



Think Big

When you come up with your company's strategic plan it is comprehensive and multi-faceted, so why should your approach to social media be any different?

I'm involved in many strategic planning sessions. A good strategy takes your company to the next level. So, it goes without saying that a good strategy shouldn't be all about just one thing. The saying "don't put all your eggs in one basket" applies. For example, if you're a technology vendor your entire 2011 strategy shouldn't be about your annual application update. Sure, you want to tout that update, but what else are you doing throughout the year to get your company front and center in a very competitive market?

You should be combining marketing that one update with a series of articles, press releases, ads in B2B publications, speaking engagements, customer outreach, etc. In the end, I think most of this goes without saying. I think companies get that a good strategy isn't all about one element. In fact, I often encounter companies that want to do too much and don't know how to prioritize.

Yet, when you hear companies talk about social media something changes. Suddenly they become very narrow minded. What do I mean? They tell me, "Michael, we want to be social so let's get on Twitter." Or they say, "Hey, we need a facebook page." I agree that

you need a presence on Twitter and Facebook, but I would add LinkedIn, YouTube, blogging and other social activities to that list. My point is that like building an overall corporate strategy for your company, your social strategy can't be just about one thing.

Recently I read a great report by Carol Rozwell, a vice-president and analyst at Gartner, in which

she said, "Social initiatives pervade the enterprise; they are becoming part of every business and operational activity. However, enterprises usually treat social initiatives as isolated projects because the technology is relatively new and it can often be implemented within hours at little or no cost. This project-by-project approach may achieve narrow goals (for example, resolving problems for customers faster), but it risks failure for avoidable reasons and may miss opportunities to create more value. IT leaders involved in social projects should explore the breadth of social business initiatives within their enterprise and what it means for their own projects."

I can't agree more. Further, when we're talking about social media, we can't forget that this is a business. Why is that important? If you're running a business you have to do what's good for the business. Everything you do has to be tied to return on investment and emphasize your brand.

To provide an example, you won't find hotels.com doing tweets or videos on politics. Why? Because that has nothing to do with their business and talk of politics doesn't enhance their brand. My point is that everything you do socially should be strategic and tied to a larger strategy that again takes your business to the next level.

Rozwell noted that companies should "help move their organization toward an enterprise-wide strategy for social business. Based on discussions with clients, we believe that IT leaders do not realize how pervasive social initiatives have become within the enterprise. Social media

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is filtering into almost every aspect of an enterprise's work, and it will take several different forms."

What does that mean? In short, it means that you're on Twitter and that you're on Facebook and that you're blogging and that you have a LinkedIn group and that you have a YouTube channel. And what's even more important than just having a presence on these platforms and acting in a social way is that you have a holistic approach to all these different social activities and that they're all tied back to getting you business results.

Take this example: Procter & Gamble's Old Spice was just another guy brand with an entertaining spokesman in its TV commercials until the brand's agency put Isaiah Mustafa on the Web recently and invited fans to use Twitter, Facebook and other social media outlets to pose questions that he quickly answered. The questions poured in—even celebrities asked a few—and Mustafa responded in more than 180 Web videos shot quickly over a few days.

Rozwell points out, "In some cases, social software deployments will look like a stand-alone application; in other cases, other types of systems will acquire social functions. Sometimes social media will play the lead role in an initiative; other times it will facilitate work carried on elsewhere. Social business initiatives will affect almost every system, process and role within the enterprise, so IT leaders should help ensure that they are not implemented as though they are just another technology deployment."

Of course, every time you do something new there are challenges and stumbling blocks. Entering the social media fray is new territory for some. Rozwell puts it this way, "Social initiatives pose an enterprise-wide challenge, but most enterprises treat them as discrete projects. Often the IT organization does not even know when departments and business units undertake social initiatives. This approach can hurt individual projects and the enterprise in several ways, such as one project may conflict with others; IT and business leaders may miss opportunities; some

problems require an enterprise solution; project leaders may needlessly duplicate work; or project team may not learn best practices."

To address these issues Rozwell advises that "IT leaders should seek out peers across the organization who lead social initiatives and start to build relationships. Those who lead individual projects should first educate themselves about what is going on with social initiatives within the enterprise, by reaching out to IT and business colleagues who are involved with other social media projects. These discussions will bring to light common problems and opportunities for working together."

Rozwell suggests that "by using social software you already have consumer tools, so IT leaders should build a community of business and IT people involved with social media projects. The community members can share best practices, discuss what works and what doesn't work, solicit advice, consult on measures of success. The group can outline the common challenges that social projects face and show why these challenges require a response at the enterprise level. Such a response might take the form of a centre of excellence to formalize the sharing of best practices already occurring in the community. The centre of excellence would include IT and business users who have a representative set of skills needed for social media projects.

Finally, IT leaders should work with peers to describe the typical phases in the development of social media projects—for example, from small-scale experiment to departmental implementation to incorporation within a business process to enterprise-wide deployment. The model would describe what project teams must do to succeed at each phase. This model can then serve as a kind of template for social projects so that deployments become more consistent."

Now that I've detailed how important social media is and how there are different moving parts to any good social media strategy, why don't you get started crafting your social media approach? You won't regret it. ❖

What's even more important than just having a presence on these platforms and acting in a social way is that you have a holistic approach.

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