



Social Media Programme

PART OF THE SIFTGROUPS GOOD PRACTICE PROGRAMME

About this Document

This whitepaper, compiled by Lawrence Clarke, SiftGroups' Head of Consultancy, describes our comprehensive approach to working with online social media and how you can reap the rewards.

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Background

What is social media?

In simple terms, social media is the collective term for online communication tools, services and techniques which have exploded in popularity over recent years.

As well as blogs, forums and podcasts, there are networks like Facebook, Twitter and MySpace, facilitating websites like Digg, Technorati and del.icio.us and image and photo sharing services like YouTube, Flickr and Google Video.

What do they have in common? They have the power to influence the way people perceive your brand.

Growth

Usage of social media in all its forms has risen rapidly over recent years. The most notable growth has occurred among social networking websites of which the biggest success story is Facebook. Since being set up in 2005, the network has attracted 175 million members who each month upload 850 million photos and 5 million videos, share 24 million pieces of content and create 2 million events.

Microblogging site Twitter also boasts impressive growth statistics and it is in the UK where it has achieved the greatest penetration. According to Hitwise, UK traffic to the site rocketed by 974% in the 12 months to January 2009 with the site the 291st most visited compared to its rank of 2,953 in January 2008.

In other areas, Technorati has indexed more than 133 million blogs since 2002, YouTube boasts 258 million users who watch 100 million videos a day and professional network LinkedIn has 35 million members.

Impact

With such impressive statistics, it is clear that social media has the power to influence the way people perceive a brand and its values.

It wasn't that long ago that offline word-of-mouth was the biggest influencer on brand understanding but nowadays people can post their opinions of a company online and within seconds expose it to an audience of millions. According to a study by UK search agency Tamar in 2007, 80% of those that access social networks or online forums use them to comment on or review a brand or product.

In many sectors, specific individuals hold significant power to influence perception. Certain bloggers can sway the public's attitude towards a particular product or service.

Dell experienced this in 2005. A single post from blogger Jeff Jarvis complaining about poor customer service coined the infamous phrase 'Dell Hell'. Combined with problems with overheating laptop batteries, it provoked a massive wave of negative comments on social media websites which the company initially struggled to control.

Engage

Social media means companies need to think differently about how they get attention for their brand. In the old days it was pretty straightforward. You bought advertising space with magazines, newspapers and broadcasters and if your target market was reading, listening or watching it was hard for them to avoid what you wanted them to know. But in the world of Web 2.0 it is different, which makes engaging through social media essential.

The greatest value of online communities is increasing word of mouth (35%), increasing brand awareness (28%), bringing new ideas into the organization faster (24%) and increasing customer loyalty (24%)

According to a survey of organisations using online communities conducted by Beeline Labs, Deloitte and the Society for New Communications Research – July 15th 2008.

How SiftGroups can help

For over 11 years we have developed an approach to social media that has tracked the rapid development in broadband take-up and consequent mass adoption of online interaction. To date, through our sister company SiftMedia, we listen to over 250,000 professionals and consumers on Sift's online community sites, who daily support each other, network and generate high value content.

We are not theorists. We continue to learn by doing and by sharing the collective experiences of both our sister company and over 100 of our own clients all committed to embracing the opportunities of social media.

Our process is built on the hard-won experience that great things can only come from small, considered steps. This is about people not technology and people cannot be rushed or taken for granted. With that in mind our process anticipates break points where you can regroup and consider whether social media is right for you now.

Our approach

Our four-step approach is designed to increase your confidence in, and understanding and appreciation of, how you can reap the benefits of social media.

- 1. Audit** This is at the heart of any business case for investing in social media activities. You need to see how you are seen by individuals in social media spaces. You need to know how your competition is seen. You also need to know your internal readiness for embracing social media.
- 2. Strategy** You need an agreed digital strategy that goes beyond a piecemeal approach to self-contained initiatives. Whatever you choose to do it has to be within a strategic context that aligns with your overall business objectives.
- 3. Execution** Whatever you do it must be effective and reinforce your brand. Better to do nothing than do something badly. Working with our online communities you can openly experiment in a benign environment.
- 4. Measurement** You can't improve what you can't measure. Our process aligns your business objectives with measurable KPIs that input into your ROI.

