Building A Social Media Team

Where to Start, What to Consider, and How to Get Organized

altitude

Many companies want to build social media teams. But where to start?

This e-book is a collection of posts that I wrote about building a social media team. I put the series together to try and help businesses of all sizes sort out the wheat from the chaff and understand what it takes to really properly staff and deploy human resources to build and guide social media efforts.

It's my hope that this is helpful to you, perhaps even prompting some more questions and ideas for what you're already doing. Want to share your feedback? Email me or send me a ping on Twitter.

What Do you Mean A Social Media Team?

Let's assume for a minute that you're already convinced that social media is something you need to be integrating into your work. (If you still need convincing on this front, sift through my archives or any of the myriad blogs on social media out there right now).

When I refer to a team, I mean exactly that. A group of people inside your organization that are tasked with strategizing, executing, and stewarding social media initiatives inside your company.

Those initiatives can be anything from just listening and mining social media conversations for insights about your brand presence to participating actively through blogs, Twitter, forums, or other social networks to engage with your customers.

So, Who Should Be Involved?

I'm going to get into specifics about recruiting, skills/attributes and succession planning later on, but for now, suffice it to say that if you're only considering adding people to your social media team from your communications department, please stop there, and let's chat about this for a minute.

I know we communication types think that since the word "media " is involved, it should live exclusively with the communication department. And I think that's selling it all very short.

Your customer service, product development, and business development teams really have stakes in this game, and you ought to consider a cross-disciplinary group that includes people from all of these departments. Why?

The information you glean from social media is going to affect more than the way you talk to your customers. If you're really integrating it, it should be affecting the decisions you make about how you help those customers, and ultimately inform the products and services you provide to them. So my team would have folks from:

- PR and Corporate Communications
- Marketing
- Customer and/or Client Service
- Business Development or Sales
- Brand Management
- Product Development
- Executive Team

If you've got multiple people in each department, select a point person or two for each to help streamline internal communication, but everyone needs to be engaged and involved.

Team members are responsible for strategizing and executing the social media initiatives that are relative to their department function (which sometimes means active social media participation and sometimes implementing internally), communicating back to the team and management about results and challenges, educating and training internally about social media initiatives, and finding ways to integrate the learnings from social media into their work. We'll dive more into specifics on that later, too.

Why Do I Need a Team?
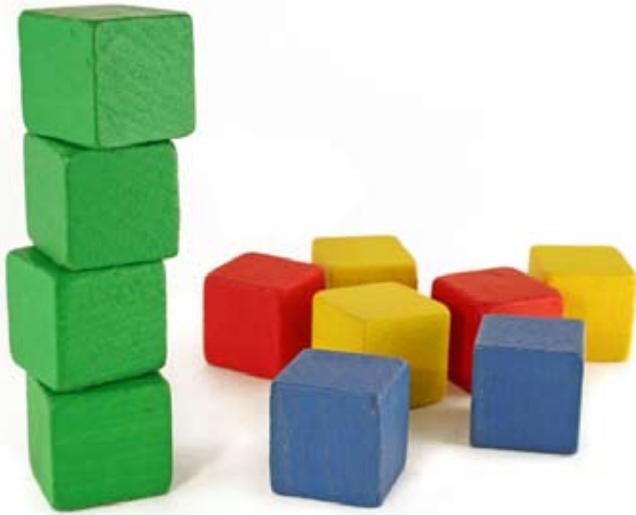
Socially charged communication is changing expectations in business, both for customers and potential customers alike. It's seeping in around and among us. There's no backwards now.

So given that, you need a social media team because having one champion in your office forever doesn't scale. You cannot conceivably manage a comprehensive and properly integrated social media presence with one guy (or girl). And done right, social media bleeds into almost every aspect of the business. That doesn't mean that everyone gets on Twitter, but it does mean that what you learn through social customer engagement can and will inform decisions and ideas about much of what you do. And the right people need to be empowered to do something with that information.

To me, building this team is a first step to getting departments to work across borders, but all with the goal of improving the customer experience, and building a more solid foundation upon which your business can grow and thrive. It means managing the monolith of social media by integrating it into what you're already doing, not completely reinventing the wheel. Dividing and conquering, and building a system of people and tools that make the ultimate value - consistent and dedicated customer outreach - much easier to manage.

Assembling Your Team

When you're assembling a team of people to head social media efforts, it can be a daunting task. What characteristics and skills do you look for? What departments/disciplines should be represented? And how do you prepare for the inevitable turnover? Let's take these in turn.

