

Consumer-Centric Strategic Social Media Plan for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

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ABSTRACT

Social media is changing consumer behavior and workplace expectations. The important role of social media is to quickly discover trends, extract structured insights to the marketplace and quantify perceptions of an organization's products and services. Information about an organization's products and services are easily accessed via social networks, blogs, tweets, videos, pictures, and numerous other online tools. When customers perceive that the information is positive, the organization can benefit with new and repeat sales. If, however, the information is negative, and the organization does not respond, the organization can suffer. In this paper, the authors define social media; discuss why it's important to develop a social media plan that is embedded in the strategic fiber of the organization; as well as present how organizations are able to develop a customer-centric strategic social media plan and the impact of this plan on small and medium enterprises.

Key terms: strategic social media plan, small and medium sized enterprises

1. INTRODUCTION

Important questions on the minds on many entrepreneurs and other managers are what is social media, why is it important, and how can it be used by Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)? It should be no secret to organizations that social media is changing consumer behavior and workplace expectations. "Social media is defined as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media sites include but are not limited to blogs, microblogs, web forums, social networks, tweets and wikis. Popular social media sites and networks include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, Google, and various other constantly evolving social media sites. Sixty-five percent of online adults use social networks, according to a May 2011 Pew Internet survey, thus the impact of social media is tremendous on many levels.

Many senior managers have viewed social media as clutter or fads, or just another method of marketing the organization's products and services (Kryder, 2011). However, that is just not true. Tim Calkins, professor at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management offers "Social media are becoming so incredibly important to a company's success that a CEO who thinks that they're a fad, risks falling so far behind the competition that he or she could put the company at risk." Soumitra Dutta (2010), a professor in Business and Technology at INSEAD, explains that today's leaders must embrace social media for three reasons "First, they provide a low-cost platform on which to build your personal brand, communicating who you are both within and outside your company. Second, they allow you to engage rapidly and simultaneously with peers, employees, customers, and the broader public, especially younger generations, in the same transparent and direct way they expect from everyone in their lives. Third, they give you an opportunity to learn from instant information and unvarnished feedback."

Social media, or as Kryder (2011) labels it - social networks, are “engagements that occur with the listening and sharing of ideas, videos, and links on social networking sites.” The tools of social media are used to handle mass communications and conversations between the organization and its consumers. When an organization develops its social media strategy, it should recognize the value of these interactions and the potential to connect with current and future customers. Consumer online interactions should never be underestimated, but the real value of social media networks is still being discovered and unlocking the potential of social media networks can be challenging (Zeisser, 2010). He stresses the value of focusing on creating and maintaining high quality interactions between the organization and consumers as critical components to any social media plan, while avoiding “traditional marketing gimmicks.” In general, organizations should strive to provide utility to consumers as well as be the preferred source for trustworthy information. This can be achieved through development of a customer-centric strategic social media plan, which represents a fundamental shift in the way organizations, customers, and others interact with each other.

1.1 Why It’s Important to Develop a Strategic Social Media Plan

Social media has become an ingrained part of the networked environment of instant information in which every organization functions. “Social media and crowdsourcing have introduced a new era of collective brilliance. The latest technologies break down traditional silos and allow for open innovation with large numbers of employees, as well as with suppliers, alliance partners, or even customers” (Gyorffy, 2010) Social media with its many benefits and challenges cannot be ignored. Social media networks such as Google, valued in excess of \$111 billion, and Facebook, with a value of over \$70 billion, have dramatically altered the playing field for every organization regardless of size, putting SMEs on the same playing stage in many ways as large multinational organizations. The de facto process for consumer shopping begins with social media (Google, Facebook, Flickr, etc.) and often ends, either positively or negatively, without ever leaving their computer or other internet connected device. Surprisingly, their final purchase decisions are not based solely on price, but rather often on referrals or comments posted online concerning organizational reputation, product usability, customer satisfaction, etc. Likewise, they also do not hesitate to provide immediate feedback on their experiences to friends and other connected consumers, and thus the cycle continues. .

