

Improving Your Firm's Social Media Culture

By Christine Nelson

Video platforms are gaining traction, with YouTube and Facebook in the lead. Yet only 44% of surveyed marketers agreed that they could actually measure ROI from their organic social activities (e.g., posting, commenting, following). And most marketers (95%) still want more tips for engaging audiences.

We often hear that marketers in professional services lack the time and strategy to manage social media activities. It becomes a monthly chore to create a social calendar, find content, and get it scheduled—hoping that some combination of posts will generate interest.

Despite these uncertainties and challenges, one thing is certain—social media in some shape or form is here to stay. Here are some ways that A/E/C firms and marketers can get better at cultivating their social media culture.

What Can Social Do for Firm Engagement?

Social media is a key tool for developing contacts and for sustaining new and existing client relationships. These platforms have more potential for success when individuals at your firm regularly engage and communicate on them. Personalization on social platforms through individual profiles has always expanded firm visibility.

Social Can:

- Increase strategic communication with leads
- Move new leads into a warm-to-hot engagement
- Expand firm communications and visibility exponentially
- Validate that your firm is well-versed in digital media and a strong competitor

Social Can't:

- Bring new connections if individuals don't interact within the platforms
- Guess the firm's strategic goals
- Maintain search engine visibility and provide results without regular activity

Once the right connections and followers are built up, it's much easier for marketers and leaders to point audiences toward resources, events, applications, and offline conversations. That's when social media supports actual outcomes.

Creating a Firmwide Strategy

- 1. Stop making excuses.** If your leaders don't regularly engage or don't want to, invite your next level of managers and directors to be social ambassadors for a

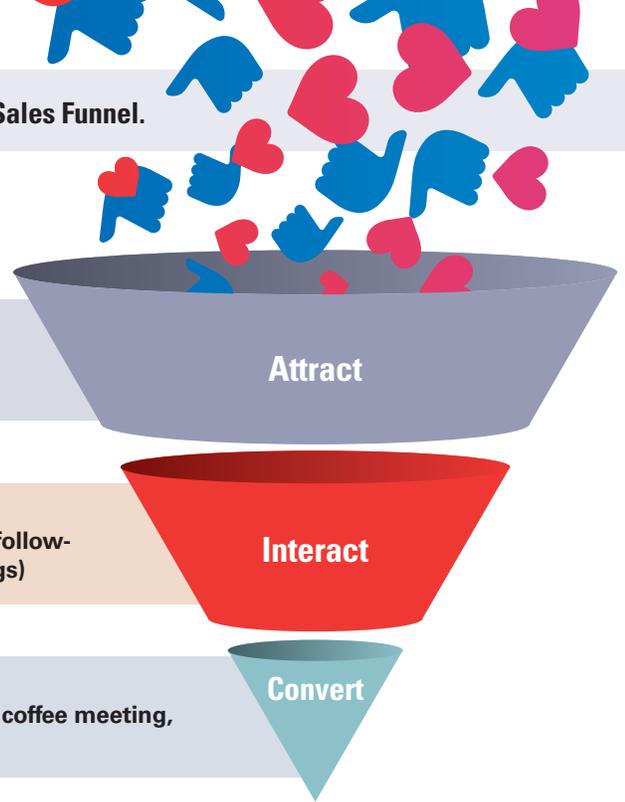
When popular search engines review and rank your firm's website content, the content in your social channels is also included. So, too, are mentions about your firm in the news media. Smarter bot algorithms and organic human searches are converging to quickly assess the relevance of all that content in microseconds. Are you worthy of showing up in search results?

One of the best indicators that your social content is worth displaying is whether you're increasing your followers and getting them to interact with your content. This is, of course, the goal of every marketer.

In 2019, the top social platforms used by B2B marketers included Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram in that order, according to *Social Media Examiner*.

Figure 1. Social Media Sales Funnel.

Courtesy of Ingenuity Marketing Group, LLC, St. Paul, MN ©2020.



ATTRACT
Visibility (posts, articles, messages, connections)

INTERACT
Engagement, followers (follow-ups, likes, comments, tags)

CONVERT
Get them to act (inquiry, coffee meeting, phone call)

niche industry or service. Marketers can also build social impact by posting and engaging with connections. Share what you're working on. Celebrate milestones. Show interest in others.

- 2. Build your individual and firm strategy.** Develop a small group of social ambassadors. Meet monthly or bimonthly and discuss a theme for each quarter that aligns with the firm's marketing goals. Help individuals set personal goals of adding connections, commenting on those connections, and posting a few times a month (or per week). Provide some sample posts aligned with your firm's social policy. Talk about how to move key social conversations off-line.
- 3. Use hashtags and tags properly.** Follow hashtags (#) of interest in your key client industries, many of which are suggested on social platforms for you to follow. Use suggested hashtags that relate to your services in your posts. The hashtags help your services show up in lists that your leads, candidates, and trade media follow. Tag (@) your individual connections when celebrating their accomplishments or when you want them to see a post you have created. Using hashtags and tags can increase engagement with your content immediately.
- 4. Improve two-way engagement.** Offer goodwill by following the pages of your connections, liking their content, and adding to the social conversation by sharing your experience. Your target connections will also stay more visible in your feed if you interact with them. Otherwise, they might disappear. Follow clients, prospective clients, allied referrals, trade connections, and colleagues too.
- 5. Schedule posts, but also go live.** Many marketers know how to stay current with content on their company social pages by creating and scheduling posts about upcoming events, sharing links to their blog posts and newsletters, or sharing articles of interest. But it's also important for individuals to log on to social platforms a few times a week and check in on connections, keep track of social messages, and add posts about their personal experiences or insights. Spontaneous posting will increase opportunities for off-line conversations and networking. (See Figure 1.)

6. Enhance images and add keywords.

Add descriptions to the images and videos you use on social media, as well as keywords within the content you post. Add descriptions (alt tags) to your images and videos to enhance the searchability of your posts. If the social media platform ranks your firm for specific key phrases and descriptions, then the major internet search engines will monitor and rank it too. People who search for your content organically will be more likely to find you, and your firm will begin to increase its search results for new candidates and business.

Bonus tip: Use questions in content. As professionals become more mobile and work remotely, mobile search and voice-assisted search will increase. Start adding questions into your social posts and article content (as well as your website). Write the questions as if you were using a voice assistant, whether it's for directions to your firm or broader questions like, "What's sustainable engineering?" Think of social as any other search engine and answer these questions in your posts.

Whether you're posting on social, creating a video, or writing a blog post, winning at digital search and engagement requires keeping your audience in mind at all times. How do they search? Why do they like something? Which social media do they check at 2 p.m. when they need a work break? You can only improve your firm's social media culture by bringing that human element into the digital world. At the end of the day, real people buy your services and work for you. ■



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