Nunchuck Skills, Bow Hunting Skills…

Communication skills might sound obvious, but that's just the tip of the iceberg, really. Here are a few standout qualities I'd look for in members of your social media team:

Work Ethic
Social media doesn't fit neatly into job descriptions, and lots of it you're going to be sorting out as you go. Seek out people eager to extend a bit beyond their job description, roll their sleeves up, and dig in amongst and with a team. This sort of role requires someone who is agile with their projects and can shift gears relatively quickly without losing their place or getting completely overwhelmed. And it's helpful if they have an interest in roles and areas of the company outside of their own.

Diplomacy
You know the people that are great at building bridges: in meetings, among colleagues, with customers. We might have called these just "customer service" skills back in the day, but it's more than just responding when called. It's anticipating needs, and being willing to be truly helpful at a personal level (sometimes before you're asked).

Team members should also be strong educators, carrying the social media torch back to their teams and departments and communicating well and often about what the team is up to, and how it affects them. It's important that they also know how to build relationships *inside* the company. With their managers, with other departments, with HR, IT, and with legal. They'll need them.

Balanced Corporate Perspective
You certainly want to be working with the people that are knowledgeable about their varying disciplines within the company. But you also want those that aren't just drinking the company kool-aid, since the packaged corporate speak won't play well in social media. (Note: you don't want the people who are the perpetual naysayers, either).

Look for people who have a positive attitude about your company and your potential but are forward- and independent-thinking enough to see what could be made better, both within their own roles and globally.

Product/Service Knowledge
No matter their function internally, you need to be assembling people who really understand the inner workings of your company, or have the relationship skills needed to build alliances and learn quickly. This kind of practical, functional knowledge is critical so that social media strategies can be approached and employed with company-wide implications in mind at all times.

And if the people on your team are going to be actively participating and contributing to social media endeavors, your customers aren't going to care what department they're from, they just know they're part of your company. Everyone needs to be armed with enough information (or access to the information they don't have) in order to help get customers the connections and solutions they need.

Problem Solving and Listening
This might go in the "duh" category. But team members need to be listening to what's happening inside your company so they can be effective stewards of that information to your team and to the customers.

Team members also need to listen carefully what your customers are saying - even when they're not saying it directly to you - in order to shepherd that information back and determine what to do with those insights to move things forward. This implies that all the members of the team need to have listening tools at their disposal.

Not everyone will have all of these skills. But if you focus on finding people that have a few of them and spread the love around, you'll have a well-equipped group of people that will help you launch a sound strategy.

Build Across Borders

You want to assemble a team of people that have certain skill sets, representing as wide a swath of departments as you can manage. This piece is really important because it ensures that your social media strategy will be built and executed with as wide a perspective as possible internally. That means understanding the potential benefits, the potential pitfalls, and opportunities to leverage both across all the different aspects of your business.

In an ideal scenario, you'd have people representing:

    * Corporate Comms and Public Relations (this can include agency partners if you have them)
    * Marketing
    * Brand/Product Management
    * Customer/Client Service
    * Business Development and Sales
    * Human resources
    * IT
    * Legal and/or Investor Relations

The right mix probably includes people with the right mindset first and foremost (or at least the open mindedness to consider social media as a promising strategy), and a mix of levels of responsibility. You don't want all managers or all executives or all junior staff members. You probably need a couple of upper-level folks to champion the initiatives up the ladder, and the rest should be people doing and managing the day to day work.

And you need the people at the table to ask the hard questions. This shouldn't be a fishbowl brigade of all the social media evangelists, but a mix of people that will allow and encourage healthy discussion with open minds about what the pros and cons of social media can be for your particular company.

Planning for "That Day"

A prevalent issue in social media today is "what happens when we train these people, put them out there on behalf of the company, and then they leave?"

My flip answer is: and this is different than any other person you recruit and train and they leave because….?

But I understand that the bigger concern is that you set expectations for "faces" of the company that may or may not be there someday, and that losing them means that you'll lose customer loyalty because they were attached to the person and not the brand.

This is why it's so important that you create a *culture* of social media in your organization, and empower many different people to be involved in your company efforts. Then the conversation becomes about "that company really wants to talk to its customers" as opposed to "that guy is really their social media guru".

This really is about starting small, with a cadre of people that can champion the cause, because ultimately you want everyone in your organization to function with this mindset. Yes, you're going to have a few people that stand out and carry the flag a bit higher than others. Yes, likely at some point they're going to leave. But if you're infusing a social communication mindset a little bit into all of your business functions gradually over time, there's always going to be someone eager, willing, and more than capable of taking their place.

In other words, having a company spokesperson is great. But they need to be an indication and representative of an entire approach, not the approach in and of itself.

Team Roles and Responsibilities

So you've assembled your social media team, and you're starting to put the road beneath your feet. Time to start sorting out who does what, right? Here are some things to consider in regard to roles and responsibilities for your team and building an approach that will work for your business.

