



Going Social:

12 key things you must consider when developing a social media program for your business, your brand, or your clients

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would benefit from reading it.

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Social media.
Everyone's invited...
What does it take to get noticed around here?



The social media magic lies in unique functions that only a social media team can deliver.





Audience Generation

Social Media Listening

Community &
Social Responsibility

Content Coordination

Internal Community
Engagement & Response

External Community
Engagement & Response

Overall Management

Customer Service

Brand Advocacy

The Humanization of
Brands





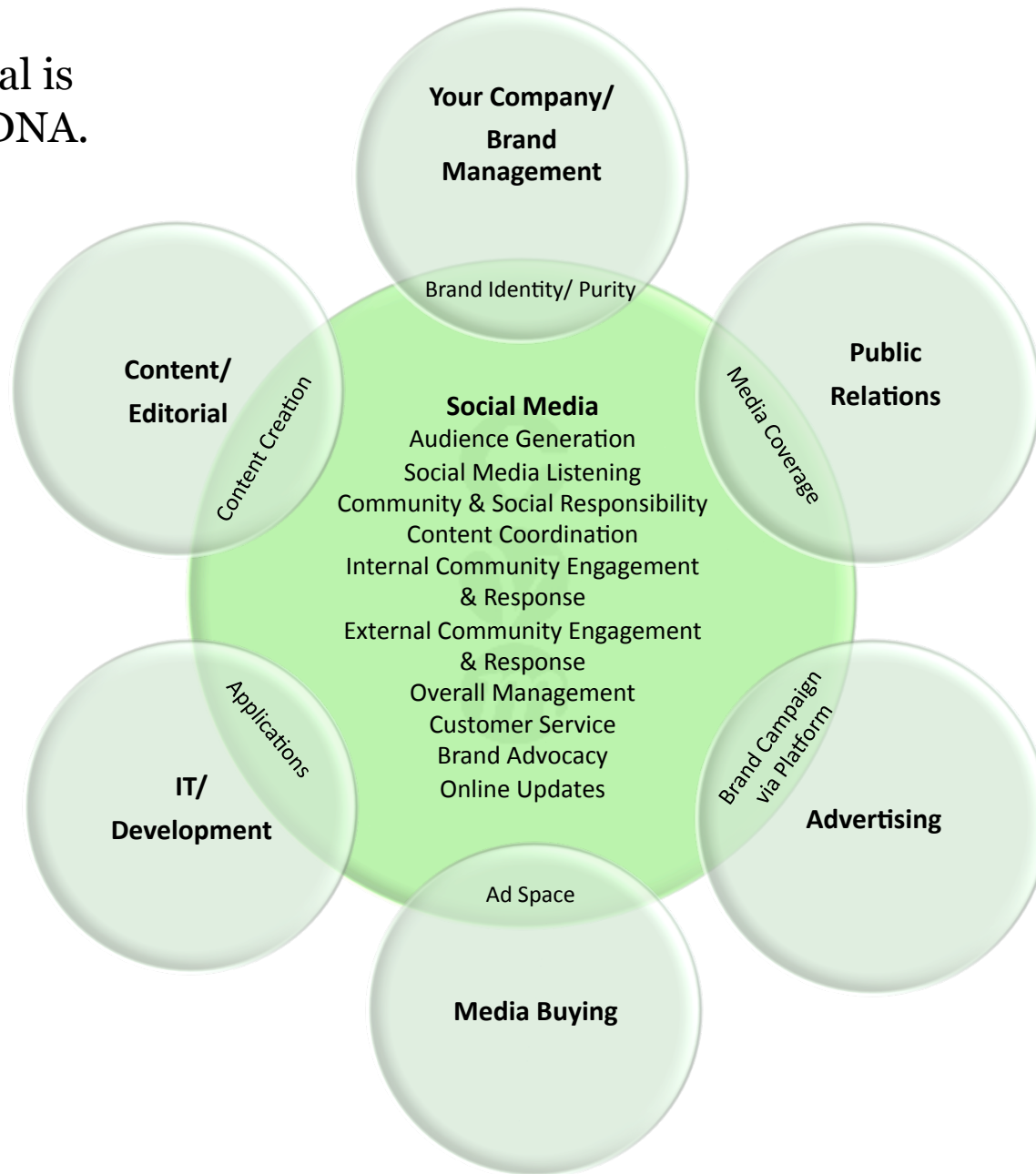
“Well, sure...”