Organizations wishing to successfully compete in today’s economy must of course employee a website to communicate with various stakeholders, but must increasingly exploit social media and utilize a substantial “customer-centric” social media plan. “Employing a ‘website only’ online presence has become antiquated as quickly as having a website became a necessity” (Madhavea, 2010). Quickly discovering various trends, extracting structured market actions, and quantifying customer perceptions of products and services are just a few roles of social media. “The social web provides an unprecedented opportunity to transform the way that we understand our consumers and go to market,” said Stan Sthanunathan (2011), vice president, Marketing Strategy and Insights, The Coca-Cola Company. “The companies that can listen carefully to what the market is saying, understand these perceptions clearly, and act confidently are the ones that will gain competitive advantage.” Many social media options are available to create a consumer centric social media plan (SMP) rooted in the strategic organizational processes. Table 1 lists key currently popular sites in the major areas of social media, although we must realize that these tools will continually change. Broad-based utilization and interaction of networks is by far preferable to a single network approach.

Social Networks	
Photos	
 Blogging	
SEOs	
Other	

Many organizations address social media as the next in a continuing stream of technology issues. Hertough (2011) feels that investments in technology alone will not guarantee organizational success in social media. Likewise, a successful social media strategy is not merely setting up Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and other social media networks (Nigam, 2011). A key to success in social media requires interaction between the organization and consumers on a one-to-one basis. This will require the empowerment of employees to interact with customers and make decisions with limited standardized control. Hertough explains that creating and accepting the flexibility for auto-governance of collaboration across departments and employees, may prove to be a challenge.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) must develop an understanding of their markets and customers through the social media. There are millions of social media posts on different sites on local, national and international mediums. It is imperative for SMEs to create, continually update, and monitor a SMP for their organizations. Social media provides both opportunities and challenges for organizations. Zach Hofer-Shall (2011) an analyst for Forrester Research in a report titled "The Road Map To Integrating Social and Customer Data" explains many organizations merely monitor and collect social data. In his opinion, too few organizations actually develop a business strategy to take advantage of wealth of information available in social media. Thus, it is critical to organizational success to use this information as an integral part of their SMP.

It is important for SMEs to monitor the ever growing number of social networking sites and tools. For instance, social media aggregators allow organizations a single online identity and entry point, simplifying and facilitating the posting of coordinated information on multiple social networking sites. Three of the key social media aggregators are Netvibes.com, Flavors, and SociaNetGate, although many exist. These sites allow organizations to manage their content and networks under one umbrella service through creation of a strong social media presence by posting to numerous social network sites, as well as monitoring the effectiveness of their social media efforts.

The entire organizational culture, as well as individual employees, will have to embrace this new way of doing business. Social media within the organization will require collaboration and knowledge sharing across departments. If the knowledge sharing and collaboration encounters problems, the social media plan will undoubtedly have issues. Long-term employees may not adapt well and it may be difficult to hire or train new employees with substantial organizational knowledge, as well as for the demands of social media. A critical mass of organizational participation is a key to success, although performance measurements of these employees may prove challenging.

1.2 Why are Customer-Centric Strategic Social Media Plans Important?

It has been recognized that prospective consumers are doing their research online prior to making their purchase decisions, with the final decisions often based solely on comments or recommendations from various unique social cliques. Information about an organization's products and services are easily accessed via social networks, blogs, tweets, videos, pictures, and numerous other online tools. When potential or existing customers have a question concerning trust and the reputation of an organization, they turn to web-based social networks (Golbeck and Hendler, 2004). When the information they receive is positive, the organization can benefit with new and repeat sales. If, however, the information is negative, and the organization does not respond, the organization can suffer (Mundinger & Le Boudec, 2005). Furthermore, other stakeholder groups also rely on the social media networks for non-purchase information gathering. Only through the development and use of a strategic social media plan can organizations gather, interpret, and respond to these all-important contacts and data about customers, as well as other stakeholder perceptions and opinions of their organizations (Keller, 2011). Customers, potential customers, and others are talking about an organization's products, services, and organization on a 24/7/365 basis. Careful monitoring of these conversations offers the possibility of obtaining unique trends or opportunities for the organization.