<u>**Everyone**</u>

Listening
Many a post has been written about the importance of listening and monitoring online. Especially for your brand, but also for things that are happening in your industry (including what your competitors might be up to). I won't belabor all the whys here, but there are a couple of posts over at the Radian6 blog (disclosure: my employer) where David Alston outlined the top 10 reasons to be monitoring your brand online, then he did another ten. Check those out if you aren't already convinced.

When you've assembled a team for social media, it's absolutely critical that everyone involved somehow has access to the monitoring activity. If you're using a listening platform, ideally everyone has access to it, but at the very least there needs to be regular reporting and sharing of information across the team. This is where it all starts, and whether or not folks are actively participating on social networks, they need to be informed about what's happening out there.

Education and Evangelism
The social media team is going to be the hub and central resource for your efforts, which means also that it's up to the team to be communicating especially well internally about your activities. If you're just getting started, you're going to be the ones charged with making (and maintaining) the business case for social media integration, and everyone will play a role in articulating the potential benefits and risks for their area of expertise.

From sharing strategies, results and key learnings of your efforts to training folks on the use of new tools, as you move forward your team is the champion for the cause and responsible for translating social media beyond the tools and shiny objects and putting it in solid business context. We'll talk more about what specifically you can be measuring and reporting on later in this ebook, but you are the standard bearers, the teachers, and the stewards.

Backstage: Key Learnings & Insights

All the listening and social media stuff isn't worth a fig if you don't use what you learn to somehow improve your business. Not everyone on your team needs to be actively participating and responding in social media, but they need to be absorbing the insights of that listening and participation.

So some of your backstage folks might look like this:

Product Development: listen for product improvement ideas, feature requests, competitive offerings
Human Resources: recruiting, culture and company perception (external), competitive hires
Customer Support: FAQs and recurring issues, praise (for understanding what's working well)
Business Development: market and industry trends, pricing intelligence, competitor positioning
Legal or Compliance: monitor participation to ensure alignment with any regulatory issues

The information comes from listening, but the real meat is in figuring out what's next for all of these things. In other words, when you have the insight about what people would like to see from your product, what's the next step? If you've discovered an untapped market, how do you act on that information? It's up to you to decide how best to shuttle information from the front lines through your organization so it gets into the right hands.

The Front Lines: Participating and Engaging

Here we go with actual getting-out-there-and-talking-to-people stuff. You're going to ask me how many people you need, and I'm going to give you the dreaded "it depends" answer. It might be as few as one or two if you're just getting going and the chatter is mild. If you're a brand with a significant presence already, you're already immersed in social media whether you like it or not, and you'll likely need 3 or more people actively managing outreach (Dell, Comcast, and other leading brands have full teams.)

As for managing the risks of what people are saying, I've written about a lot of that here, here and here. And there are several companies - big companies - who have written policies of their own to help manage this kind of thing. Personal accountability, smart hiring, and common sense count for a lot. I've collected a bunch here for you; if they can do it, so can you.

As for roles of people on this front, here are a few basic ideas to get you started thinking about what might work for your own organization.

Comms/Community folks:
These folks are often the bridge between company and customer, and function like a facilitator and connector. This is the role I take on each day. You might have these people paying attention to:

- Compliments: Say thanks.
- Complaints: Apologize, and help get them connected with someone on the support side that can work to resolve their issue (work with customer service)
- Inquiries: Help provide and connect customers and prospects with information on your company, and work with the BD team to care for them appropriately
- Media opportunities: Connect with bloggers and journalists to build relationships

BD and Sales:
Your sales team should be engaged and involved in your online efforts, but you may need to do a bit of education about what's acceptable in social channels. It's not for selling. It's for informing, educating, learning and connecting.

- Leads: listen for "point of need" sales opportunities and make genuine, helpful connections (no pitching, folks).
- Kudos: For example, our reps might connect with their prospects on Twitter after they went through a product demo
- Inquiries: Working hand in hand with the community and communication folks above to steward these requests

Customer Service:
Probably the most important thing in this area is empowering your customer service team to actually solve problems, in real time, with the authority to do so. Ritz Carlton hotels are a good example; every employee is empowered to solve any guest issue at any time that requires $150 or less to remedy. Think about how you can set comprehensive guidelines for issue resolution and customer rewards so your support team can act as autonomously and effectively as possible.

They'll be the ones listening for and responding to:

- troubleshooting or technical/product support issues
- customer complaints
- accounting/billing questions (to route to appropriate people)
- compliments and kudos (there's no such thing as too many people saying thank you)

The Role of Agencies and Consultants

Many companies work with agency partners on a regular basis to manage and implement some of their communications. If you have PR or communications folks out of house you're working with, you'll absolutely want them to be in the loop about what you're doing, and even engaging their assistance with strategy (if they're suited to that role).

