



GUIDE TO SOCIAL MEDIA OPTIMIZATION

During our everyday lives, we exchange and share information through different Social Media platforms in the hopes of being heard, understood and followed. We spend hours in front of a computer sifting through countless Twitter, Facebook and YouTube pages. But what precisely makes us choose to view and engage with one page over another? What sparks our interest? The answer is often found in the content, tone and design of our websites and Social Media networks. Today, more than ever, Social Media has provided organizations with free marketing outlets leading to a higher demand for Social Media Optimization (SMO). SMO is composed of a set of processes meant to successfully promote a brand, product or event. The objective of SMO is to reach as many targeted people as possible to create a snowball effect meant to lead to a community of loyal users.

SMO is composed of three key steps:

1. Research
2. Planning
3. Execution

Although it can be time consuming, following these guidelines will ultimately increase your brand's Social Media influence.

Research

Know Your Audience

When working towards a successful Social Media campaign, it is critical to have a vast understanding of who your audience is. Unfortunately trying to target too many niches can be unrealistic. Instead, seek loyal viewers that will stick with you. For example, if you are selling organic baby food, target working parents, or if you are promoting an environmentally focused organization, reach out to people who currently support eco-friendly groups and products. Important steps to take when researching your audience include the following:

- Find out where they spend their time. Which Social Media platforms are they using regularly?
- Pay attention to trends, specifically comments, questions and likes. Some of these conversations may give you insight on useful content approaches.
- Research a number of Social Media platforms including video sites, photo sharing sites and professional networks.
- Assess user quality. It is not always about how many followers you have, it is more important to realize who really follows you. Target the right people.
- Finding out what consumers are seeking by administering surveys or polls. Use no-cost tools such as Google Docs or Survey Monkey for this purpose.

YOUR BRAND HAS PROMISE. WE MAKE THAT PROMISE REAL.



Competitive Analysis

Competition is out there, even in the non-profit realm and one of their goals is to drive public mindshare in their direction. It is important to be on top of the game when it comes to your competitors' actions. When researching, consider the tone of the content as well as the link quality. For instance, which sites are they linking to and vice versa? It is also important to observe the rate at which they post or update content. To keep followers interested, refreshing content regularly is critical. In addition, following these simple guidelines will ensure that your search is complete:

- Pay particular attention to distinct approaches on each Social Media platform.
- Make note of how to improve already existing content. Think ahead and do not be afraid to take some risks.
- Keep an eye out for originality. If you see content that catches your attention, then it's probably worth it.

Planning

The second step in your quest for successful SMO includes planning ahead. Choosing the right Social Media platforms can mean the difference between a success and a failure. For instance, if you provide services to business professionals and they seem to be more active on LinkedIn than Facebook, a main focus for you should be building community on this platform. The key is to predict where your future followers will be and be able to understand where the trend is going. Additional steps to consider include:

- Crafting a plan of action. For example, deciding whether you'll be targeting awareness, selling a product or simply establishing reliability. It is important to define one goal to maintain a consistent flow. This does not mean your goal cannot change over time. Also, keep it simple. You want to be seen as a go-to source for whatever your niche may be. If ideas are spread too far, you may end up confusing and losing your audience.
- Setting both short-term and long-term goals is important. Ask yourself how many followers you hope to have in a week, a month and a year. What is your targeted ROI? Although measuring ROI in terms of Social Media can be a challenge, tools such as SMO Firefox, Google Insights for Search and Hootlet can help you measure your strategy's success.
- Establish a personality through design and tone. What is your message? Who are you? Consider customizing your backgrounds or landing pages when possible. Make sure you craft a voice for your brand or organization and stick to it when posting and interacting with the public.
- Create a blog. This will act as a personal newsletter; ultimately it should tell reoccurring stories that captivate your audience. For instance, if you work in animal welfare, make sure the stories focus on up-to-date pet information ranging from health issues, to food products, to grooming, to exercise and beyond. Keep in mind that the goal is to inform and persuade. Consider the following questions before you start a blog: Why did your organization form? Why should the public be interested in what you are doing? Most importantly, emphasize your organizational values and practices.



Execution

After your ideas have been organized, proceed to sharing your work. Remember that once a social media page is active it is crucial to update it regularly. Followers tend to lose interest if the feed is old or repetitive. Reflect upon the steps below before you launch your new Social Media sites:

- Establish a relationship with your followers by asking questions and seeking recommendations. It is important for your audience to see you and your organization as a real person and not a machine.
- Get you staff and board members on board with your social media efforts. Have them follow you and share your page(s) with their friends and co-workers.
- Reward your followers when possible. Everyone likes a gift or a deal, and most everyone likes to be recognized. Set up a contest with a great giveaway, or simply thank people who have helped, contributed or been a source of inspiration.
- Develop a set of 20-30 dummy social media posts that make sense with the lifestyle your organization is promoting to use on days when you have not got anything timely to share. Make sure you replenish them regularly!
- Shorten links for easier sharing. This is especially useful for Twitter posts, where you have a limited word count. Use tools such as Bit.ly to shorten links.
- Measure your user engagement weekly or monthly. Facebook has great analytic tools built into pages and you can also use Google Analytics and EdgeRank Checker to help determine how many people are engaging with your sites. Reflect upon each post you made during this period. Did certain sorts of posts drive more engagement than others? Did certain times of day get more engagement from your followers than others? If so, consider tweaking your postings to mimic the things you are seeing that are more productive.
- Assess your data. Observe click rates, social e-commerce productivity and the number of subscribers you have. You may want to use tools such as How Sociable and Social Mention to improve your statistics.
- Make sure you place social media badges on your websites and your email communications to encourage viewers on those platforms to join you elsewhere.
- Start getting involved in social bookmarking and encourage the public to sign up for your RSS feeds.
- Interact regularly with other social media sites and share the good work from others with your followers. This helps to build community and helps expose your page to followers you may not have access to personally.
- Consider advertising on social media sites to further your reach, especially with your most likely brand advocates.
- Make sure that no more than half (maybe even no more than 1/3) of the information you are sharing is directly about your organization. We are working to build community on Social Media, and community is not all about you.

In Summary

- Increase your linkability
- Encourage the mashup
- Help your content travel
- Make tagging and bookmarking effortless
- Reward inbound links