An organization's social media plan, in its simplest form can be considered a customer service operation and thus a cost center. The development of metrics for the evaluation of a social media plan is different from those used in traditional customer service. Jumping into social media without the commitment of both leadership and a sufficient level of resources will insure its failure. Charlene Li (2010), author of *Open Leadership* explains "The fundamental rules that have governed how relationships work are being rewritten because of the easy availability of use of no-cost information sharing. You can learn what's going on in the minds of employees,

customers, and partners who all share information about what’s happening in the marketplace. In business, it’s all about relationships, and social media, properly used, enable a company to have the best and deepest relationships.” Early adopters of a customer-centric social media plans are expected to reap tremendous benefits.

Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain a unique insight of the consumer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowered employees have a wide range of authority required for one-on-one communications – is the organization willing to risk this employee empowerment?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to monitor & understand perceptions of the organization’s products and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential to develop a platform for rumors and misinformation that could become viral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Platform to share knowledge & exchange ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May disrupt the normal reward systems within the organization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create & enhance collaboration with consumers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees may inadvertently disclose embarrassing or damaging information about the organization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Source for product/service innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited number of resources available to evaluate consumer responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote transparency & develop trust with consumers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediacy requirements can overwhelm employees and distract from other responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to develop and identify key influencers, successful discussion generators, & reliable web voices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Response may require a multi-disciplinary approach – how does the organization determine the appropriate person/department to respond?

A successful customer-centric social media plan offers organizations the ability to engage internally and externally with employees and consumers. These interactions can be used to build, leverage, and strengthen organizational trust and collaboration. Companies are then able to move from a role as a corporate organization to a one-to-one relationship with their stakeholders. The collaboration has the potential to become a real-time learning experience for the identification of trends, new innovations, and feedback on potential and existing products and services. Through customer-centric social media plans, organizations are able to fast-track innovation. For example, if a consumer has a problem with an organization’s product or service, they can almost in real-time be connected directly with the department or employee able to assist in resolving their issues. From the organization’s perspective they are given insight into the issues of concern to their current and potential customers. In the long-term by directly involving employees with consumers, employee retention and engagement is improved.

1.3 Small & Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and Social Media Plans (SMPs)

A well-developed social media strategy allows SMEs to grow their businesses without the massive financial resources of larger companies. A sound SMP has the potential to allow these SMEs to compete not only on a local, but on a global stage as well. Most SMEs have only recently embraced social media as an outlet for their marketing efforts. Thus, most have no strategy or plan to measure their return on effort (ROE) of their social media efforts. SMEs often realize they should have a social media, but have not thought about how they will integrate this new medium into their already existing strategic and general marketing plans. In order for their efforts to be effective, there must be a strategy behind the implementation and effort. For instance, 304 business leaders were surveyed and it was found that 47% of them do not use social media (Barone, 2011). Twenty-four percent of those that do not have a social media presence cited lack of time as to the reason why they are not using social media, and 14% stated they didn’t know enough about it. SMEs must learn to use social media in order to be competitive in today’s global market. Barone states she makes time for her social media efforts every day. It is built into her schedule. In other words, she plans for it.

Of the SMEs that have a social media presence, most do not have a plan for using social media. They fall into the “build it and they will come” trap thinking that if they have an online presence, customers will find them. Not so. SMEs must be able to stand out in the myriad of other companies vying for the same customer. Lack of planning and strategy may be due to the perception that social media is difficult and cumbersome to use. Very small