But I'd recommend against having your agency do the outreach on your behalf, at least for the long term. They might be able to act as guideposts and training wheels as you get going. And I think there is immense value in having trusted, experienced experts on your team to lend their talents and ideas.

But ultimately, you need to own social media outreach inside your own organization and execute it there. The expectation you're setting by being present in social media is that people get to interact with the people at your company. Let your agency and consultative partners help you engineer behind the scenes, but your goal should be to give your customers what they want: real interactions with you.

Remember...

No matter who is reaching out on behalf of your company, your customers and community aren't segmenting you by department and they don't care about your job titles. They're looking at you as a unified team that they can count on to meet their needs. So by all means devise a system that works for you, but ultimately remember that you are ALL stewards of your company and your brand, and by participating in social media, you're setting new expectations for accessibility and availability. And you're all in it together.

Team Toolkit: A Listening Platform

At this point, it's critical that you equip your team with the tools that will allow them to integrate social media into their work.

Let's start right off the bat with some super clear disclosure: I work for Radian6 as their Director of Community, and I use our listening platform exclusively for my work. That means that I am unequivocally biased in favor of our tool and its capabilities for listening and engagement in social media.

If you can pay for a monitoring solution, it's the one I'm going to recommend because I think it's the best on the market and one of many reasons I work for them.

Clear enough? Fully disclosed now, are we? So now that that's out of the way...

Building a Listening Platform

You need some assembly of listening tools in order to monitor the conversation. This to me is probably THE most important tool in your arsenal, no matter what. If a paid solution is within your reach (ours starts at about $600/month), please consider investing in one. From an efficiency and streamlining perspective alone, it's worthwhile, and can make this part of your process so much more comprehensive.

But if a paid solution is still out of your budget right now, consider building yourself a dashboard of your own that aggregates RSS feeds from several search tools.

I've noodled with several methods, and so far, I like NetVibes as an aggregator, pulling in search feeds from:

- Google Alerts (News and Blog Search)
- Twitter Search - separate feeds for different search strings/keywords
- Technorati Blog Search
- TweetBeep - a good backup to capture mentions of your brand on Twitter
- SocialMention.com
- Backtype - search among blog comments
- BoardTracker - search forums and bulletin boards

This method won't have the ultimate value of paid tools - things like workflow tracking, sentiment analysis, and deep data analytics and reporting - but you'll at least be able to aggregate the information to give yourself a starting point for analysis by hand.

At a basic level, you'll want to listen for:

- Your brand/company name (don't forget to look for common misspellings or derivatives of that brand)
- Your competitors
- Stakeholder mentions: If you have people or representatives on your team that are active online, you might be listening for their specific names
- Industry/Opportunity phrases: if you're selling insurance, you might look for phrases like "need insurance coverage" or "shopping for car insurance"

Manpower

Ideally, each person on your team is set up on any listening system you put together. But if that's not financially or logistically possible, make your assignments for listening based on the complexity of your team.

For a smaller company without large, independent departments, you can probably have one or two people act as your information gatherers through your listening tools, and report back to the rest of the team on a regular basis about what's happening. (More on that later).

For more complex organizations where you're building a team across departments, it's ideal to have at least one person from each department - front line OR backstage - manning the listening posts relative to their area of the business. If that's not possible, try to at least have one communications, one or two sales, and one or two customer service people that can share the responsibility and distribute learnings.

Keeping Tabs

If you're listening and not yet participating actively on social networks as a company, you can probably have your team members checking in on sites two or three times a day, just to keep abreast of any emerging issues or time-sensitive intelligence to report to the team.

If you're actively participating and engaging with your customers, those plugged into the listening systems need to be integrating that as continually as possible into their daily work. That means peeking at your dashboard every 30 minutes or so (yes, really), and ideally if you're using a great tool like Tweetdeck for Twitter participation, you can have it set up with some redundant searches right in the window so you can catch brand mentions in real time on your desktop.

Again, paid tools like Radian6 offer capabilities to help with this part of the process, including the ability to build and implement a workflow for your engagement efforts right in the platform, track your responses, and get alerted to new posts in near-real time through email or IM (so you don't have to remember to refresh a dashboard).

I know it sounds like a plug, but I can't tell you how much these capabilities make a difference when the volume of mentions about your brand gets to more than a few a day. When considering how you scale social media, scaling the listening and workflow aspects needs to be one of the first things you address. Serious participation, tracking, and analysis of your social media efforts is eventually going to require a tool that goes far beyond what you can build for free.

