

83 ways to improve engagement – and 17 things to skip

Using audience lifecycle modeling for Social Media effectiveness

By Randall Craig

Building engagement is always a question of working at the intersection of what "they" want – and what you might need. Focusing on only one is a sure-fire way to either minimize your ROI, or minimize their interest.

Before considering what should be done to improve engagement with Social Media, it makes sense to stop all of those activities that do the opposite. Beyond the time that needs to be spent undoing the damage of the inappropriate, spending time on these negative activities saps budget and resources that can be spent on just about anything else.

Here are 17 things that you should never do:

- 1) Too much: For every marketing activity, there is a point of diminishing marginal returns: one additional erg of effort may not provide a corresponding benefit. At the limit, too much interaction will overwhelm the target audience, and have the opposite impact.
- 2) Too little: Similarly, a very low level of activity may not register on an audience's radar. Achieving a critical momentum is important; gauge this through the number of *shares, comments, likes, follows...* and transactions
- 3) Too salesy: While there is a role for sales messages, this is often a turn-off when the audience is not ready for a message about purchasing. Delivering the wrong message at the wrong time kills engagement.
- 4) Too contrived: Most people can smell a fake conversation a mile away. The worst: vendors asking leading questions about their own products and services.

Randall Craig: Digital Strategy: Keynotes, Workshops, and Webinars

5) Too stupid: Sometimes it is better to keep your mouth shut, than opening it and proving your ignorance. Getting smart people on your team, using an editorial calendar, and proofing a post before putting it online are "smart" things to do.

6) Without permission: Nothing annoys an audience more than an expectation gap. An example: your Twitter feed promises topic X once each day, yet you send topic Y five times every day. Or if they are bombarded with commercial offers to an email address harvested from their Social Media profile.

7) No Social URL: It has become almost standard to use social icons (the Facebook F, the Twitter bird, etc) in real-world venues, as a clue to an organization's Social Media community of interest. But without the actual URL, how are people to know where to go?

8) The intern problem: This issue is a relative of the *Too Little* problem. An organization hires a summer intern, who is tasked with building a community within Facebook or Twitter. They may be successful, but what happens when the intern goes back to school? The community flounders, and the organization appears unresponsive.

9) Silly QR codes: These are the small squares that appear almost everywhere, but almost no one uses. Ever. What is most surprising is seeing QR codes in places where a user can not possibly access the underlying web page: subways, remote geographies, etc.

10) No Social Media policy: While you may want those in our organization to help amplify your message through social channels, what happens when your name is used within a user's profile, and that profile contains inappropriate content? Building a Social Media policy and guidelines, and then training your staff on it can solve problems before they start.

11) Facebook Social Graph: This is the *search* function that is available within Facebook. Used creatively, it can open your

organization up to significant embarrassment. Consider a search such as "People who work at Coke who like Pepsi". While it is impossible to protect your organization against every eventuality, developing some basic tests makes sense. Good engagement is desirable; bad engagement isn't.

12) Ignoring opinions: While you may know that books are rated on Amazon, and hotels are rated on TripAdvisor, you may not be aware that ratings sites exist for every single type of organization or function: Teachers, Portfolio managers, Accountants, even Funeral Directors. You have four choices with these sites: ignore, monitor, respond, or build your own venue for comments. (Hint: *ignore* is not a good option.)

13) Active User Disengagement: Even more than email, Social Media is a permission-based activity. Slamming users into Facebook groups (which generates email notifications) will agitate them at best – and drive negative opinion on Social Media. (It may also be contrary to certain jurisdiction's Anti-spam laws.)

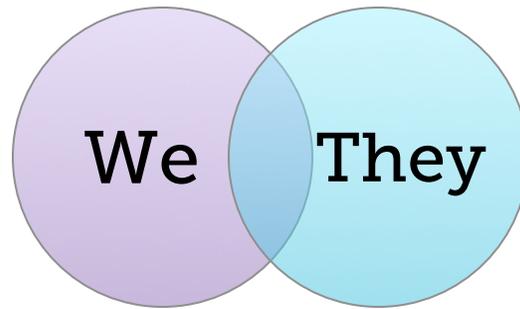
14) Automatic posts: While there certainly is a role for automatic posts, when the organization is in a time of crisis, Social Media must be managed strategically. Automation can quickly take engagement in the wrong direction.

