

ANALYSIS

BECOMING A SOCIAL MEDIA SUPERSTAR

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Introduction

We have all witnessed the ups and downs of social media over the past several years. Although its reputation is sometimes tarnished by the perception that it is little more than a waste of time, social media has proven to be an effective tool for brand marketing. In fact, today's business climate makes establishing an online presence critical to increasing your brand awareness. Social media provides a distinguished forum with access to the largest crowds imaginable. With that in mind, it's not uncommon for a dose of stage fright to set in when you realize that a social media strategy involves more than simply being active on various platforms.

This article explores some of the most common challenges associated with social media marketing and offers tips on how to navigate them.

The Metagame

Social media marketing features a level playing field, meaning that businesses of all sizes can compete for mindshare. Every participant is given the same tools and must play by the same rules. Even so, some brands tend to overlook the presence of an unwritten "game within the game," which is more commonly known as the "metagame." The "meta," often considered an acronym for the "most efficient tactic available," was initially associated with the video gaming world. Today, this same term is used to describe trending online strategies and best practices. The metagame doesn't just concern the popularized algorithms we often hear about; it's more closely tied to how social media participants engage. Each platform and the community within it has its own metagame.

As an example of this trend in action, consider the changes we've seen from YouTube. Early in YouTube's lifespan, the most subscribed channels were accounts run by individuals. It was a game of discoverability, as the algorithms favored frequent and consistent uploads for the front page. As a result, the meta (or best practice) was to churn out low-effort content in high volumes, often in the form of daily video blogs or vlogs. Over the years, the focus shifted toward more valuable content of higher quality. As a result, the draw of the platform evolved to include tutorials, video essays, and more. This shift in meta has increased the potential for branded channels to succeed on YouTube.

This information is important as you develop your social media strategy. It's also smart to recognize that your social media account is rented space from the company that provides the platform. These "digital landlords" can (and will) alter the terms and conditions without warning. Abrupt changes to layout, algorithms, and more can factor into how and when your intended audience will see you.



The Rewards of Research

Experienced marketers know that strategy starts with identifying your target audience. One great way to do this is by creating a customer persona, which details ideal demographics like location, occupation, and age. Psychographics or related interests and personalities are also helpful.

Once you have your ideal customer in mind, the next step is using the search functions on Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter to explore relevant hashtags (e.g., #print, #art, #graphicdesign). This will provide insight into how people engage with those topics and existing content. Take note of other hashtags that are commonly used in tandem. Your search will likely reveal the trending pain points that are being voiced by your audience. These can become valuable topics for the content you post.

Now, look for patterns among successful brands, including post frequency, content type, and presentation style. For example, is the content long-form, short-form, casual or formal, in the form of blogs or videos? Knowing all of this will help you determine how best to approach your audience.

Selecting Your Platform

According to a study by The Sprout Social, the top platforms that customers currently use to follow brands include Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. At the same time, however, a relative newcomer to the social media space is also becoming a force to be reckoned with. TikTok has seen incredible growth over the past few years, surpassing 1 billion active users in September 2021. In addition, TikTok recently introduced business profiles, ads, and the ability for creators to collaborate with brands on both paid and reward-based campaigns. Each social media site has its own signature appeal and unique engagement methods, so it's a good idea to establish a presence on a variety of platforms.

Keep in mind that the content you decide on will need to adhere to the style people expect from each platform. Fortunately, there's a platform for just about every marketing goal you may have. For example, live streams may appeal to you if you are searching for a solution to provide information and answer questions in real-time. Instagram and Twitter are prime for succinct interactions using images and text that inform and entertain. Pinterest is popular for visual communications. Think first about your strategy, and there's no question that you will eventually land on a platform that suits your audience and their needs.



Yes, Content is Still King!

Although the management of social media accounts is free, the content you create for them will likely be your most significant investment in terms of time and money. There are many different types of content at your disposal, including live streaming, blogs, newsfeed posts, infographics, and videos. Everything you post should reflect the values of your company and customers alike. Market data can suggest what works and what doesn't, but your audience determines the true test of effectiveness.

Naturally, a good place to start is by delivering content that resonates with your audience's interests. Some examples are tutorials of your products, education on different printing methods, and tips on color theory or finishing options. The more topics you can cover, the wider the net you will cast. Use all the resources that are available to you—if you have a team of talented graphic designers, have them create infographics for Twitter and Instagram. If someone excels at public speaking and improv, enlist them to host a Livestream. Ask your best writers to draft up scripts for YouTube and snappy tweets. Each type of content has its own unique value. A video can put a face to a brand and make it more personable, while images can break down concepts so they become more digestible at a glance. There are plenty of free online resources to get you started, or if it's in your budget, you can partner with professional organizations to assist with your content creation.

Once you decide on content topics and types, it's a good idea to establish a manageable calendar that will keep you on track. There are many great tools that enable you to schedule posts ahead of time and maintain a consistent output that doesn't require constant check-in. Experienced marketers know that a single piece of content should not exist in a vacuum. The metagame behind this idea is to buffer your content and syndicate it on different platforms. With the proper preparation, you can record multiple weeks' worth of 10-minute videos in a single day. Additionally, a Livestream enables you to create long-form content on the fly, which can be repurposed into shorter form for other accounts.

Measuring the Return on Investment

It is easy to get distracted by “vanity metrics,” like the number of likes or an increase in followers. A better way to measure the success of your social media efforts involves using tools that are equipped with data analytics capabilities, including Hootsuite, Clubhouse, or Google Analytics. With Google Analytics, you can set the parameters for what constitutes lead generated. Look for tools to measure the metrics you've established in your strategy so you can identify the efforts that will deliver the best results.



Industry Influencers

One investment that's been tried, proven, and accepted is employing the voice of social media influencers. While you're competing to stand out, the metagame still demands a great deal of collaboration. Today's variety of social media platforms covers every niche imaginable. There's an established audience and community for every possible pursuit, including marketing and sales, design, and workflow, just to name a few. You will find individuals who have risen up to "influencer" status within each of them. These are the people and pages you want to follow, study, replicate, and consider partnering with.

Print service providers offer a physical and visual medium as their product. During your research, keep an eye out for creators that already have your target audience's attention. Find the industry influencers who are making tutorials and leading webinars. If their approach aligns with yours, you have an opportunity to get your brand in front of their followers by offering your services in creative ways. Keep an open mind as to where print services may apply. Every day, many artists and designers will post their latest work to their feed and maybe film a quick 15-second video for TikTok in between. These influencers are seeking their own unique content to present. This opens the door for collaboration, particularly if your firm provides specialized printing formats, finishing, and techniques.

The Bottom Line

Becoming a social media superstar may sound like a lot of work, but it doesn't have to be! When you're first starting out, take the time to establish a proper system. Without the appropriate approach, a brand will run the risk of sounding like a soapbox speaker instead of a reliable source of information.

Social media is often the first point of contact with valuable prospects, so start small and do what you do best so you can start experiencing the rewards. Over time, you can scale up. Once you've found your voice, you can transform a soapbox into a well-lit stage.

One final piece of advice—when establishing your social media presence, remember the strategies that brought you success in other areas of your business. As is the case with so many other things, it's important to remain alert, flexible, and open to change when required.



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As part of the Business Development Strategies Consulting Service at Keypoint Intelligence, Karen Kimerer has experienced the many challenges of expanding current market opportunities and securing new business. She has developed a systematic approach to these opportunities, addressing the unique requirements of becoming a leader in our changing industry.

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