enterprises or solopreneurs find it difficult to manage their time and efforts in all that they are doing currently, let alone implement a new strategy into the already cumbersome mix. Nevertheless, they realize they must have a social media presence in order to be competitive. Unfortunately, most go about it haphazardly with no clear goals and objectives in place to help balance the increased commitment. SMEs often will set up a Facebook page with no understanding of what they are trying to accomplish. The SMP must clearly define the SME's objectives for their social media efforts. Are they setting up a page to get customer feedback, establish themselves as experts, encourage conversation, or promote their products? Likewise, many SMEs set up their social networks and then never make the effort to interact with their customers. They also often do not differentiate their personal pages from that of their company, blurring the lines between their private lives and brand. By not being cognizant of what they post on their personal pages, they can tarnish their company image tremendously in a matter of minutes, if not seconds. SMEs often fail to realize they are their brand. Having a SMP in place can aid tremendously in communicating a company's vision and mission and keep the message consistent across all parts of the organization.

2. DEVELOPING A CONSUMER-CENTRIC STRATEGIC SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN (SMP)

While many forward thinking SMEs have begun the development of their comprehensive social media strategies, others struggle to understand its impact on their individual companies. Advertising Age magazine stated that "marketing world leaders have declared that it's time to give up control and accept that consumers now control their brands" (Creamer, 2007). Organizations must understand that, in many ways, power has moved from the organization to the consumer. Debra Miller writes a blog for *compete.com*, a media organization that helps organizations improve their marketing based on the online behavior of millions of consumers. Miller explains "Three out of five shoppers always or often use search engines when shopping online. More consumers use search engines than they do coupon sites, retailer emails, consumer reviews, or shopping comparison sites." Before the consumer ever considers purchasing your product or service they have used a variety of social media tools to see what others say about you. This is how social media has empowered the consumer.

Michael Stelzner (2011) is the author of *Launch* and an expert in social media. In his book he continually reinforces the concept that social media plans (SMPs) are not merely a marketing platform. He explains "People want valuable insight, access to great people, and recognition before they need products and services. If you can keep your eyes fixed on people and their desires, half your mission will be achieved before you begin." David Silver in his book, *The Social Network Business Plan* (2009) states, "People feel the need to form review, rate, and recommend communities in order to find the truth about products and services, their prices, and efficacy, the vendor's after-sale support, the best model and the worst one, and the experience that others have had with them." Due to the personal nature of the communications between individuals, it is believed that product information shared in this way has an added layer of credibility.

For instance, research points to individuals being more inclined to believe word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) or viral marketing than more formal forms of promotion methods (Grewal, Cline, & Davies, 2003). This type of promotion can be used to build brand awareness at a nominal cost. Social networks which utilize WOMM by communicating customer ratings and/or recommendations of products and services will greatly reduce the need for finding the customer according to Silver. Social media tools (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) can accelerate and stabilize a brand faster than ever before. To demonstrate the power of WOMM, Forrester Research found that "Seventy-one percent of online shoppers read reviews, making it the most widely read consumer generated content" (Bizaarvoice.com, 2011). In January of 2008, Bizrate.com found that almost two-thirds of their users considered customer reviews more valuable than those of experts, which is similar to the findings of a Global Nielsen survey of 26,486 internet users in 47 markets which found that 78 percent of the study respondents felt that consumers' recommendations are the most credible form of advertising.

Social media collaboration, a key component of the SMP, includes communication with both internal and external stakeholders. A customer-centric SMP understands the value of collaboration with all stakeholders (customers, employees, etc.). The focus cannot be solely on the financial benefit of these collaborations. The value of these relationships involves trust, reputation, high-quality feedback from consumers and workers and many additional benefits. In the development of a SMP, organizations should create credible content that reflects industry leading knowledge and understanding. It provides the beacon to attract, connect, and retain consumers in both the short and long-term. Consumers will begin their search for information online. It should be the goal of

the SMP to be the provider of exactly the information these consumers seek. A successful social media strategic plan is consumer-centric and meshed with the overall organizational strategic fiber of vision/mission and strategic/tactical and operational goals; embraces 'social consumers'; and facilitates differentiation from competitors.

