Connecting with social media

Let’s talk series
An increasing number of companies of every size and in every industry are eager to tap into the power and benefits of social media.
The power and influence of social media is being felt just about everywhere these days—from the political and social spheres to the business and personal ones. For private companies, the opportunities social media offers are as far-ranging as the options to connect. It can play a leading role in helping drive business by engaging employees, consumers, suppliers, partners and even investors and turning them into champions of your company’s brand or extensions of your customer service departments. Even better, the cost of entry is low. More often than not, it’s just a matter of the time and effort you’re willing to put into it.

Not surprisingly, an increasing number of companies of every size and in every industry are eager to tap into the power and benefits of social media, but the reality is many don’t even have an entry strategy.

“Social media is about establishing a relationship online and telling your story,” says Debbie Dimoff, vice president, consulting, PwC. “It is an experiential medium. Explore what people are saying about you as your employees, customers and competitors are already likely active on social media.”

If you’re a private company that’s ready to embrace social media, here’s how to get started:

- **Explore.** Familiarize yourself with the various forms of social media out there. Try it out. Find out how it works.

- **Start listening.** Use simple—and free—search functions on Twitter and Google, for example, and see what people are saying right now about your industry, your own company and products.

- **Develop a plan.** This starts with identifying what business goals you want social media to support. For example, do you want to use social media as a tool to enhance your customer service? Do you want to use it to engage your customers in product design? Be specific.

- **Choose the optimal social media platform to achieve your goals.** “If you are in the B2B space, for example, blogs, LinkedIn and Twitter will likely be your first choice,” says Dimoff. “If you are reaching out to consumers, platforms such as Facebook and YouTube will work as well. There are currently some 750 million users on Facebook and YouTube now receives more than 3 billion views per day. But don’t just consider the most well-known platforms. There is a tremendous variety of social media out there, including niche communities that might be designed specifically to attract people with your customers’s interests. Find out what platforms and forums your customers are using and go there.”

- **Create your presence and establish your voice.** “The key is to think about your audience and what you can offer them,” says Dimoff. “If you are writing a blog in the B2B space, consider offering thought leadership pieces, insights and news. If you are in the consumer...
space, you will only be able to engage people if there is something in it for them. Start conversations about hot topics, offer coupons, special deals or the opportunity to participate in product creation.”

• **Manage the conversation.** “This is not something you should outsource because your customer relationships hang in the balance,” says Dimoff. “Have a senior level employee manage communications so they can ensure the brand, values and overall strategy are represented correctly in your social media interactions.”

• **Coordinate channels.** Whatever social media platform you choose to use, ensure there is a link back to your website and vice versa. The goal is to drive traffic to your business and seamlessly coordinate your communications channels.

• **Think mobile.** “Six months from now mobile and social media will no longer be separate entities,” says Dimoff. “Businesses are well advised to keep that in mind and enable customers to move back and forth between mediums, integrating all their channels and making them accessible by mobile device.”

**Stay connected.** Social media is all about connecting, often in real time. In order to succeed and keep your audience engaged and with you, you have to be active and involved, regularly offering fresh content and interesting interaction.

Entering the social media space as a private company is about a step-by-step evolution. It is not necessary—or recommended—to launch a massive campaign in which you simultaneously attempt to engage your company in every possible platform. Rather, it is about building relationships gradually and authentically—much as a small business would do through its personal interaction with customers. Test out the waters with one platform, build it, and then add another social media layer, always remembering to connect them all.

Done right, the benefits are far-reaching.

• Social media channels can enhance and protect personal and corporate brand reputation.

• Social media can expand your reach to new customers at a lower cost than traditional advertising mediums.

• Social media can be used to minimize the impact of public relations and customer service issues.

• Social media has the potential to set your business apart from your competitors.

• Social media is a great way to showcase your philanthropic initiatives and corporate culture. It can also help you attract and retain top talent.

“Social media is constantly evolving and it is still in its early stages, which means it’s a learning process for everyone in many ways,” says Dimoff. “Get involved now, choose a business issue to solve, experiment and test out innovative ways to make it work for you.”
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Our PwC Technology Consulting team

At PwC Canada, our dedicated team of Technology Consulting professionals has experience in helping a wide-range of companies develop, implement and manage their social media strategies. Combining deep technical knowledge with expertise in business transformation, stakeholder engagement, and business strategy, we find the right solutions for your business needs.

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