Audit

Our audit can be used as a one-off exercise or considered as part of your benchmarking activities requiring regular, usually quarterly, reviews.

The audit covers three key areas:

- 1. Baseline conversational media sweep** What is your online reputation? What is being written about you on blogs and forums? Who is Twittering about your brand? Who are the major influencers – and your potential advocates? A conversational media sweep is a narrative about your online presence—sentiments, sources and impact.
- 2. Competition conversational media sweep** We'll also look at what's being said about your competition. Are there opportunities to fill a niche other companies aren't filling? Where are they failing to meet expectations, where are they succeeding? (maximum 3 -5 competitors)
- 3. Your internal readiness** How "Social Media ready" are you? Are there legal constraints (regulated industries for example) or internal policy issues that impact what you can and cannot do with Social Media? Are you willing to cede some control over defining the brand? What are you prepared to do in regards to ethics and transparency?

Key Facts

Number of days	3 days research and write-up 1 day meetings
Dependencies	Required information: current marketing intelligence; current communication policy documents Access to key individuals
Deliverables	Aggregation of all points made organised by importance

Strategy

We approach your strategic objectives using the workshop format. Having an understanding of your internal readiness for embracing social media from the audit, we are in a position, with you, to encourage your internal stakeholders to appreciate the significance of social media supporting their own activities and to understand how to maximise the opportunities and minimise the risks.

The workshops can be adapted to reflect just how far down the social media road you are.

Recommended menu of workshops

Strategic objectives and internal alignment

A re-evaluation of your strategic objectives and how they might align with social media opportunities.

Profiling with personas

An engaging process used to develop in-depth profiles of users who are representative of the target audience groups.

Content strategy

Using the personas, an objective analysis of the relative value of the various types of content assets that could be leveraged across online channels.

Engagement strategy

Working with the content types that deliver most value to end users, a process to identify the internal resources required to successfully produce and deliver that content both on your space and on appropriate social networking spaces.

Strategy workshop details

Strategic objectives and internal alignment

Using a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, the workshop covers a top level review of your strategic objectives involving all key stakeholders. This review informs all subsequent workshops and act as a reference point for decisions taken. This is an important 'kick-off' meeting for the project for all those involved and will assist with both cultural and change management aspects of a project of this nature.

Key Facts

Number of days	½ day workshop ½ day write-up
Dependencies	Previous workshops: none Required information: none
Deliverables	Aggregation of all points made organised by importance

Profiling with personas

A persona is an in-depth profile of your external stakeholder who is representative of one of the audience categories (prospects, customers, partners, suppliers etc). Each category should be supported by at least one persona. The persona includes outlining typical tasks and goals that the user may have in relation to your products and services, as well as demographics. It is then used to simulate various scenarios that can be used to form a framework for improved engagement.

Key Benefits

- Provides a focus for the web, marketing and other departments in the organisation
- Offers a framework for improvements/alterations to your campaigns to be judged against
- Gives a voice to the user in all aspects of the decisions to be taken

Key Facts

Number of days	½ day workshop
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	1 day preparation and write-up
Dependencies	Previous workshops: SWOT Analysis Required information: User profile data
Deliverables	Persona Profiles

Content strategy

Appropriate content, products and services are mapped against the needs of the identified priority Personas. Each item on the list is graded according to relevancy to each stakeholder and a prioritised list is achieved as a result of the exercise. This workshop is particularly useful for considering what content and functionality needs to be considered to support your own community space on your website. The main objective of this exercise is to determine where your effort and resources should be focused. This workshop explores the business objectives and the clear alignment of commercial initiatives with the personas.

Key Benefits

- An understanding of the relative importance of each persona to the business objectives
- Ensures the most relevant content and services are aligned with key persona needs
- An understanding of the relative importance of various revenue generating opportunities

Key Facts

Number of days	½ day workshop 1½ day preparation and write-up
Dependencies	Previous workshops: Outcomes of positioning workshops & persona profiling
Deliverables	Content and Commercial strategy workshop review document

Engagement strategy

This workshop will provide an understanding of how best to align your content resources with commercial initiatives using a template that plots resource-intensive offerings against access rights for the users. The result is a clear understanding of the priorities and value of each offering and the importance of encouraging people to profile themselves. This will help to define the roadmap for the future roll out of appropriate social media activities. The workshop maps the key activities against the access rights for those activities and addresses key engagement challenges.