Team Toolkit: Participation

You've built a team. You've sorted out some roles and responsibilities. You've got a listening tool system in place, and you've got a sense of what you're going to say. Now it's time to start participating - in other words, talking to your customers online, in the places where they congregate.

For some organizations, getting ready for that may mean a discussion (or a series of them) with IT and management about dissolving certain firewall restrictions and/or being able to install applications on individual desktops. This means laying out your case for social media participation in compelling and clear terms: "We know our customers are asking for us to be present on these sites because of X learnings we've captured through monitoring. We have selected Y sites as our outposts and Z tools for internal and external communication because..... Here's what the time and capital requirements will be for our team and the expected benefits to our participation...." (You get the idea).

You may need to do some negotiating and addressing of concerns and potential risks and rewards of social media participation. To help do that, consider the tools you'll need to make that participation as effective as possible.

Communication Guidelines

While not a technical application, this could be something that really allays the fears of some folks in your organization about this participation. Check out some examples from other companies here. Even if you don't need a formal policy, it can be helpful to outline the philosophy and approach of your company's social media participation to share with others that are still learning about this type of communication.
Social Profiles

Depending on the external sites on which you choose to participate, your social media team members will need profiles and a presence on those sites.

As for the whole "corporate vs. personal" profile argument, I'm in the camp that says having a personal presence either instead of or in addition to a "logo" presence is really critical to making the most of social media. I think the approach differs a little based on the site:

Twitter: I think each person on the front lines needs an individual profile with a photo (much like the Dell or Comcast guys do). You can have handles that reflect the corporate presence - BobAtCompany, for example - but do let individual people have individual accounts. (As for the "who owns your account" stuff, your mileage will vary based on your company culture and policies. When in doubt, have the discussion first).

If you're going to use a general logo/corporate presence as a Twitter profile, consider that Twitter is a very person-to-person medium. You'll need to think about how you're planning to use this more generalized presence; at Radian6, we're planning to use ours to help further our best practices and educational content, including facilitating backchannel conversation for webinars and gathering feedback about content our customers would like to see. But the bulk of our outreach happens through our individual accounts.

Facebook: Facebook Pages are a popular corporate solution, and while I'm not yet totally convinced of their ultimate value, they're designed to be built as a logo presence versus a personal one. That's the nature of these sites, but think about how you can provide a personalized, human touch to this by really thinking through how you'll engage your customers on that page, and how you can help them connect with a real, breathing individual straight from that page if they'd like to.

Since most people tend to use Facebook as more of a personal communication channel, I'd advise that your team members interact through the page itself (via the wall or messages). Rather than offering up their personal Facebook profiles as a link, publish appropriate email addresses or other social network profiles (like Twitter) so customers can reach out that way.

LinkedIn: Here, my recommendation is that each team member maintain their own individual profile and use that to participate in areas of the site like Answers, or join groups. Then from a company perspective, you can form a Group if you like to engage in more company-to-customer and customer-to-customer activities.

Forums: The forum culture is such that people really expect to be talking to people. If forums are a viable channel for your company to be talking to customers, then I think you really need to allow each individual to have their own presence on the site and communicate with forum members that way.

Blogs: When leaving a comment on a blog, always identify yourself as the individual representing the company. That's simple to do: close your comment with your name and your company name. People want to know who they're hanging out with. For instance, I sign blog posts:

Amber Naslund
Director of Community, Radian6
@AmberCadabra

Who's Talking

Deciding who should be participating on which social networks is a matter of several factors, and your mileage is going to vary. But here's some things to think about when you're determining that.

Interest: The members of your team doing the participating need to be interested in doing so in the first place. Some people have a natural affinity for Twitter or Facebook, and that might be the perfect place for them to engage on behalf of your brand. Check out whether your team members are using social networks or blogging in their personal lives, and see where their interests lie.

Expertise: It's important that the people interacting on the social web for your company have two-fold expertise: they need to understand the tools they're using, and they need to be equipped with the right information and skills in their corporate role to respond and engage in their area of expertise. In other words, if you're using Twitter for customer service, you want someone with the right blend of social media savvy, web and tech expertise, and deep knowledge of your company's customer service practices.

Resources: When I say resources, I mean that your social media team members need to have the ability to integrate this into their other work (time), as well as access to people and information they may need to fulfill that part of their role. You've got to treat team member social media responsibilities as an integral piece of their job, not a bolt-on accessory.

Even if you have full-time social media or community team members, scaling your social media strategy is going to require that more people get involved and immersed. The full-time person can then be a bit of the hub for social media activity and strategy, and work closely with all of the other members of the team to keep efforts cohesive and on track.