Our advertising agency/ pr firm/ editorial team/
brand managers/ IT guys/ customer service can take
care of that....”

But why aren't they seeing any results??



Because social is not in their DNA.



SMALLER creative agencies have historically had to fight the good fight to get work from large brands. But with the surge in demand for social media—which, for all intents and purposes, falls into the “grassroots” category on a list of traditional services—there’s been a shift: Now, not only are larger creative agencies looking for silent partners to implement social media projects for larger clients, but larger brands are looking to smaller agencies to do the social media work their big agencies can’t wrap their heads around quickly enough.

As a result, brands that were once inaccessible to all but the most established shops are giving smaller, nimbler companies a shot. Of course, all of this got us talking:

What’s so difficult about social media anyway?

The short answer? The “social” part...



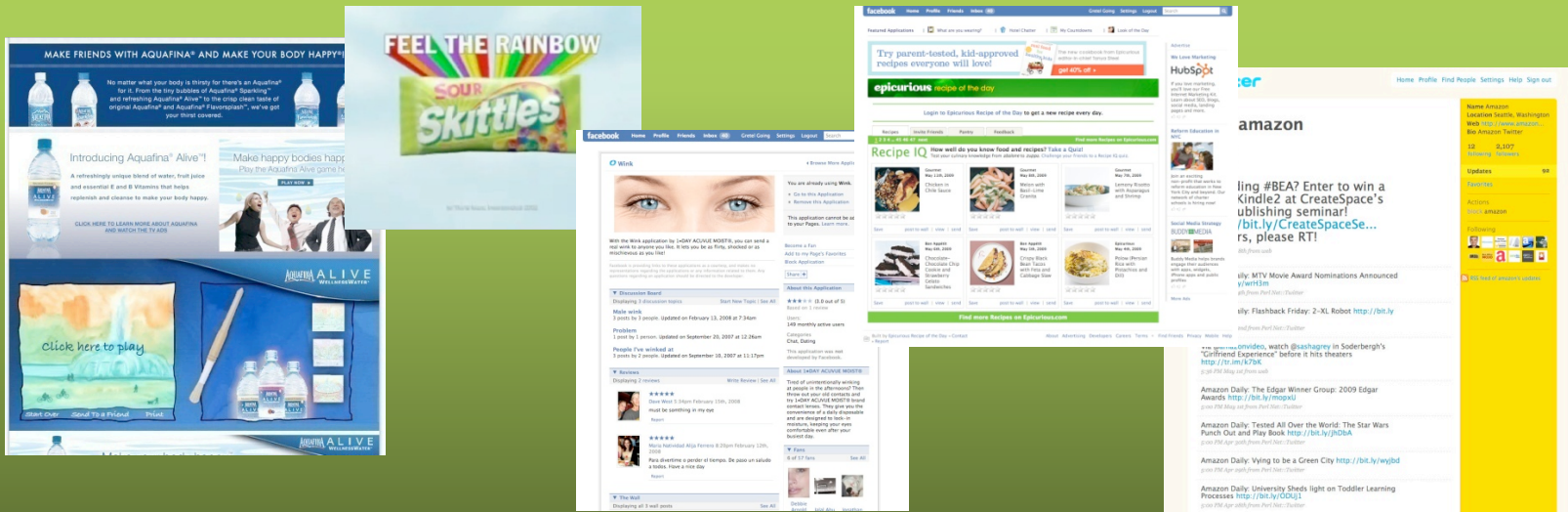
The Long Answer:

Look strictly at the traditional offerings of the different types of marketing agencies out there, and it's quickly apparent that more than hierarchy and bureaucracy are making it difficult for, say, advertising or PR agencies to roll out their "social media programs." It's that they have to reorganize and learn new skills in order to offer something they've never offered before. Social media done right requires more than just a slick application (which any designer/development worth their salt can conjure up at a very decent rate) or a corporate-approved press release sent out to key bloggers (forget the old "we know the right people" model).