Key Facts

Number of days	½ day workshop ½ day preparation
Dependencies	Previous workshops: Content & commercial strategy; persona profiling
Deliverables	Completed 'resource/access' chart and aggregation of points raised

Execution

With a complete understanding of your differentials, the opportunities available to you and your internal readiness to respond, this is the point at which we define what can and should be done and how it can be executed.

Underpinning the approach are the eight emerging good practices:

1. Start with the end in mind
2. Focus on the value to the visitors
3. Don't start with the technology
4. Keep it simple and intuitive
5. Keep it fresh and active
6. Attract dynamic advocates
7. Think through who to involve – or not
8. Get a passionate core of participants active before launching

Depending on your objectives, we can identify the best mode and place for delivery. Through our sister company's sites, we can offer the perfect 'sandbox' for you to try out new concepts and approaches, identify new advocates and filter the best to your own social media space. Alternatively we can establish a research-based community within your site where you can engage with key customers to develop or improve on products or services.

To support you we have a range of social media services from online community training to encourage your staff to confidently engage and represent your brand online, to community management, where we extract value from your audience and feed that back to you, or community mentoring, where we transfer our knowledge to your internal resources. We also offer corporate blogging and Twitter training.

Key Facts

Number of days	½ day workshop ½ day preparation
Dependencies	Previous workshops: Audit and strategy workshops
Deliverables	Roadmap for roll-out activities

Measurement

Whatever analytics tools you have or choose to acquire, it is essential that you know what you should be measuring and that you can influence what is being measured. Arriving at your Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) requires an understanding of all site activity – especially user-generated content. Sift uses established templates for capturing and analysing user-generated content and their related KPI's.

Sample measurements include:

- Contributions – quality and quantity
- Participants – passive and active
- Frequency – rhythm of interaction
- Click-throughs - where
- Events – both physical and virtual
- Ratings - effectiveness
- Polls and surveys - effectiveness
- Internal contributors – who and how many

The best contributions from your Community are those that publicly impact on your content, processes or products. In other words, you need to be seen to be part of the conversation and responsive to the outcomes.

The recommended KPIs supporting your online community are designed to help you evaluate the attractiveness of your community, its context within the wider community of professional and social networks and the impact of the community on your organisation.

Key Facts

Number of days	½ day workshop 1½ day preparation
Dependencies	Previous workshops: Execution
Deliverables	KPI templates

Who is SiftGroups?

SiftGroups, part of Sift Ltd, is an award-winning company with over ten years real-world experience and focus on building successful online communities and professional and social networks. Our approach supports knowledge-exchange both within your organisation and between your external stakeholders. The result is efficiency gains and enhanced and measurable value, both perceived and actual.

With a strong reputation for its managed content management and collaboration suite - Sift Unity - supported by a professional services team, the result is not only a software solution optimised to facilitate social and professional networking but also a methodology built on years of experience that greatly increases the likelihood of on-going success.

Sift is a trusted partner in the successful delivery of solutions to clients in a range of sectors including corporate, publishing, not-for-profit and public sectors.

Sift employs staff with expertise in all the disciplines required to produce highly usable websites that add value to your business. Our team is recruited with significant levels of expertise and a record of achievement in their field. This includes strategic consultancy, design and usability, content publishing, sales, support and technical development. This means the people working on your project have the relevant skills, experience and personal attributes to meet your demanding objectives. Many of our staff are considered to be thought leaders in social software and network widely to continue contributing to the growing body of knowledge in this sphere.

Our client base of over 100 active clients include: the British Council, Centaur, the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), the Kennel Club and Crufts, the Law Society, Mensa, Microsoft, National Computing Centre (NCC), National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), Oracle, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), TreeHouse and TalkTalk, Vodafone, and Voluntary Services Organisation (VSO).