Home Base

Don't neglect the importance of making sure that your customers have plenty of clear, applicable reasons to visit your website. Use your outpost social presence to bring people home to roost and hang out.

It's not enough for a website to be a static brochure anymore. Your customers want to do things, find things, share things, participate in things. If you haven't done so, audit your site for opportunities to enhance that content presence. Be open minded and creative about the ways you use your site. Invest in making your website a resource and destination for people, and a conduit to information and interaction with you.

Roger, Roger: Team Communication and Reporting

An aspect of social media execution that I think often gets lost in the shuffle is communicating among your internal team. It's so very critical to doing this stuff (okay, any business stuff really) well, but it's like the shoemaker's kids having crummy shoes. We forget to take care of our own.

So let's talk about this in two pieces; the things you're going to want to communicate about and why, and then a few tools you ought to consider to help you do that.

The Information Highway

On a daily basis, there's so much happening across the company that it's nearly impossible to sort the wheat from the chaff, and know what your colleagues and compatriots need to know. It's not the minutia that matters so much as the things that could potentially affect the way someone else does their job, for better or worse. Especially as it relates to social media, the intelligence that needs to be shared is the meaty stuff that influences how your team interacts with your customers and community. Just a few examples:

Sales and Biz Dev:
• New account wins
• Significant account losses
• Sources of new leads
• Upcoming significant pitches/presentations
• Significant decision drivers for prospects/customers
• Goals, both short term and long term

Support and Product Development
• FAQs and recurring issues among customers, including which are being looked at for implementation
• New product/service updates/schedules
• Testimonials/Use Cases/Feedback

Community and Communications
- Share of Voice vs. Competition
- Overall sentiment for the brand
- Media Coverage (traditional and social)
- Testimonials/Use Cases/Feedback
- Upcoming events/speaking engagements

Executive and Management
- New Hires, Promotions, other HR
- Changes to compliance, regulatory or legal issues/policies
- Strategic Planning & Business Goals
- Partnerships and Alliances (and their purposes)

Everyone
- What you need from other team members/expectations
- What other team members are doing that's valuable (not sunshine blowing, truly meaty feedback)
- Ideas for other team members outside your role
- Cultural issues: the positives that keep you coming to work and the challenges that make your job harder

All in all, this is a guidepost. It's not meant to be comprehensive, but rather to get you thinking about what might be important in your company. And I'm not advocating that you churn out dozens of reports and spreadsheets and graphs and sit around the conference table looking at PowerPoint slides. I'm suggesting that in the format that works for you and your culture, you need to be talking to each other: regularly and openly. Social media is about communication, after all. Don't ignore each other.

The Power Tools

Communication really isn't about the technology, it's about the intent and the effort. But having some of the right tools around you can be super valuable. Let's talk about a few things that are available so you can consider what might work for you.

Micromedia Platform: With the explosion of Twitter, there's a strong movement for similar products that are meant to be used internally. At Radian6, we use Yammer for quick bursts of internal communication, and mostly to share news like media coverage, interesting links, or sales wins. Another application that serves a similar purpose is SocialCast, though I can't speak to it's capabilities. These tools are helpful for many-to-many communication and useful for sharing quick bites of information that would otherwise clog people's email inboxes.

Instant Messaging: When IM arrived, email volume for me dropped dramatically. It's great for the one-off ping to someone. The downside is that it's not captured in an archive (unless you deliberately do so) and it's only one-to-one communication, but sometimes, that's all you need. I'm a fan of Adium, an IM client that integrates all the popular platforms into one easy to use interface.

CRM and Engagement Tracking: Radian6 has features that allow each user to respond to and track responses to posts and comments across the social web, as well as post comments to internal team members about specific posts so we can talk to each other about how to respond (or how to disseminate important feedback).

This kind of audit trail is invaluable, because you can not only track what you're doing, but report on it later. Whether or not you're using Radian6, you'll want to devise a system for tracking and capturing the interaction your team members have online.

You've also got to have a solid system in place for tracking your customer and client relationships. Don't skimp here; if you're small, find a system that you can grow into. We use and like Salesforce, but there are literally dozens on the market, all the way up to enterprise-level (and incredibly

complex) software like SAP. It's pretty straightforward, but you MUST be able to keep track of the path of communication with, among, and between your customers and prospects, and have it available for everyone to see.

Blogs: Internal company blogs can be a compelling way to disseminate content and information around the enterprise, but they also take a dedicated effort by the team (read: time and access to information). But they can be a streamlined way to share information, stories, ideas and challenges, again without cluttering the email system. Since they're readable on the reader's schedule and allow for comments, blogs also serve as a great archive of information and resources across the company.