All of this falls into what we call the "if you build it, they will come" approach to social media.

It also requires more than just a few witty updates and following/being followed by a million people, in hope that they'll return the favor. (*The "Ashton Kutcher" model.*)





Without a social media strategy and team, even the best brands fail. This failure is usually due to:

- Being too sales-y and promotional (thinking of brand promotion over audience).
- Failing to understand audience needs and community interaction.
- An inability to differentiate brand and branded content in a crowded online arena.
- Lack of community outreach around initiatives.
- Neglected maintenance, updates and improvements.
- Lack of value (information, education, entertainment, service) for audience.



- Social media requires regular care, profile updates, and continual dialogue with your audience.
- Social media should not be implemented as a “campaign”—this segmented practice is a reflection of the type of company handling it (i.e. a traditional advertising company, which works in spurts or campaigns, will often naturally apply a campaign framework to its social media initiatives).
- Social media should be introduced as an ongoing program.



Now for the breakdown of the different elements involved in a successful social media program...

(Of course, not all of these will be crucial to every initiative and there's always going to be a difference between social media programs implemented by brands versus b2b companies versus the average Joe who just wants to socialize. And while handing out disclaimers, we should also mention that none of this is to say that all agencies don't belong in social media; it's more that they're going to have to add new capabilities.)



1. Audience Identification

If you know who your audience is, you're already one step ahead of the game.
The next step is to figure out how and where they're engaging and interacting online:

- What platforms are they using?
- What are their media of choice for connecting?
- What are they talking about?
- Who is popular?
- What brands have they publicly condemned?
- What brands have they publicly lauded?
- What audiences demand particular attention?



2. Platform Development & Design

Once you've identified your audience and figured out where you should be connecting with them online, it's time to start thinking about developing your various profiles or building applications that users can spread throughout their communities.

Any agency with a design and development department should be able to create an aesthetically-pleasing platform or application, but if this is the threshold on which you base your decision, you should probably rethink your strategy. This is the lowest common denominator.

Note: "Aesthetically pleasing" and "cool" are *not* strategies.