2.1 Vision/Mission

The Vision for the SMP should be to provide a consumer-centric relationship between the organization and consumers. It will provide unprecedented access to employees at all levels of the organization. This collaboration will offer the availability of informative, educational information on a one-on-one basis responding to the needs of consumers, not just a marketing platform for the organization's products and services. Organizations will provide them information and assistance with products and services "without any expectation of anything in return!" The organization's vision should be to meet the core needs of its consumers by helping them solve their problems at no cost whatsoever to them. For consumers, trust in a company is more important than delivering great products and services (Beinhocker, Davis & Mendonca, 2010). This vision must be supported by top management and clearly articulated to everyone inside and outside the organization.

2.2 Goals/Objectives of the SMP

There are two strategic goals for SME's SMP: First, an SMP offers organizations the opportunity to efficiently and effectively understand customers' perceptions of their products, services, and overall organization. Secondly, prepared with this unique and timely information, organizations are able to respond to both positive and negative perceptions and uncover trends in consumer preferences for their products and services, as well as those of their competitors. So what does this mean for SMEs on the practical side?

Embrace the Power Shift. A major impact of social media for customer relations communication is the movement from a push model controlled by the organization to the pull model controlled by the consumer. The SMP must include this customer power shift in their overall strategy (Tsai, 2009). Savvy consumers now have the ability to block correspondence they consider "marketing overload." Forwarded emails, links to your website, postings on Facebook, Tweets, or negative comments on Yelp are the new "word of mouth" techniques for consumers.

Be the Site of Choice. Consumers begin their search for information online, and an SME should strive to provide exactly what they are looking for. Once consumers come to the organization's site, do not give them any reason to ever go elsewhere for information on products or services sold by the organization - the aspiration is to be the "go-to" site. The goal of the SMP is to be consumer-centric with a focus of "How can we help you?"

Delineate Between the SMP and Marketing. SMP should not be used as a marketing platform for the organization. Consumers are not naïve and will recognize a market pitch and may abandon the organization's site. If done properly the benefits from the SMP will include market knowledge that can be used for innovation, consumer understanding, and a reputation as a leading expert in the industry. The metrics developed will not be ROI focused, but rather will reflect the overall impact of the SMP. By continually providing assistance to consumers with their small problems they will turn to the organization in the future for their big problems and ultimately their products and services.

Create an Organizational Social Media Culture. The culture change within the organization will require full support of top management. The organizational culture is a combination of components. It is about the shared passion for the products and services offered by the organization and how the organization treats its stakeholders. The organizational stakeholders would include employees, vendors, customers, and anyone else that comes into contact with the organization on a recurring basis. Organizations are not judged merely by their products or services, but rather by reputation of how they treat these stakeholders. Change in organizational culture will be difficult. The organization must make a clear, unambiguous commitment from top management in support of the SMP. The development of SMP cultural norms will provide the guiding light for the successful plan. The organizational commitment should be to develop an instrument that defines and articulates the expected SMP culture with complete clarity.

Employees. It is important for people to have a broad framework with considerable flexibility, autonomy, and power to address the needs of consumers. It will be their responsibility to create exceptional social media content for the entire SME that functions seamlessly, providing consumers with a simple, one stop experience. Employees must be allowed to do their social media jobs with a broad range of authority. There will be some

stumbles as should be expected with any new program. Management must be willing to review and adjust the SMP, understanding that it will involve a learning curve for everyone. Employees will have to be continually supported and reinforced that their contribution is a valuable component of the SMP. Reward systems supporting the organization culture and collaboration among employees should be designed and implemented. These rewards don't have to be monetary. The employees with a customer-centric focus can and do appreciate recognition for their work in other than monetary forms.

