



## Community Management Services

### Introduction

Sites commonly referred to as social media networks are defined as any digital medium which facilitates the user-generated exchange of content, ideas and discussion. While the networks themselves are powerful in that they provide the online space and tools for these exchanges to take place, the true power and elegance of social media lies within the users themselves. Without user-generated content and the emergence and maintenance of subgroups, social media networks would fail to thrive.

Social media's reach is impossible to deny. It's quite simple to prove its influence and adoption rates; after all, it's unusual these days to find someone—from toddlers to seniors—who does not use some form of social media. Quantifying how to best employ a social media tool for brand success is a little more difficult due to variance in demographics, existing brand equity, maturity of the community and other factors unique to an organization. It takes a highly functioning social media professional to tap into this information and create an effective program.

The social media networks most commonly utilized by brands today should not come as a surprise. Facebook is used by consumers for many aspects of their lives, from keeping in touch with family and friends to joining professional groups and seeking out deals for the products they love or haven't yet tried. Twitter is a common tool for following interests and brands and is increasingly used for customer service as it is quick and to the point.

This paper will focus on these two popular choices, although Google+, Pinterest, YouTube and other popular networks certainly have value.

### Brands and Consumers on Social Media

The use of social media by brands is nothing new, but is constantly evolving, as there appears to be no stronger tool than social media for reaching consumers directly in an efficient and powerful manner.

Perhaps the most impact social media is having on organizations comes within the purchase cycle. Along with search, it drives awareness for products and services. Social Media can also have a direct influence on customers' purchasing decisions by providing user-generated feedback as part of the purchase consideration phase. Additionally, social media can be used to gauge if

customers' actual experiences match the expectations and goals set by corporate marketing. It used to be enough to simply have a brand Facebook page or Twitter account to post updates on.

Now, fans are seeking out a more authentic and useful relationship with the brands they are interested in, and if this can be achieved, an increase in direct revenue will result.

Since users with personal accounts have been around longer than brand accounts, consumers hold the power and have established the norms and expectations on social media networks. This is counter to traditional marketing tools used by brands—everything from print to television spots have been one-way messages pushed out to consumers. If a brand does not learn the cultural practices of the groups they are functioning within, even when those groups are made up of their own followers, the outcome may be negative, or worse, positive for the competition who figures this out. Consumers are the best gauge of authenticity and will be the first to point out a mistake, often with disastrous results. From this truth stemmed the necessity of a central role to monitor and maintain brand presence on social sites.

### The Role, Requirements and Value of Community Managers

With the advent of Facebook and Twitter being used by brands, the role of the Community Manager has emerged. These brand advocates are tasked with managing content, responding to inquiries and ensuring a good user experience for all followers. Unfortunately, brands often forget the "community" portion of the role and treat social media accounts like a push technology. Many have great intentions but think too much like traditional marketers—and in fact, many Community Managers come from marketing roles.



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Community Managers are an integral part of strategy, governance and crisis management. Because they are on the forefront of social media every day, their familiarity with followers and current trends should directly influence social media strategy and ensure the plan is driven in the most correct direction. In addition, a Community Manager can gauge the reaction of followers to social media applications and measure interaction using management tools and analytics. Furthermore, they are well-positioned to spot when applications fail, need to be refreshed or decommissioned, and should always be empowered as the first responders to a social media crisis with all communication concerning action flowing outward to all other stakeholders.

### Strategic and Operational Components of Social Media

Many times, social media management is thought of only as posting a brand's status updates to sites like Facebook and Twitter. Unfortunately, for many, this is in fact the extent of their social media programs. However, it is recommended that brands incorporate other efforts which align with overall business goals and marketing plans to ensure maximum positive impact. A well-equipped Community Manager should participate in all of these areas.

#### Social Media Strategy

Unfortunately, social media is not always incorporated into a company's overall growth strategy. According to Gartner, "[A] survey conducted by Insight Consulting...found that only 11% of companies using social networks incorporate them into their overall strategies, which leaves some room for improvement." Instead of an afterthought, social media strategy should be an integrated part of a company's efforts in reaching consumers.