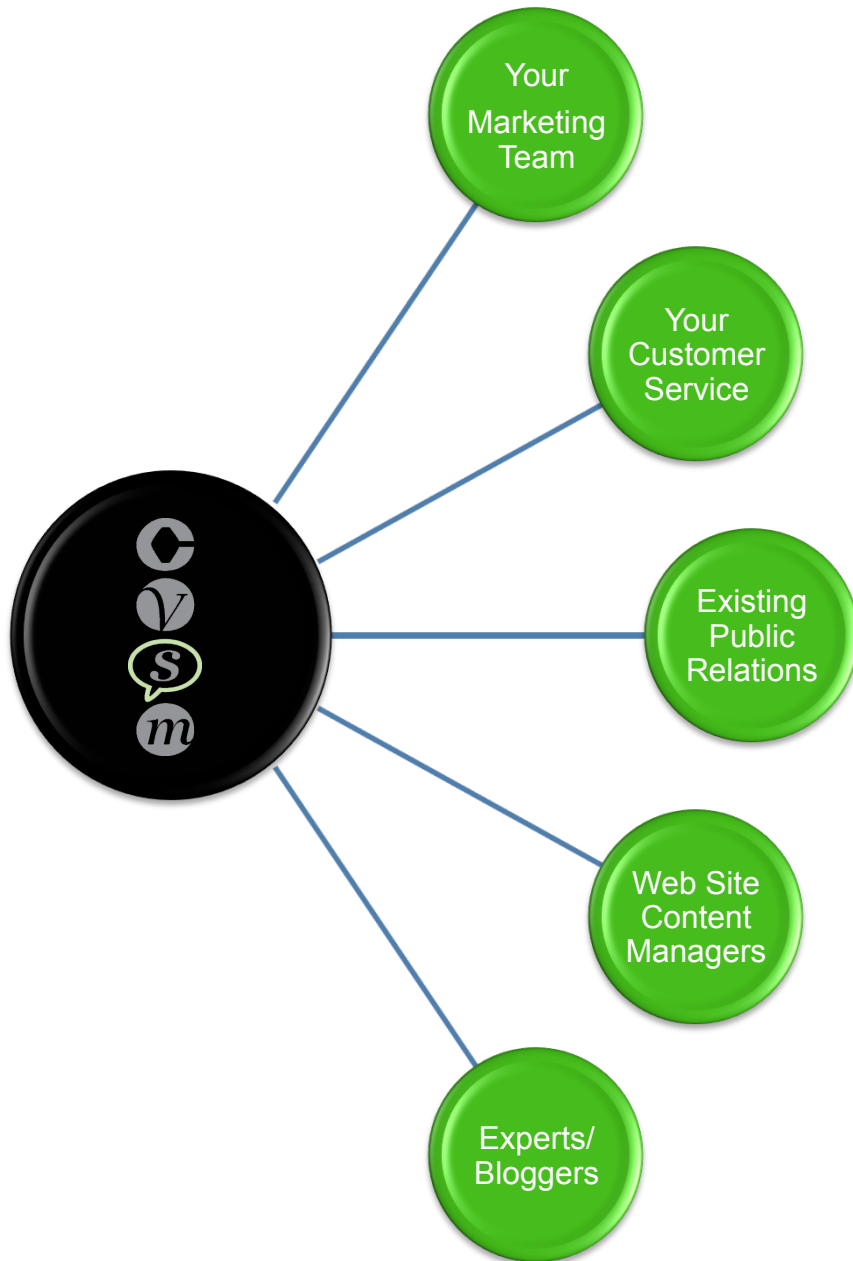


3. Brand Campaign Integration

It's possible for a social media program to piggyback off a good brand campaign implemented by a brand's agency of record, but it has to be transformed into the more accessible, cooler younger brother of the formal campaign.

In other words, you don't want to create a bunch of social media profiles that are over-branded with your product or logo (and therefore off-putting). But it might make sense to take your tagline (and the promise that comes with it) and build an audience whose common interest is achieving that promise. (It's much easier to inspire community around a cause or interest than it is to rely on a community based on an innate shared interest in perpetuating your brand.)





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Social media integration and management plan.



4. Content Creation & Coordination

More than just a snappy tagline, your program needs an overall voice, tone and consistent message. But who should be responsible for writing the content and maintaining that consistency?

“...all too often businesses create profiles for their CEOs and then assign a minion to update the content.”

It depends. Both b2b and b2c brands need to establish specific people in their company as experts and empowered representatives, and give them room to share their insights and personalities. Who doesn't prefer a real person to a corporation? But beware: all too often businesses create profiles for their CEOs and then assign a minion to update the content. This

almost always fails—not only is an intern ill-equipped to speak from the perspective of the CEO, but it reeks of inauthenticity.

When it comes to consumer brands, however, companies have more flexibility. An agency knowledgeable about a brand and its message can handle content for you and do a great job with it. But proceed with caution...



Content Creation & Coordination (Continued...)

Your PR agency likely has the writing skills essential for a meaningful social media presence. But do they understand the need for regular content and engagement? And the difference between old-school PR (push out the message to a known network of media connections) and social media relationships (let people come to you by connecting with the community, speaking to their needs and offering good content)? This is the difference between inbound marketing and outbound marketing, the latter of which is rapidly becoming obsolete.

