



“Engaging in social media to promote your company is a long journey. You do not get there overnight.”

Social Media: Four Steps of Engagement

The question is not whether you should engage in social media, but rather how to do it intelligently, effectively, and profitably by implementing our four-step plan

ENGAGING SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE YOUR company is similar to taking a long trip in your car. You must take these four steps:

1. The *vehicle* you are taking: one you know how to drive.
2. Where you are going: your *destination or goal*.
3. How you are going to get to your destination; what are the *means or objectives*, for attaining your goals: the roads to take.
4. *Checkpoints* along the way: to assess your trip and possibly to make adjustments.

One thing is certain: a long trip does not happen overnight. It simply takes time.

All of these factors about taking a long trip are true about engaging social media, except there are multiple vehicles, goals, objectives, and checkpoints. Let's look at them individually.

1. Vehicles. When taking a long trip, it's best to choose a reliable vehicle. In social media, there are many reliable vehicles. Chief among these are blogs (posted from your web site), microblogs (through *Twitter*), social networks (*Facebook* being the most popular), and professional networks (*LinkedIn* by far the largest). There are others, of course, but these vehicles represent a firm foundation for your social media efforts.

Once you choose your vehicles, learn how to drive them. You can easily create a blog on your web site, join *Twitter* to make an account for your company, sign up for *Facebook* to create a fan page, and enroll in *LinkedIn* for a company page and for pages on your key executives, managers, and staff. In fact, you probably already own many of these vehicles. But are you driving them to your greatest advantage? For that, you need to know your destinations or goals.

2. Destinations or goals. These are broad, intangible, even abstract statements of your long-term intentions. Your destinations or goals describe your future expectations, provide direction for your actions (your means or objectives), and focus on end results. Some of your goals might include any or all of the following:

- ◆ Build awareness of your brand and enhance your reputation by shaping their perception in the marketplace.

- ◆ Generate leads and convert these prospects into loyal customers.
- ◆ Interact with your customer community, and influence their behavior.
- ◆ Manage customer relations with your prospects and customers.
- ◆ Promote your products and services.
- ◆ Increase employee morale and empower their collaboration with social media.

You can adapt these goals, add others, or create a list to meet your specific needs. What's important is that these goals be the ones most important to you, the ones that help you attain your overall company goals.

3. Means or objectives. From your social media goals, enumerate the means for attaining them through the vehicles you are driving. It all works together. The means must be tangible, realistic, and above all, measurable statements of action. They generally fall into three categories: *information* (what to post); *engagement* (who is engaging your community); and *management* (how much time and resources to invest). Make these decisions up front, and all becomes clear.

To be more specific, your means describe the kinds of information—text, images, audio, video, ideas, concepts—to post in your social media vehicles, who is creating them and how, where are they being posted and how often, who is responding to comments, who is interacting with your community, and what are your guidelines for involvement. The means you choose must directly support your goals.

4. Checkpoints. Once on your social media journey, check at regular intervals to make sure you are still on the right road. This is why your actions must be measurable. Many methods are available. Success, however, depends less on the methods you use and more on what you measure and how well you do it.

Show some return: make money. When all is said and done—your vehicles chosen, your destinations set, your means being implemented—you must be able to answer this question affirmatively: Are we making money? Doing that makes for profitable journeys.