A good SMP changes the focus from the organization to the customer. Consumers should expect a one-on-one relationship with employees of the organization. The relationship will become personal, not merely one between the consumer and a business. Although some difficulties are to be expected, it is extremely important to let the SMP affiliated employees know how much they are appreciated and supported. Many parts of the SMP will be developed "on the fly" as the organization learns the wants and needs of their customers. Likewise, there is seemingly no endpoint to an SMP, but a journey that continues indefinitely. Large organizations may hire an entire SMP department, but for most SMEs the responsibilities for the SMP will be distributed throughout the organization. Especially at start-up, the SMP functions best when everyone in the organization is involved. We now turn our attention to a social media coordinator who will ultimately take overall responsibility for the coordination and implementation of the SMP. It will be management's role to express their commitment to this person and to the overall SMP effort.

2.3 Tactical/Implementation

For an SME, all of this work does not get completed magically. Although initially many in the organization may be involved in social media interactions, for efficiency and effectiveness an individual should be designated as the Social Media Coordinator (SMC) in charge of the organization's SMP. Initially in the typical SME this will be a part-time role. However, as the SMP gains traction this person's role can be expected to move from a part-time to a full-time responsibility. The SMC will be the gatekeeper for all social media activities. This person must have a good grasp of the organization's products and services; an understanding of social media, including the ability to monitor external social networks and coordinate communications created and uploaded to websites and aggregators; and the ability to work with employees throughout the organization. Many organizations have turned to PR professionals or journalists to fill their SMC positions. Using personnel from outside the organization will require time and resources to train the SMC in the organizations products, services, and methods of operation. Table 3 provides an overview of the roles and relationships of a Social Media Coordinator.

Table 3: Role of Social Media Coordinator (SMC)	
Top Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SMP will require support of top management • Will be top management's representative in the SMP effort • Must ensure communication between the organization's social media activities and top management
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment of employee participants • Ensure participation is voluntary • Create incentives for participation – focus should not be on monetary rewards • Act as the intermediary between employees and top management • Encourage risk taking and acceptance of failure
Monitor External Social Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers • Competitors • Industry
Coordinate Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct incoming traffic to appropriate employee or department • Assign responsibility for outgoing social media communications
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion of social media efforts • Major role in the development of the overall SMP

Organizational content is the cornerstone of a SMP and will determine its ultimate success or failure. Great content encourages consumers to get involved, comment, share, engage and *click here*. The right sort of content is critical, as it must be customer-focused, compelling, entertaining, surprising, valuable, and interesting (Handley and Chapman, 2011). You must earn the attention of people. This is the primary role of the SMC, without this commitment to quality content the organizational SMP is doomed to failure. The SMC is responsible for ensuring the tone of all correspondence maintains a customer-centric focus. This person will review organizational website and other existing social media tools. It is the SMC's responsibility to oversee all general areas in the development of the SMP and to ensure that it meshes with the overall organizational strategic plan. The collaboration between consumers, the organization, and employees is the responsibility of the SMC. For many organizations the success of the SMP will be based on the selection of the right SMC. The SMC is the face of all organizational social media activities.

Regarding incoming correspondence, the SMC will facilitate the assignment of consumer requests for information to the appropriate employee within the organization. He or she will also provide assistance with any problems concerning consumer requests/questions that cannot be successfully answered by others. It is important for the customer to feel as though they are corresponding with a real, live human being, not just a canned response from a corporation. This is the opportunity to provide mass-customization between the organization and its consumers. Regarding outgoing correspondence, FAQs should be developed based on consumer and industry input. These FAQs are derived from consumer questions and through careful review of industry publications and blogs and writings of industry experts. It is important for FAQs to be continually updated to meet the ever changing needs of consumers. Well-structured FAQs allow interested parties to obtain their information without the need for human intervention.

2.4 Metrics to Evaluate Success

The success of an organization's SMP must be measured. Clear definable goals spell out exactly expectations for performance. A SMP cannot be designed without well-defined metrics to evaluate success, and requires a holistic overview of its value, with complete and unambiguous support of upper management necessary. By developing clearly articulated measurements organizations will be able to determine the success or failure of their SMP (Joly, 2009). Throughout the paper the authors have emphasized social media is not just about marketing. However, many of the metrics for measuring the success of SMPs have been developed by marketers. eMarketer publishes data, analysis and insights on digital marketing, media, and commerce. Their focus using analyst reports, articles, charts, case studies, and other resources provide trends, estimates, and forecasts of what's going on in social media. A recently completed survey identifies the metrics used to value social media marketing activities. The results of their research can be found in Table 4.