Social media done right builds valuable relationships with clients or consumers. Done poorly, it's irrelevant. Worse, an overly-promotional, inconsistent, or ill-managed presence can do real damage to your hard-won reputation.

Bottom line:

Keep your social media program as tight, consistent, and as highly controlled as possible for the best outcome.



5. Goal mapping

In other words, how do you measure your success?

You're not getting into social media because everyone else is. Well, you are, but you need to create strategies and goals that are meaningful for your brand and audience.

What are the qualitative and quantitative goals that will accurately measure the success of your social media initiatives? Taking into account the results of your other campaigns, past marketing initiatives, existing traffic and reach, and the realities of social media and your audience, map out a plan for measuring success. That way, if certain goals aren't met, recalibrate your program (or your goals) in kind.



“An irregular and inconsistent social media presence through a variety of individuals will inevitably muddy your brand identity and messaging.”

6. Brand Identity/Purity

Another reason why a good social media strategy is so essential. An irregular and inconsistent social media presence through a variety of individuals will inevitably muddy your brand identity and messaging. It's up to you to ensure that everyone on your social media team understands the ins and outs of your messaging and story. Don't just expect to bring in a social media team that can do it all for you: at the end of the day, you need to be a part of all initiatives taking place.



NOTE:

Larger brands like to start spreading the word of their new, fancy and glossy initiatives at the outset, but if your social media program is good, your audience will find them on their own.

7. Audience Generation

Crucial as it is, audience generation is not always understood by traditional agencies. For years, they have worked on the “push” model of putting out a message and assuming people will listen.

Take PR agencies, which tend to approach audience generation from the top down: tell the media and the media will tell their readers, listeners, and viewers. While this approach can make inroads in social media, it is pretty much antithetical to everything social media stands for. True audience generation emerges from a mix of attentiveness to and dialogue with your audience, as well as social media listening (described next).



8. Social Media Listening

This ongoing effort is at the heart of social media, and explains why any initiative needs to be a long-term program rather than a short-term campaign. If you don't know what people are saying about you and your products, their related interests and more, how are you going to interact with them?

“If you don't know what people are saying about you and your products, their related interests and more, how are you going to interact with them?”

Your social media team should be on the ground, listening to what people are posting, tweeting, blogging and otherwise broadcasting about issues important to your overall goals and objectives. (*You do have goals for this, right?*) Listening also helps you find the stand-out voices in your area. Follow, friend or otherwise connect with these people to build relationships with those who are likely to interact with your work and share it with their friends. Don't go after a large audience for the sake of having huge “friend” or “follower” numbers.

In social media, it's quality, my friends, not quantity.



9. Community & Social Responsibility

There's no quicker way to ruin any relationship than to be a taker rather than a giver. In particular, bigger, known brands can get a bad rap for using—as opposed to engaging with—online communities. This “ask not what you can for the community, but what the community can do for you” approach is infamous for overly-branded, sales-y and often interfering efforts, and even credited with destroying once-popular platforms.

The reality is that social media is about relationships and community, and being a member of the community means contributing to it. Social responsibility is increasingly expected of everyone—brands included—and this engagement is an essential part of your online identity.

Authentically connect by tying initiatives to your existing social responsibility efforts and by engaging with new issues that are of concern to your audience. People want to align themselves with brands that share their values.

“People want to align themselves with brands that share their values.”



“Do it how we want or we will do it ourselves.”



“That means you need to get touchy, feely and join our community and get to know us. I know, sucks for you, huh? You have to engage us. You have to even learn to trust us, but more than that you have to make us trust you. And you’re not going to gain our *trust* if all we are to you is a statistic.”