Dell and Best Buy have done amazing things with their internal blogs, everything from innovating new product and service ideas to simply sharing news and successes. Platforms like WordPress are easy to install and integrate into secure areas of your company website or intranet.

Social Networks: These are going to be overkill for some companies because they take significant human, capital, and technical resources to make them work well. But companies like IBM, Deloitte, Microsoft and Best Buy have been leveraging the power of social networking internally for sharing everything from employee-generated ideas to communication among disparate offices and collaborating on product and service innovations.

There are enterprise providers like Awareness Inc. and Jive's ClearSpace that offer compelling and robust white-label social network platforms, but even something like a private network on the Ning platform can be a great starting point for companies looking to take the next step toward internal and multi-channel social communication.

The Old Fashioned Way: Please, please don't underestimate the importance of our "old school" tools like the phone and email, or even the (gasp) in-person meeting. I'm not a big fan of meetings for the sake of them, but with a purpose and a clear agenda, there's no substitute for taking time out of your day to get together and communicate with voice. You can only digest so much in text before you tune out.

But don't just use your meeting to report in to each other, use it to tackle a particular question or challenge and aim to come away from the meeting another step closer to the solution. Distance in the way? No worries. That's why they invented GoToMeeting and Skype.

Social Media Teams In Action: Humana

We're all clamoring for real live examples of what's working and what's not. Greg Matthews from Humana was kind and generous enough to share what's he and his team have been up to over there.

Greg is the Director of Consumer Innovations where he's focused on using social media to create different kinds of interactions with consumers, and he blogs at CrumpleItUp.com. What better cap off to the Social Media Team e-book than to hear - straight from the organization - what's working for them? Here it is, in Greg's own words.

Humana made the decision to step - lightly - into social media last year. But the interesting thing is that it wasn't really one decision, but many . . . perhaps dozens of decisions, happening all at about the same time. And when you think about it, it's really not all that surprising that in a company of 29,000 people operating a complex business, the benefits of using social media became obvious to lots of us. Or, at least, too enticing not to try.

For those of you who don't know our company, we're one of the bigger health benefits companies out there. Here's a pop quiz: How many of you love your health insurance brand? Nobody? OK, how many of you find your health insurer easy to work with? Ahh, yes. A few more, but still not many. How many of you find the health system easy to navigate? Crickets again.

Can you imagine why we might want to make a deeper connection with consumers? Why we might want to collaborate better with doctors and hospitals to make sure that our members get the best care for a reasonable price? To connect healthy people with programs that will keep them healthy? Then you can imagine why social media started to appear on everyone's "solution radar" in 2008.

How it started

For me, it started with a realization that I couldn't keep telling people that social media was a solution unless I started actually living it out. So, I started doing the usual stuff - blogging, setting up a facebook page and even a twitter account. You can read more about it here and here .

But things really took a turn when our team got some good press from the social media campaign for freewheelin. That led to a presentation to Humana's executive committee, and a directive to create some kind of company-wide platform that we could use to help bring together Humana's social media activities into a common place. After having done some pretty low risk exploration, we figured that the first thing to do would be to lay out a set of principles to live by - and the Town Square was born.

The Town Square is a concept that says every department in the company can get a "lot" on the town square, and build whatever kind of building suits their business needs best. It's the place for Humana to understand, explore and use social media to take its business forward. It's not about tools or technology; it's about a new model for interaction and collaboration. It's for our customers, yes, but not JUST our customers. It also applies to the way we work with doctors, hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, employers, the government and - yes - each other.

The Town Square model

We figured that if we were going to be working in social media, we needed to apply social media principles to the way we worked. And that means that we weren't going to be a governance committee. Or an approval board (oxymoron alert!).

There's only one rule in the town square . . . but it goes with six fundamental principles. The rule is: We Share. We share our ideas and plans. We share what's worked and what hasn't. We share vendor recommendations. We share reference materials and resources. The fundamentals are important too, although pretty obvious:

- Authenticity - We're honest, accurate and thorough. We're not marketing; we're having a conversation. We don't keep secrets or spin the truth. We're people, too.
- Active Listening - We're taking the time to stop talking and just listen. We want to hear what you have to say - even if it's negative. When we enter a new space, we'll listen first before we start talking. We'll listen for how we can make your life better or easier. We are changing the way we work based on your needs.
- Going Where They Are - People go to the places and do the things they know, trust and enjoy. You don't have to come to us; we'll come to you. If it's necessary for you to come to us, we'll build you a bridge.
- Personal Voice - We will interact with you as people, not as a corporation. I am accountable to you as a person, not as a corporation. We will use language that you can understand - not just what's convenient for us.

