

Tying Social Media to your Strategic Plan

By Tim Shaw

When looking at social media and strategic planning it may not seem like they belong together. Social media is immediate and fast moving — a way to instantly communicate and converse with an audience. A strategic plan is executed over a period of months or years with objectives that are realized over the long term. A stark contrast.

But in order to have a social media strategy that adds value to your organization it must be tied to the strategic plan.

Measure, measure, measure

Your strategic plan sets the direction and identifies what success looks like to your organization. Success in social media is tied directly to your organizational goals. In social media, it's tempting to fall into using metrics like number of fans or followers to measure success, but more meaningful metrics can be identified by looking at how social media is used to engage and influence your fans and followers in a way that support your broader organizational goals.

Function, function, function

Different groups within your organization perform various functions that contribute to achieving the goals outlined in your strategic plan. Identify the functions that will find the most value in social media. There's a very good chance that member-facing functions will be able to make more impact in social media than administrative or financial functions. Because the activities of these groups are driven by the strategic plan, aligning social media with them ensures that it too is contributing to the overall success of the organization.

Strategy, strategy, strategy

Once it's clear where social media will add value, a strategy must be developed outlining how that will happen. At this stage, social media is probably written in as a tactic in the broader group strategy, but it is important that a specific social media strategy be developed that will outline more specifically how social media is going to be managed, who you are trying to reach and why, and what type of content will be developed so that it really contributes to the success of the group.

And finally, tactics

To many people, it seems backwards that the last thing to be considered when it comes to social media is the actual technology. But it's true, once you have reached this point social media will be firmly entrenched to your strategic plan: it has good metrics that link back to the strategic plan; is part of a larger functional group strategy; and the

social media strategy has outlined how exactly social media is going to be managed. And now finally you get to choose which channels will be used to execute your strategy.

In the non-profit world where budgets are tight, it's important that everything the organization does adds value. The way to make sure that social media is a truly valuable piece of your organization is to make sure that the metrics, function, strategy and tactics all tie back into the overall goals set out in your strategic plan.

Tim Shaw is a Partner at amplifi, a digital advocacy & public relations firm that builds champions for your brand, issue and cause. Tim teaches the Social Media for PR course at Durham College and can be reached at 905-415-4588 or at www.amplifi.ca.

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