— Erin Kotecki Vest, Mom Blogger
QueenofSpainBlog.com



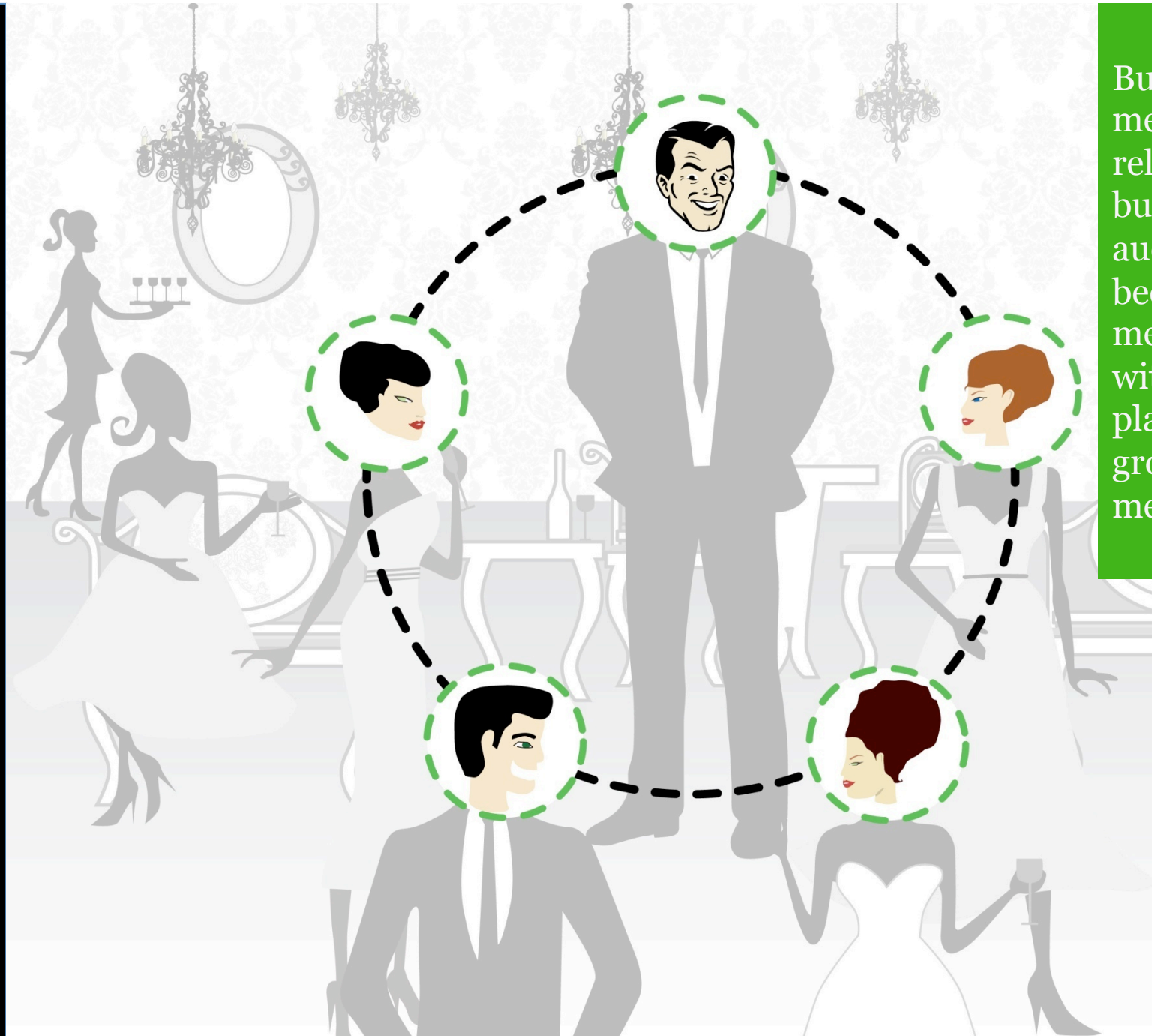
10. Internal/External Community Engagement & Response

Be everywhere. All the time.

Okay, so maybe that's a little extreme, but it's up to you to let people know that you are listening, engaging, helping, and offering solutions. From creating and moderating your own community for a niche audience, to talking to bloggers and Twitterers, your social media team needs to be an active and consistent presence.



