

# Five tips for a winning social media strategy

 By [Bianca Quinn-Diavastos](#)

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Social media continues to grow at a rapid pace, but many brands are still a bit unsure about how they can harness it in a way that drives better relationships with their customers. If your brand is one of them, here are five starting points for shaping a social media strategy that will pay off for your brand.

## 1. Decide who you want to talk to and where

Most brands are active on social media, so you probably have accounts on the major platforms. However, each major social media platform is a unique environment with subtly different audiences, purposes, strengths and weaknesses. Thus, one of the most important elements of a good social media strategy is to understand which social media channels you should focus on and how you should use them to interact with your customers.

Brands are most successful on social media when they align their content and messages with the social network's audience and reason for existence. LinkedIn can be powerful for reaching potential employees or B2B contacts, while Twitter's short message format is great for customer service updates and news alerts.



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Facebook, YouTube and Instagram, meanwhile, lend themselves to informal but rich engagements. Facebook and YouTube attract the biggest user bases in South Africa, but they might not be the best fit for every campaign or customer.

You can use social media monitoring tools to listen to conversations to learn where the conversations that are relevant to your brand are taking place and where the people you'd like to reach are active. If you have an email database, you can use that to explore on which channels your customers hold accounts.

## 2. Define your voice and persona

Your tone of voice and brand personality matter even more on social media than they do in other channels. People don't want scripted responses, dry legalese, insincere promises on social media, but to feel like they're connecting with a brand that has empathy for and interest in them.

That means you need to think clearly about the tone of voice you'll project. And then, you must formalise it and train every person who will write for social media or respond to customers to master that distinctive and memorable personality. It's important to be consistent, but not at the cost of approachability and warmth. It's a tough balancing act, especially when you probably also have legal and product departments who are anxious that you don't make promises you can't keep.

The tone should be true to your brand and it is always important to carry a human element in your social media dialogues. This means that you need to think of your brand as a real person on social media to ensure that each response is human, personal and sincere. Customers are much more likely to build a relationship with a person than a series of automated responses.

### **3. Put together a content strategy**

As important as it is to align your social media strategy with other communications and advertising campaigns, social media should not be a dumping ground for PR and marketing materials. Follow what your customers are talking about, make sure that your content is tailored to the needs of different audiences and platforms, and always focus on quality and relevance.

It's not just about product and price - it is about giving people information that will help, and entertain them. Your content should be educational and interesting to stand out in a cluttered landscape. It should appeal to your customers' emotions, intellect or sense of humour. People use social media because they want useful information or diversion - not because they want to be sold to.

When it comes to the time of day to post there are no golden rules to follow. To see what works best for your brand, you'll need to experiment posting at different times of the day and week, play around with how frequently you post, and test different kinds of content. There are many variables at play, so plan your social calendar ahead of time, but be prepared to test and optimise. If people are sharing your content or replying to your posts with interest and amusement, you'll know that you're doing something right.

### **4. It takes two to have a conversation**

We live in the "sharing economy", so it's not just about your brand. In real life, you wouldn't run around shouting random messages at friends, strangers and colleagues in the hope that you can influence them to see things your way. Instead, you'll converse with them in a two-way exchange of information and listen to what they want and need. In real interpersonal relationships, we need to listen to the other person and really consider their perspective before responding.

In the same way, people on social media don't simply want to listen to brands boasting about themselves or selling them things. They also want to voice their opinions and talk about their requirements and expectations. Using customer data to listen to customer perspectives and responding in a considered and empathetic way will help you to build better customer relationships.

So, listen more than you speak, repost interesting things from other people (and not just posts from people saying how great your brand is!), and be part of the community.

## 5. Be fast on your feet

Social media is a world of instant gratification where responses are expected in hours (or even minutes) rather than days. If you are too slow in picking up on a post from a discontent customer, it can quickly escalate through retweets and shares, creating a crisis.

If you're not quick enough to answer a question, a client may look elsewhere for help. That means it's important to respond within an hour or less to a query or a complaint for a customer - even if it's just to say you've heard them and are taking action.

### ABOUT BIANCA QUINN-DIAVASTOS

Bianca Quinn-Diavastos is the managing director of the digital marketing agency Jetweb - "Digital on Demand". She has worked in media and publishing since 2006, and has gained a diverse range of experience spanning the marketing and strategic digital industries.

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