



# Business Strategies

## Do You Get Social Media?

Too often companies dismiss social media because they don't understand how to create an engaging social media presence. That's a mistake.

By Michael Hammond

**A**ny good technology vendor will be able to tell you what's coming out in their next update and what's planned for their product in the next six to twelve months. They have a strategy. Yet these same people can't explain why they aren't getting more traction from social media. Like anything else, for it to be successful you need a strategy.

In the article "The Ultimate Guide to Social Media Engagement" by Mack Collier, he says, "There are three main reasons why most of us struggle to get the level of engagement we want from social media:

1. We aren't creating engaging content.
2. We aren't making it easy for people to engage with our content.
3. We don't have an engagement strategy.

All of these three problems are inter-related, he points out. For example, if you have an engagement strategy, then you have a plan for creating the type of engagement that's meaningful to you. Most people/companies don't have an engagement strategy, they often go for whatever type of engagement is the easiest to measure, such as comments on a blog or Likes on Facebook.

We also struggle, according to Collier, to create

engage with our content. The interesting thing about social media is that engagement breeds engagement. So what we want to do is lower the barrier to engagement with our content. If we make it easier for people to engage with our content, then more people will engage with our content.

How do you make engagement happen? Collier explains that he started #Blogchat in March of 2009. Even during a 'slow' week, the hashtag still generates a few thousand tweets from a few hundred participants. So it's a pretty 'engaging' chat. For #Blogchat he wanted as much participation as possible. You might think that every chat wants this, but when you say you want as much participation as possible, it means you have to pay careful consideration to the topics of the chat.

In the case of #Blogchat, Collier purposely gravitates toward 101-level topics, because that lowers the participation barrier for others, and makes them more comfortable engaging. If he picked say 201-level topics, the participation level would fall off a cliff. You could argue that the conversations might be 'deeper,' but there would definitely be fewer people having them.

Also, since he wanted more people to be engaging, he tried to reward engagement. One way

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engaging content. We focus too much on trying to get people to engage with the type of content we create, versus trying to adapt the type of content we create in order to make it more engaging. In the end, we aren't making it easy for people to en-

he did this is by personally replying to anyone that he saw tweet that they are joining #Blogchat for the first time. Why? Because what better way to encourage someone to stay engaged than to reply to their first tweet and to have that reply come

from the chat moderator? Plus, more people participating in the chat means more overall engagement.

One of the things Collier also did with #Blogchat is he paid close attention to what people were discussing in the chat. Often, certain themes, ideas and questions will come up repeatedly. These are good indicators of future topics for the chat. Also, he will simply ask #Blogchat what topics they want to discuss. This also helps give the community ownership of the chat, which also makes it more likely they will engage with topics they want to discuss.

Everything done is designed to make it easier for people to engage and contribute. Whether it's 101-level topics, using the community's topic suggestions, or welcoming newbies when they arrive, a 'culture' is created that facilitates and rewards engagement.

So how do you create more engagement around your social media efforts?

First, you need a plan. Yes I know, no one wants to create an engagement strategy. And most of you

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don't and this is the biggest reason why you aren't getting the type of engagement you want. You need to think about what type of engagement you want from the content you are creating, then you need to think about how you can create content that's valuable for your audience, and that encourages the type of engagement you want.

While everyone loves getting comments and hearing from readers, getting more comments may not be your top priority. Instead, you may want people to share a given blog post via Twitter, Facebook, and e-mail it to their friends, boss and co-workers. Again, always consider what you want to accomplish, and that will help you decide what type of engagement you want to encourage.

If you have an engagement strategy in place,

then you know what type of engagement you want to see happen from your content. This feeds into creating engaging content because it makes creating engaging content easier because since you created a plan, you now know what type of engagement you want to see happen. In general, before your content can be engaging, it has to be valuable to your audience. If it's valuable, then it will earn their attention, and then you have a chance to facilitate engagement. So first, the content needs to create value for your audience.

Something else to keep in mind is that different tools are better at encouraging different types of engagement. You have to not only consider the type of engagement you want from your content, but you have to also consider which tools will help you get that level of engagement. Maybe a 140-character Tweets serves your purposes. For other things you might want to write a full blog.

Now that you have a specific engagement plan for your content and know the exact type of engagement you want, you need to think about ways to make it easier to encourage that type of engagement. Think carefully about the action you want others to take (leave a comment, signup for a newsletter, request a product demo), then make sure you are not only giving them the motivation to engage in this activity, but that you are also making it easy for them to do so.

For example, a dead simple way to get more comments on a blog is to simply end your post with these four magic words: What do you think? That signals to your readers that you are opening the floor for a discussion, and that you are interested in their thoughts. If you have followed your engagement plan and have created content that's easy for them to engage with and then close your post by asking for their thoughts, the odds are that your readers will indeed share their thoughts. Then when readers do comment, if you engage them back and interact with them, that encourages the chance that they will respond again. Then as more readers see that others are leaving comments, that makes them more likely to leave a comment as well (comments breed comments).

If you are working to create content that helps facilitate the type of engagement you want, then you work to make that type of engagement as easy as possible for your audience to...engage in, then you'll win! ❖