Build meaningful relationships, build your audience, and become a social media presence with a strategic plan for on-the-ground social media outreach.



“...if your efforts give the impression that you don't care, why will your audience feel any different?”

11. Brand Advocacy

Authenticity and transparency are such huge aspects of social media, your social media team must be 100% dedicated to and sold on your brand or mission. After all, if your efforts give the impression that you don't care, why will your audience feel any different?

Sure, you pay your team to be your brand advocates, but if they're just doing it for the money, it will come through loud and clear in the content. Fully immerse them in the culture of your company. Help them “get it.” Once they do, they'll work hard to make the social media sphere get it, too. (And if they don't, run—don't walk—the other way.)





Shocked and awed. @ComcastBonnie deserves heaps of fame + fortune for turning a miserable experience into a happy ending, on twitter no less

2:17 PM Apr 16th from TweetDeck



Very impressed with Comcast. Did I mention how fickle I am :) @ComcastBonnie replied to my unhappy at Comcast tweet within a minute. Wow.

3:03 PM Apr 9th from TweetDeck

@ComcastBonnie I do not. But I can give you my comcast email or DM you my deets?

2:06 PM Apr 9th from TweetDeck in reply to ComcastBonnie

@SantaFeFrank Have I told you how much I really truly madly deeply hate Comcast?

12:42 PM Apr 9th from TweetDeck in reply to SantaFeFrank

Dear Intuit: Your phone tree is a nightmare, your representatives ask way too many unnecessary questions & their script is way too long.

11:14 AM Apr 22nd from twhirl



Kirasw @gretelgoing I work at Intuit & saw your tweet. LMK if I can help.

1:30 PM Apr 22nd from TweetDeck in reply to gretelgoing

Name ComcastBonnie
Location Philadelphia, PA
Web <http://www.comcas...>
Bio Official Comcast Person (@comcastcares team)! People helper, internet addict, cellist, photographer, and all around fun and funky person with pink hair!