15) Non-strategic engagement: Social Media engagement must be part of an overall plan. Engagement initiatives that develop conversation for conversation's sake – or on inappropriate topics – are counter-productive.

16) Stop shouting: Engagement doesn't mean a series of broadcast pronouncements, or warmed-over advertorials. It means conversation and the development of a community of interest that benefits all parties.

17) Stop experimenting (mostly): Many Social Media challenges have already been solved, so rather than spending time and resources solving them anew, use models to short cut the process. One model is *Three Tiers of Social Media*, which describes a social media continuum from *Passive*, to *Broadcast*, to *Engagement*.

The one key question – *Where Do They Care?*



This simple sentence encapsulates three critical factors:

- 1) Too often, our focus is on the *We*, and not the *They*. To increase engagement, we need to engage on topics that the target audiences actually care about.
- 2) If we only focus on the *They*, then the organization's goals will never be met. Clearly the intersection of *We* and *They* is the target.
- 3) The *Where* is actually just as important. If the attempts at engagement occur in venues devoid of the target audience, then why bother? Fish where the fish are.

Audience Lifecycle Modeling

One way to drive engagement is to trace the lifecycle of an audience as it discovers, lives with, and eventually exits your organization. For a professional services firm, this might mean from initial discovery of your organization, to the billable engagement, to the billing. For an Association, it might mean member recruitment, certification, and exit. For an individual in the context of their career, it might mean graduation, employment, then retirement. Because the target audience deeply cares about where they are on their journey, engaging on these dimensions is far more likely to result in engagement than not. *Audience Lifecycle Modeling* adds the dimension of **When to Where to They Care**.

Here is a list of just such moments:

- Discovery of the organization
- Orientation
- Events
- Volunteering

Randall Craig is President of 108 ideospace, the author of seven books including the *Everything Guide to Starting an Online Business*, the *Online PR and Social Media* series and *Social Media for Business*. He speaks on social media strategy and reducing social media risk. 108 ideospace helps organizations use the web, social media, and CRM to leverage and extend their strategy. Contact Randall directly at @randallcraig, or Randall@108ideospace.com.

- Leadership
- Professional Development
- Communications/Community development
- Advocacy
- Recognition and Positive Reinforcement
- Retirement or Exit

Consider the following positive engagement ideas – 83 of them – organized by Audience Lifecycle:

Discovery of the organization

1. Open LinkedIn groups
2. Twitter
3. TweetChats
4. Targeted email to new stakeholder groups
5. Social get-togethers
 - Market using Twitter, Facebook events, Eventbrite
6. "Content marketing" to partner organizations
7. Students and those considering your field
8. Young professionals projects

Orientation/Onboarding

9. Pre-recorded webinars with live Q&A
10. Veteran's advice on unlisted YouTube pages
11. *The Opportunity of Engagement* Slideshare tours.
12. Training that includes how to use and connect through LinkedIn, Blog, Twitter, etc.
 - The training should ask a question: what (and how) can you contribute?
13. Resource Center with open comments
14. Mentorship program using Social Media as the connection mechanism.
15. Feedback survey
16. Social Media Toolkit: a resource kit that helps clients/members learn how to use Social Media themselves, thereby empowering them to amplify your message to their network.

