

Strategic Overview: The Seven Steps to Achieving Social Media Marketing Excellence

As we continue transitioning from the 4P's of Outbound Marketing World to the 6C's of the Evolving World of Inbound Marketing, these 7 simple steps are vital in positioning yourself within your ideal community and consistently delivering on your brand promise.

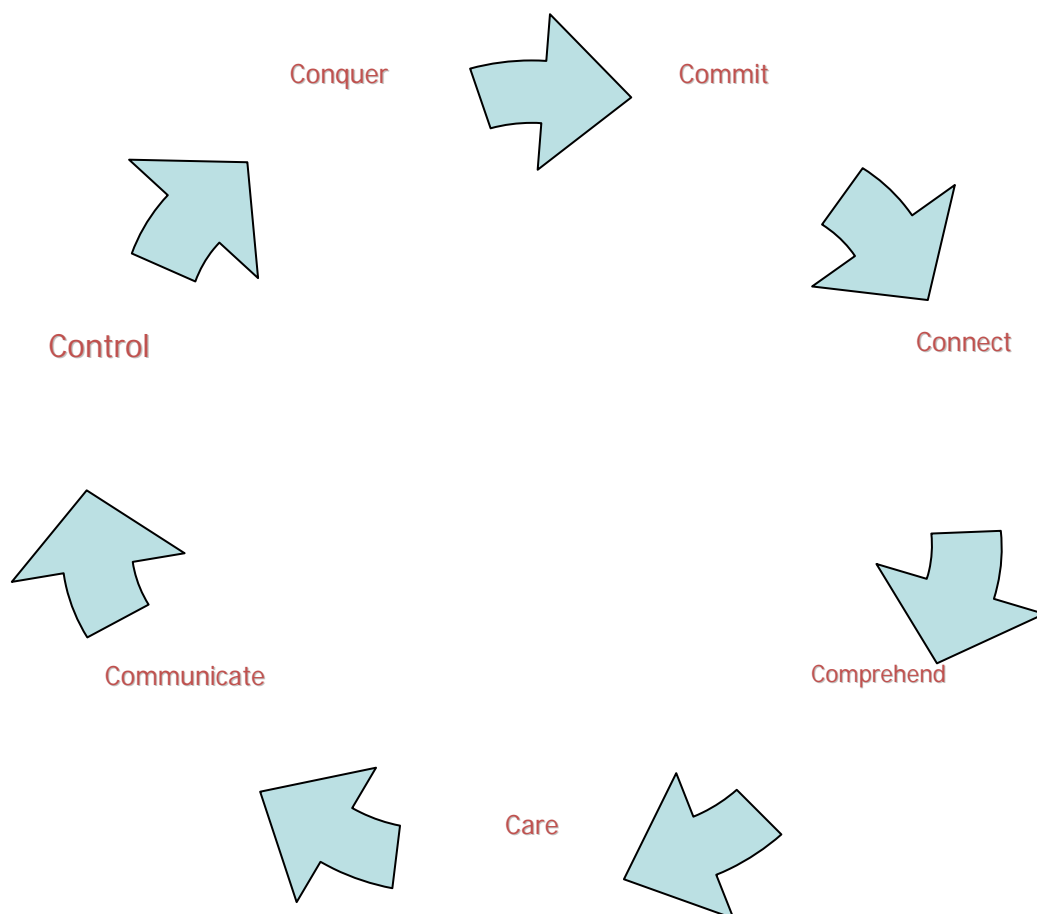


Figure 1. Social Media Activation Model

Step 1. Commit

I'm sure I speak for many consultants when I say how frustrating it is that our clients want to share in the success that social media promises, but often resent and resist the commitment required to make that happen.

Social media is not a quick fix. Quite the opposite unlike more traditional forms of marketing such as advertising and sales promotions, its effects are built slowly and with great purpose. It is not a realm for the impatient.

Suffice to say if you wish to partake in it, you need to commit time, resources and personnel to drive the mechanics of the process. If you can't or don't want to, walk away now before a half baked attempt actually hurts your brand.

Step 2. Connect

The next step must always be to find and connect to your ideal, target client, customer or consumer. Who are they, where do they live, what distinguishes them from other non targeted individuals and most importantly what platforms do they use to: communicate, learn, ask, laugh, cry, complain and share?

Within all of the major networking sites there are powerful search facilities that will allow you to find those groups, communities and enthusiasts that you seek.

Examples of these include: Twitter Search (search.twitter.com), Technorati Search and SocialMention.com search.

When you find these preferred platforms, you will also have found the podium from which your marketing efforts will eventually flow.

Step 3. Comprehend

You can surely make a strong argument that this third stage is the most important in the entire process, because through active listening we hopefully gain real insight into peoples' true and often undelivered needs, the reasons why they have these needs, the costs they incur by not having these needs met and ultimately how their lives and situation would benefit if for instance these issues, problems, concerns and desires were adequately met.

In medicine doctors typically ask their patients, "where does it hurt?"

The in the modern age, social media is how marketers ask and answer that question.

Step 4. Care

This is not rhetoric or the ravings of a sensitive new age guy gone mad. People who care for their clients and customers stand out like a beacon in the dark. Genuine, deep felt and sustained caring for the people and businesses you want to serve.

Ask yourself one question at this point, do I really care about my customers' outcomes or is it all just about a sale. If it's just business, rethink your position.

Marketing and ultimately selling is all about serving people and their needs. As a by product of this quality, sustained and caring service, good businesses make money.

Don't think you can put the cart before the horse. Social media will highlight and hurt businesses who continue to make this mistake.

Step 5. Communicate

Once you have listened to and fully understood the landscape and what your audience faces in terms of challenges, fears, concerns, existing issues, up coming concerns, etc. then and only then, you can start to communicate with authority.

The first golden rule here is: Start low and go slow.

Earn the right to advance gradually with time and ongoing engagement of people within the various close knit communities. Wherever possible contribute your expertise to help solve problems and answer questions as they arise.

The second golden rule: Give first to get.

So many businesses foolishly in the past 2 years, unfamiliar with the etiquette and expectations of this medium have gone in with both guns blazing with a strategy of little more than carpet bombing the community members with a plethora of product information, broken up with only special pricing offers.

Step 5 is Communicate. Put more specifically, Communicate intelligently and generously.

Step 6. Control

As you begin to connect, interact and contribute to the discussion, it becomes very important to be able to monitor (as a means of controlling) how your brand, business and messages are being perceived by your audience.

With the ongoing growth of social media technology we also see a naturally occurring growth in the number and sophistication in the tools available to social media marketers to measure and monitor all activity and campaign effectiveness.

These products allow you to easily and effectively measure everything from traffic and activity on your website and blogs utilising products such as Google Analytics, as well as the positioning, reputation and effectiveness of your brand and its message with monitoring tools such as Trackur and Radian 6.

You can also use a link shortener like bit.ly which has a built in link tracker which will monitor how each link performs in terms of clicks. As well tools such as bit.ly and TweetMeme (for Twitter) can also measure link sharing with others (or retweets for twitter) as another important marker of link effectiveness.

Step 7. Conquer

Selling your firm, its brand and its various happens gradually. When you reach this stage, it is self evident to say that you need to provide solutions that deliver a memorable and very satisfying experience that will likely be freely shared amongst the community.

Although few things are guaranteed in fiercely competitive markets, following this process will strategically align your approach and help optimise your ability to listen, learn and deliver in a meaningful way to your target market.



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