1,159 following 1,159 followers

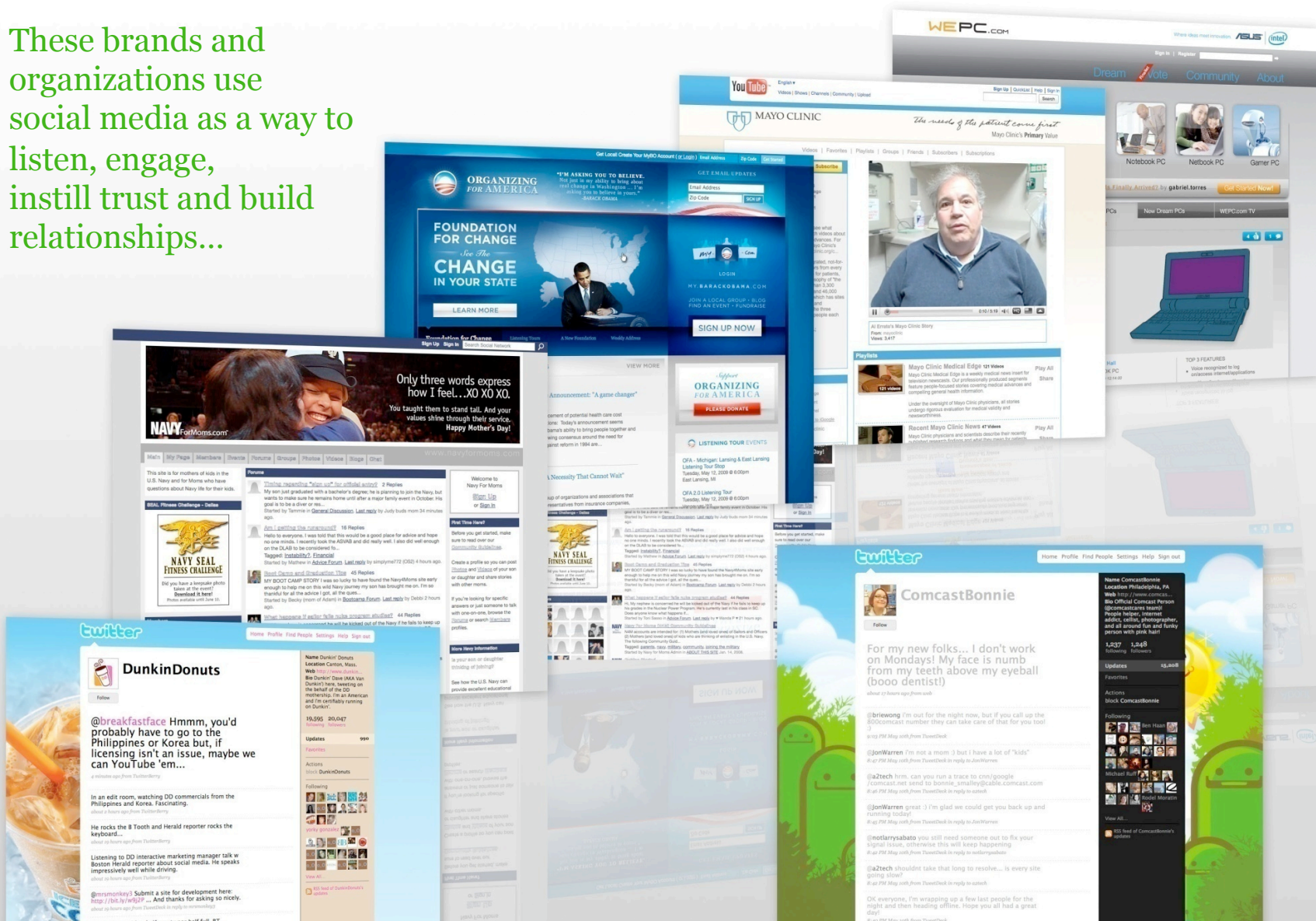
Updates 13,811

12. Customer Service

Brands like Comcast and Intuit have shown the world how to use social media for customer service. Good customer service involves listening (within and outside of social media) and attending to consumer comments. This activity is one that should be handled uniquely by your company if you're a direct-to-consumer distributor. If your brand distributes to stores rather than directly to consumers, it's okay to have your dedicated social media-content person fill this role since you won't be fielding complaints directly (well, at least not as often as direct-to-consumer brands). But no matter how you handle it, you must ensure that your social media presence has a direct line to someone in-house. It's a lot easier to nip a potential "social media crisis" in the bud when someone is on hand who has the authority to resolve issues quickly and painlessly.



These brands and organizations use social media as a way to listen, engage, instill trust and build relationships...



From left to right: Dunkin Donuts on Twitter, The NAVY blog, President Obama's many online platforms, The Mayo Clinic's community, WePC's community, and Comcast Bonnie—Comcasts's online customer service initiative on Twitter.

A good place to start?

You don't need anything fancy to begin your social media program. Remember: authenticity and good content are the keys. Start simple. And though new social media platforms are introduced all the time, start slowly now by putting your message on...

B Blogs:

Frequently updated expert blog content on your site makes it a regular destination rather than a one-time stop. Blogs allow companies and brands to begin controlled transparent engagement with readers and consumers.

twitter

Post daily tips, helpful insights and links with a profile in this microblogging community. If you're a direct-to-consumer company, you can achieve amazing customer service results with Twitter. Others use it to establish expertise and build relationships.

facebook

Emphasize your place in the community with a representative profile (or group or fan page) and with interactive applications and quizzes that will speak to your audience. For big consumer brands, this is a good place to share your commitment to social responsibility and community above and beyond branded promotion.



Relevant Communities:

Similar to engage with your audience on your own blog, you will want to branch out and become a part of the community at large. This involves lots of community listening and then responding with your own authentic messaging when appropriate.