Events

17. Voting with interactive keypads
 18. Remote attendees (Remote presenters?)
 19. Post-discussion groups
 20. TweetChats and other online "meetings" to supplement real-world ones
 21. "Un-meeting" facilitated meetings with social component (Hybrid events)
 22. Group Blogs: three paragraphs every week
 23. Twitter Wall at the registration desk
- Events themselves can also use the Lifecycle Model: Social Media can be used during each phase of an event: *Planning, Promoting, Delivering, and Post*
- 24 – 27. *Planning*: Team collaboration, Needs discovery, Speaker selection, and generating buzz
 - 28 – 32. *Promoting*: Event blog, Discussion forums, Anchors and Outposts
 - 33 – 37. *Delivering*: Twitter wall during each presentation, Remote attendees, Publicity, Info-capture for post-event conversation info-capture for subsequent event marketing.
 - 38 – 41. *Post Event*: Discussion forums and blogs, Teleseminars/ Webinars, Membership sites, Community development

Volunteers

42. Call for volunteers
43. Volunteer training page
 - Videos
 - Comments
 - Discussions
44. Volunteer scheduling
45. Volunteer reporting
46. Feedback on volunteers

Randall Craig is President of 108 ideaspac, the author of seven books including the *Everything Guide to Starting an Online Business*, the *Online PR and Social Media* series and *Social Media for Business*. He speaks on social media strategy and reducing social media risk. 108 ideaspac helps organizations use the web, social media, and CRM to leverage and extend their strategy. Contact Randall directly at @randallcraig, or Randall@108ideaspac.com.

Leadership

- 47. Mailing lists
- 48. Discussion forums
- 49. Voting
- 50. Draft policies with commenting
- 51. Call for nominations
- 52. Online Standard Operating Procedures (with annual feedback)
- 53. Past-presidents' LinkedIn group
- 54. Google Docs real-time collaboration

Advocacy

- 55. Webinars on the Social Media Toolkit
- 56. Social Media Training for members
- 57. Online Petitions with Social Media connection
- 58. Ambassador program with training
- 59. "Borrowing" profile pictures for a time period

Communications and Community Development

- 60. Audit existing "elderly" communications tools
- 61. Member Surveys
- 62. Member Benchmarking
- 63. Discussion forums
- 64. Facebook Pages with an editorial calendar
- 65. Multiple Twitter identities and Hashtags
- 66. New role: community manager
- 67. CRM with "actionable" links
 - Text Message interactions
- 68. LinkedIn Job board
- 69. LinkedIn Profile, groups, and subgroups
 - LinkedIn Company Page / Showcase Pages

Recognition: positive reinforcement

- 70. Nomination and submission process, with comments
- 71. Online commenting or voting
- 72. Remembrance or Honor page for honorees
- 73. Post-publicity for honorees
- 74. TweetChat or discussion forum with honorees
- 75. Annual team blog (on their insights) by honorees

Retirement or Exit

- 76. Alumni group on LinkedIn
- 77. Exit interview compiled into survey tool
- 78. Online Mentorship
- 79. Group or Page Moderation
- 80. Special Projects: Knowledge Management
- 81. Revocation of Social Media privileges (LinkedIn group, etc)
- 82. Review of how organization's name is used on their profiles
- 83. Video of tips for newcomers ("Leave a legacy")

There is no shortage of ideas, well beyond the 100 presented in this document. But there is a shortage of time, and with most organizations, a shortage of resources. So of all of these ideas, how might you decide where to start, and how much should be invested in social media initiatives? Here are six key questions that can help:

- 1) How does each potential initiative contribute to the achievement of your goals? (And by extension, to the achievement of a corporate strategic goal?)
- 2) How much time does it take to do? (And what will it displace?)
- 3) What is the learning curve – and is it worth it?
- 4) How much might it cost?
- 5) Are you setting up expectations that you cannot fulfill on an ongoing basis?
- 6) What are the downside risks of a particular initiative?

Building engagement is a team sport: working at the intersection of *We* and *They* means a far greater chance of meaningful engagement... that produces results.

Randall Craig is President of 108 ideaspac, the author of seven books including the *Everything Guide to Starting an Online Business*, the *Online PR and Social Media* series and *Social Media for Business*. He speaks on social media strategy and reducing social media risk. 108 ideaspac helps organizations use the web, social media, and CRM to leverage and extend their strategy. Contact Randall directly at @randallcraig, or Randall@108ideaspac.com.