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5 Easy Steps to a Winning Social Media Plan

By [Emily Soares Proctor](#)
Published June 9, 2010 [Print](#)

So you've set up your social media empire using Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and you're blogging too.

But how do you make it all work together? You want to reach potential clients and establish your authority online, but what's your plan?

This article delivers five foolproof steps to get you on your way to finding, formulating and distributing content that will get you noticed. Content could include your own blog posts or links to others people's work posted on your social networks.



#1: Find Your Target Audience.

The first step in social media planning is largely the first step in identifying your brand—determine who you are and who your customers are.

What unique aspect of your product or service attracts your target population?

Are you a veteran business coach who works with small entrepreneurs? A grandmother and knitter who likes to teach others how to create gifts?

You'll need to determine what your readers want to know from you, what their likes and dislikes are and where they congregate.

You'll also need to find the right tone. The "social" in social media requires a conversational approach, but you still need to speak your clients' language.

Be sure you know the lingo and style that your clients are comfortable with and where they talk to each other—on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs or on social bookmarking sites.

Write out a basic profile for your most common type of client or customer. How would you classify them in terms of education, hobbies, tech-savviness and time spent engaging in social networking?

#2: Solve Readers' Most Important Problems.

Become a reporter/editor.

Sharing information on social media is essentially about becoming a

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reporter/editor for those who take part in your industry or your passion for your product or service. As a newspaper editor asks herself, so must you: "What do the readers really want to know?"

Most newspaper editors today have to admit that what readers want is tomorrow's news yesterday. So be timely. Your clients have specific issues that need solving, whether they're about your product or service or their own business struggles that you can help untangle.

Pick the right sources.

Research will be a big part of your social media planning, so make sure your sources are on the cutting edge of your topic.

You'll also want to provide analysis to help guide your readers' absorption of the information you provide. Most readers today—of any format—don't feel they have the time to connect all the dots, so tell them why the information you're sharing is relevant to them.

Do the work **for** them by writing on point, underscoring the impacts and keeping the content valuable. You'll be rewarded with clients, followers and fans who trust your information and know you won't waste their time.

Sit down now and write a list of burning questions the people you would like to have as fans and followers are asking. Later, you will conduct regular research to keep this list current. For now, the most pressing questions that are top of mind should form the initial core of the topics for your editorial plan.

#3: Decide How You'll Fulfill the Content.

Who will regularly do the information-gathering, writing and distribution for your content? Is it you? Or maybe you have staff that can do it. Before you can determine volume and frequency, you'll want to figure out what your business can reasonably deliver.

One thing to keep in mind: whatever schedule you set for yourself or your staff will no doubt require more time than you think, especially in the beginning. Getting started with social media content has a learning curve, so be prepared for the extra time needed to get comfortable with the process.

According to the recent [2010 Social Media Marketing Industry Report](#), most business owners can maintain a very respectable social media presence in six hours a week, including research and production time.

#4: Create Your Plan.

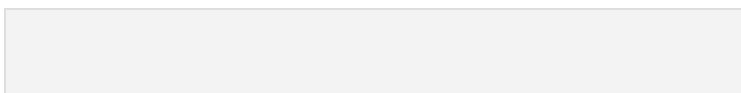
Now it's time to create a plan. You can use a number of different methods to help you build your content strategy.

Mind-mapping

Try mind-mapping for higher level development. If you have some themes that you would like to explore in intricate ways, mind-mapping helps you flesh out the many angles around any given idea. It can also help you plan how you would like the components of your social media plan to interact. [Freemind](#), [XMind](#) and [Mindjet](#) are all popular mind-mapping programs.

Editorial calendar

The greatest time-saver and strategic tool in your content-planning arsenal is an editorial calendar. One option is this [Google docs-based social media calendar](#) to lay out your content by date and topic. This gives you an easy-to-follow look at the formats you use and what part of your theme you want to deliver during a given day or week:



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Using an editorial calendar helps you bring clarity and purpose to your content—on a committed schedule. Never underestimate the power of a deadline!

Keywords

You can also add keywords to your calendar, so you know which words you should be including in your content about a given theme. [Google AdWords](#) and [Wordtracker](#) both offer free tools to help you find the most valuable keywords for your subject.