- Learning through Action - Nobody has found the "magic bullet" in enterprise social media. We will try new things. We realize that we will make mistakes and do things incorrectly, but we will learn as we go. We'll be honest about what we've learned, and celebrate our smart failures. We'll get better every time we try.
- Sharing/Open Source - We are adopting a culture of sharing, both inside and outside of Humana. If we can't share our successes and failures, we limit our ability to learn. We don't have to control, but we do have to communicate. We will create a culture that emphasizes and values collaboration and sharing.

So now that we had a framework, we needed someone to start building around the square. I mentioned before that there were a whole lot of people who'd begun to work in the space. Our Perfect Service Innovation team was the first part of the company to work with an internal wiki for knowledge sharing. Our Web/New Media team has launched a series of videos (over a million views on YouTube - pretty amazing!) And another part of our marketing organization had launched a real social network for pre-retirees.

Continuing the Town Square metaphor, we needed to find a way to bring together the right people from around our business to carry the learning forward - we call it the "Chamber of Commerce." A group of 17 people - none above the Director level - from 14 different departments of the company. They are all either currently engaged in some form of social media or preparing to be.

How we run it

We run it as a radical social media democracy. It's an un-committee. We don't have a charter, and we don't have rules. We don't have a P&L and we don't have a budget. We don't have a leader and we don't have any formal reporting structure. We even live-tweet our meetings (watch for hashtag #hcoc for Humana's Chamber of Commerce).

We're what a management guru might call a self-managed team. The Chamber of Commerce itself doesn't actually do any work or have deliverables … but it does set up workgroups that people in the team can voluntarily join - and since they're all leaders in their organizations, they can also commission others to help. The Chamber of Commerce meets every 3-4 weeks, and our agenda usually looks like this:

- Updates from last meeting
- 1 member presents an update of their social media work: what is it, how and why did they do it, what have they learned?
- We incorporate a "voice from outside" to provide expertise
- One or more work-groups present updates

How does it work? It's amazing. It's the only team I've been on that has nearly 100% attendance at every meeting - even, as it turns out, when they're called at the last minute. And you don't have to look hard to figure out why. It adds value to people's jobs. It fuels their passion. And it's one of the rare groups that actually lives up to the saying "you get out as much as you put in."

What it means for Humana

We've recognized up-front that this new way of doing business will stretch and redefine the capabilities of every department in our company. As a group #hcoc will advise:

- HR on Creating a culture of collaboration, and on hiring, training and rewarding people for collaborating and sharing
- Marketing on having a conversation and building a brand based on collaboration
- IT on issues of security, access development and toolsets
- Legal on IP, compliance, liability and indemnity

I have to admit at this point that this is a new team - we've only been meeting since January. We have really tough issues to tackle, and we all have "day jobs" that keep us busy. And frankly, the biggest threat to the Chamber of Commerce is biting off more than we can chew. But the value we can bring to our company is this: There are very few large companies that have really made social media a differentiator for their business. And I can't really think of any in health or health care.

We know that health, and the health system, have to change. Humana intends to continue leading that change through innovation and our focus on consumers. There's a lot of work to do . . . but luckily we work in a company with 29,000 other people who can help. And that's what the Chamber of Commerce will be tapping into.

Are you ready?

As with anything, building your social media team isn't going to fit the mold of other companies. It's going to be unique to your business, and colored by your goals and objectives, resources, culture, and whatever else comes along. That's okay. Again, this is meant to serve as some thought starters so you can build out your own approach. I'm equipping you with ideas. The execution? That's up to you.

Social media isn't going to stay some odd, separate thing that people are trying to figure out. It's going to wind its way through the ecosystem of companies, slowly but surely, and become part of the fabric of what we do and how we do it. Like the internet as a whole. Like email. Like the phone. It'll just be part of business.

And while you don't necessarily have an email or a phone "team", right now, you just might need a social media team to help ease your company's transition into it. It's a stepping stone, and a way to get everyone communicating regularly and openly about what you're doing. Lousy communication and a scattershot approach has been the death knell for more than one social media program.

So now. Go forth, and collaborate. Build that team. Let us know how you do.

Amber Naslund is a social media and marketing pro, and the Director of Community for Radian6, where she's responsible for client engagement, community building, and helping companies tap the potential of online reputation management, customer engagement, and social media monitoring. She's spent the last decade or so raising funds, building brands for companies of all sizes, and messing with all things online.

Amber blogs at altitudebranding.com, focusing on elevating brands through social media and communication, and keeps her personal blog at Inaccurate Reality.

This content is Amber's alone, so that means that it doesn't represent the thoughts, views, opinions or practices of her employer, friends, family, minions, pets, children, or that annoying neighbor that does the leaf blower thing at 6 a.m. on Sundays. If you'd like to reach Amber, drop an email.

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