Table 4: Metrics for Social Media

Metrics Used by CMOs Worldwide to Measure the Value of Social Media Marketing Activities, 2010 & 2011		
<i>% of respondents</i>		
	2010	2011
Site traffic	68.0%	68.0%
Number of fans/members	59.4%	62.9%
Number of positive customer mentions	52.6%	62.9%
Number of page views	50.9%	43.4%
Number of contributors	42.9%	50.3%
Number of mentions	41.1%	41.1%
Number of posts	40.0%	42.3%
Conversion	32.6%	65.7%
Revenue	29.1%	49.7%
Average order value	22.3%	23.4%
Reduced returns	12.0%	16.0%
Reduced call volume	11.4%	11.4%
Increased channel sales	4.0%	14.9%
Other	2.9%	6.9%
Do not track metrics	18.3%	6.9%

Note: n=175
 Source: Bazaarvoice and The CMO Club, "CMOs on Social Marketing Plans for 2011," provided to eMarketer; eMarketer calculations, Jan 27, 2011

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3. FUTURE TRENDS

For social media, 2011 and 2012 were years of explosive growth, innovation on metrics to analyze their impact, and an overall acknowledgement of its importance. Doug Miles (2011) is the head of the Market Intelligence Division for AIIM (www.aiim.org), a non-profit association dedicated to nurturing, growing, and supporting the Enterprise Content Management (ECM) community. In his report "State of the ECM Industry 2011," he found that with larger organizations (>5,000 employees) approximately 53% have a social media plan. For those smaller organizations (<5,000 employees) only 29% have social media plans. From IBM's perspective, 2012 will meet the challenge of developing social analytical tools. These tools will help organizations gain a better understanding of their stakeholders and dramatically improve customer satisfaction. In order to achieve these goals, organizations will have to create new roles called "community social media managers." These managers will be responsible for building, maintaining a social media plan around the common interests and topics determined by their customers. This is very close to the SMCs discussed above. Rachel Happe is a co-founder and principal at The Community Roundtable, a peer network for social media, community, and social business leaders. In her opinion, organizations have realized that social media is about far more than just technology. Happe sees three critical challenges for social media including: overload of information, an acute lack of talent & expertise, and momentum dip. The following is a brief explanation of these challenges:

Overload. There is too much information available and it has not been handled in a productive manner. Tools will need to be acquired and adopted that will allow social material to be sorted, prioritized, and ultimately allow better and quicker decisions to be made concerning issues related to social media. It will be a combination of finding the right tools and the right people.

Acute lack of talent & expertise. As organizations get more serious about social media the need for social media managers will continue to grow, but available expertise may not keep up. Organizations must address these needs immediately. Time will be required to find the right people and to train support staff. A clearly articulated social media plan should address these needs.

Momentum Dip. There will be a lag time to get organizations from where they are to where they need to be in order to respond to the challenges of social media. The social media plan must include a company-wide vision including all departments and personnel. The successful social media plan will provide for systems integration across the organization. It will require both resources and support of upper levels of management.

4. CONCLUSION

The organization's SMP must mesh with the overall organizational strategic plan. First and foremost, the SMP must have a consumer-centric focus. It must involve everyone in the organization, as they will be expected to have direct contact in many cases with consumers. Internal stakeholders must be given the flexibility and decision making authority to respond to the needs of the consumer. Without employee empowerment the SMP has little chance of success. Remember a primary objective of the SMP is to establish a one-on-one relationship between the consumer and the organization, but through a macro perspective. The SMC is the gatekeeper of the organization's social media activities and should be carefully selected. For organizations, a Consumer-Centric Strategic Social Media Plan offers both a safety net for potential social media attacks and an instrument that can be used to take advantage of the many competitive advantage building opportunities available in social media networks.

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