Content cycles

A great deal of the content we respond to, whether by creating our own posts about it or directing readers to what someone else has said, happens as breaking news. As you chart your content, be sure to leave space for news from others.

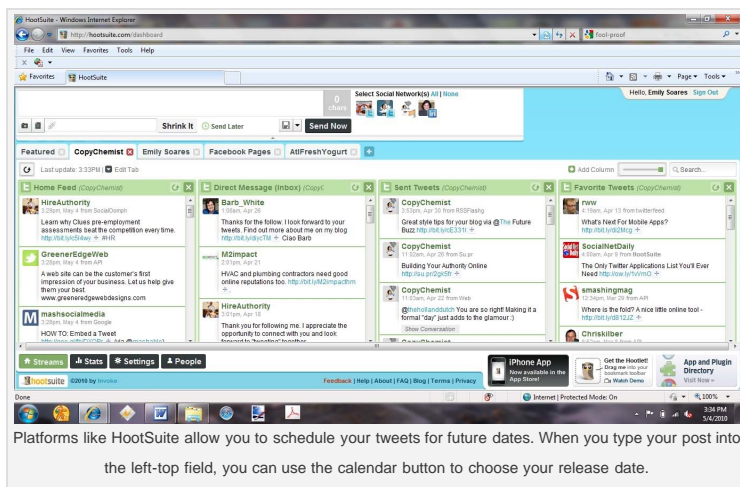
Some content planners create a formula centered on blog posts: Monday for best-of lists; Tuesday for product/media reviews; Wednesday for personal experience stories; Thursday for an editorial on a controversial topic; and Friday for fun, freewheeling commentary or guest posts.

Interviews make great content as well, and because they happen less frequently, you can target individuals for monthly, bimonthly or quarterly rotation. And don't forget about video! Share clips from the interviews you conduct or vlog your how-to article on a given week, rather than writing it. Now you've added YouTube as another platform to post your content.

More great content ideas are found in these Social Media Examiner articles: "[5 Easy Steps to Creating Reusable Social Media](#)" and "[4 Steps to Driving Faster Sales with Social Media Content](#)."

#5: Schedule Your Content

To schedule your content, consider what formats you will be sending and how often. Applications such as [TweetDeck](#), [HootSuite](#) and [SocialOomph](#) will let you simultaneously post to Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and others.



But a strong word of caution here. Automating posts, when done carefully, is an effective way of pushing content when you can't be there to do it yourself. But consider the following:

- Twitter and Facebook both have applications that will push to the other when you post to one, so know if you have set that up.
- Whatever Facebook RSS app you use to pull your blog posts to your profile or fan page may *also* be given permission to update automatically.
- If given the proper permissions, HootSuite and TweetDeck (and others) can push content automatically, *without* you scheduling it, so they may also tweet a new blog post, for instance, when you've already done so using another app.

All of these various permissions can lead to an embarrassing loop of repeat tweets and/or Facebook status updates if you're not careful. Consider going manual until you understand exactly which permissions you have opted into for each platform.

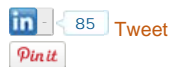
Quality Over Quantity

You don't have to post every day to create an effective presence with your social media. Find the frequency that makes sense for your business and go with that. Remember, quality must always trump quantity. If you can't maintain the quality level of your content at the rate you're trying for, reduce the frequency until you can.

Whew! Seems a lot to do, right? Well, the beauty of content planning is that it will create its own cycle. Use responses and questions you get to one area of content to begin planning your approach to deepen understanding on a given topic or to explore another.

The single most important component to your editorial planning should be your ability to absorb new information and create valuable content from it.

What do you think? Have you employed any of these ideas? Have a few of your own to share? Please comment in the box below...



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Delaney Kirk

Great suggestions. While I blog and am on FB and Twitter, I have not set up automatic postings between these. Will give it some thought. Thanks.

Daniel

This is a great point. Its funny it reminds me of the recent episode of the show "THE OFFICE" where Ryan makes a site called woof. When he woofs his computer goes crazy because the woof is sent to every social networking site. He also gets a phone call from it.

billysticker

Quality over quantity. This blog is an example of both. Great content.

"People down plan to fail, they fail to plan." We've heard it and its true. Plan it then work the plan.



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