and social customer service has helped Activision lower total annual operating expenses related to customer service by 25%. This innovative center uses Marketing Cloud to listen to social media conversations – gathering invaluable information during a disaster, or monitoring public preparedness for a serious situation.

Conclusion

Whether your social strategy is just getting on its feet or you're broadening an already-effective approach, strive to create a social community that customers will want to join.

Listening to what customers say about you on the top channels is a start. But the journey to true social maturity starts and ends with the customer's wants and needs. Perhaps they're looking to you as an industry content curator or are simply seeking real-time answers to questions. Listen to your customers every step of the way and you'll fully realize your social media potential.



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