

Kickstarting Your Own Social Media Initiative

By Mary Sullivan

Last month we published an article called [Get Ready! Social Media for B2B Companies](#) and referred to it as a primer. Because we believe that B2B companies are ready to explore uses of social media in their own businesses, we are developing a series of articles on social media for B2B businesses. This is the second article in that series.

When people talk about social media in B2B companies, they generally mean using it for some aspect of marketing. This isn't entirely wrong, but let's do a check on what we mean by "marketing."

Twentieth-century marketing was about reaching out to prospective customers and telling them who you are, what you sell, and why they should care. But it's not just about the "4Ps" anymore. Social media has added a fifth "P": **Participation**. 21st century marketing includes engaging prospective buyers and existing customers in talking about what it is about your company and/or product that they like. Yes, sometimes they will independently talk about what they *don't* like about your company, but social media also provides tools that enable you to *listen* to the negatives and respond in ways that counter potentially damaging effects.

Some Uses of Social Media for B2B Companies

Why should you consider social media in your marketing mix? Here are a few ideas. You can:

- Grow a community of influencers/evangelists that will help validate your value proposition
- Direct readers to content about your company that is posted anywhere on the Internet—your website, YouTube, media articles about your company, etc.
- Develop conversations with your target audience and/or customer base
- Draw additional readership to your corporate blog
- Publicize your latest press release
- Conduct ad hoc research, gather reader opinion
- Create additional searchable web pages that talk about your company.

Getting Started

Do any of the uses suggested above pique your interest? Here's what you'll need to do to get going:

- **Plan** – Identify objectives and create your social media strategy. Nothing mysterious here—you should always understand where you’re heading when you set out in new directions.
- **Listen** – Join the social media sites that you think may serve your needs. Be a spectator for a bit until you get a sense of what is going on. You will need to engage with some other community members to see how people communicate. Click around on all the links to see what the site offers. Get a feeling for the capabilities and opportunities.
- **Contribute** – Join in the conversation by posting information and inviting replies or comments. See if you can create a snowball effect by mentioning your website or blog on one of the social sites and see the impact on your traffic. Or alternatively, [Get Your Feet Wet with Internal Social Media](#) before going outside.
- **Plan Again** – Once you have a feel for the possibilities, lay out a pilot social media plan, identifying which tools you will use, how you will use them, and who will be responsible for them. *(This last is critical; don’t underfund or under-staff. You will set yourself up for failure.)* Decide what measurable outcomes you aim to achieve and by what dates, and determine how you will track and measure results.
- **Benchmark** – Before you put your plans into play, gather benchmark stats about your website’s page-views, blog traffic, and any other measurable areas of your business you expect will be impacted by your social media initiative.
- **Network** – Then implement your plans. Make sure you or your community manager are actively contributing to your social networks on a daily basis.
- **Manage** – Re-measure against your benchmarks, and analyze what is working. Make adjustments to the plan as you deem necessary.

Social Media Vehicles for B2B Companies

It’s important to understand how the different social media tools (social network sites) work and what you can do with each. Our [March article](#) offered a primer on the “big 3,” Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Here’s a quick review:

Facebook – “Friends” are symmetrical, and thumbnail profiles of users can be found via search engines. Users post updates, photos, and “friends” can comment back. Users can also be “fans” and join fan groups; businesses are experimenting with this relatively new feature.

LinkedIn – “Connections” are symmetrical, and some (but not all) profile information is publicly available to non-LinkedIn searchers. Generally used as an online resume to find jobs or job candidates; some use LinkedIn to reach out to prospective customers.

Twitter – “Followers” are *not* symmetrical; you can follow the updates of people you don’t know. Updates of 140 characters or less, called “tweets,” can be sent either from a cellphone or a computer. Tweets are searchable by keyword, and users’ profiles and tweets can be viewed if you know the username. People use Twitter to make announcements, point to blog posts, ask questions, and gather information from others.

Once you get started using social media, you may want to enhance your communications with other social tools such as blogs, pictures, audio and video. Tune in next month to learn about some applications that you can easily integrate into your social media to provide a richer experience for your online community.

About the Author

Mary Sullivan, co-founder of KickStart Alliance, delivers customer-focused product marketing to clients in a variety of technology sectors, including clean tech. Mary is an experienced social media user and community builder: a long-time blogger, LinkedIn member, Facebook user and active Twitterer. Want help mapping your social media strategy? [Contact Mary](#).