When it is created, a robust social media strategy typically begins with marketing's efforts and can coexist nicely with the Community Manager role. These roles, if viewed as separate by a company, should work closely to ensure marketing and social media efforts are aligned. It is helpful to view overall social strategy as the foundation of what the brands want to convey using social media sites, while community management is the maintenance of the relationship with followers and how they react to brand messages.

Since social media is organic, a social media strategy must allow for flexibility on the part of the Community Manager. For example,

aligning scheduled posts with marketing calendars is one example of how this strategy can work, but the Community Manager must be given the authority, responsibility and be held accountable to change wording and timing as appropriate.

In many cases, a touchpoint analysis should be performed regularly to ensure that social media strategy is aligned with the larger business strategy including other departments. For instance, if a link to purchase a product is planned to be shared on a certain date to advertise a sale, the Community Manager should coordinate with the inventory team and site manager to ensure the item is in stock and that the page can handle a large volume of traffic. If a post is a response to a recent crisis, the manager could engage with the brand's PR agency to ensure a consistent message. All of this requires a high level of structural knowledge and a great deal of flexibility with the end goal of syncing marketing and operations.

#### Social Media Governance

Social media governance encompasses everything from the management of vendors developing social media applications to the establishment and enforcement of best practices and overall strategy.

The governance of developers ensures that all Facebook applications are built using the latest knowledge, best practices and Facebook developer guidelines. In addition, a governance team can manage timelines, oversee work with creative and planning agencies, officiate over escalations and provide a defined set of processes to all vendors to drive consistency and lower management costs. This governance team works closely with Community Managers to ensure successful page content launches.

#### Social Media Crisis Management

Many companies do not have a systemic plan in place for an unexpected social media crisis, or if they do, they are limited in scope. Such plans should not only define actions taken by those who manage social media accounts, but should also be a cross-departmental effort involving Human Resources, IT, Marketing, Site Managers, Public Relations and other stakeholders in protecting a company's image amid market "gossip". Since Community Managers should be set up to receive emergency alerts and are familiar with fans, followers and any past controversies, they are in the best position to escalate issues that originate on social media.



## Community Management Services

### Community Manager Objectives

Let's stop to consider the huge responsibilities and critical nature of Community Managers. Many brands boast hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of fans and followers. This results in thousands of comments, opinions, questions, complaints, spam posts and customer service issues, each with the potential to go viral depending on the response (or lack thereof). While only a portion of these fans are considered active/engaged, a brand's Facebook or Twitter presence will quickly become unwieldy without proper management. All of this is in addition to sharing the brand's specific content and messages to the consumer world.

Supporting this role are four key responsibilities: growth, engagement, listening and improvement. Intrinsic knowledge, empowerment and trust are also important attributes.

#### Growth

Growth of a community depends on a variety of factors and efforts. A Community Manager may be asked to begin managing a large existing community or tasked with growing a small one. Tools such as Facebook ads, giveaways, interactive applications and the like are often done in conjunction with marketing and can improve numbers.

#### Engagement

The great challenge faced by Community Managers is understanding and engaging users. An effective Community Manager will recognize and record patterns of communication among followers and adjust interaction accordingly. This is an organic process which takes place each and every day. It is not a quarterly effort that can be quantified with a PowerPoint presentation (though a periodic summary and discussion of learnings should take place). It requires a familiarity with not only the brands, but also the demographics and driving consumer passions that make up the communities they attempt to manage. A nimble approach and minimal red tape is essential to success.

#### Listening

While intrinsic knowledge and a sense of intuition are important and are qualities of a good Community Manager, analytics, listening/monitoring and reporting are essential tools. Brands can choose to pay for a platform with which the manager can schedule and manage these tasks, while others may choose a simpler and

more cost-effective approach such as Google Analytics tagging. The Community Manager can oversee this data collection to ensure regular reporting.

#### Improvement

If a company tracks analytics and sentiment, the Community Manager can interpret the results and apply learnings to future efforts. Many platforms allow brands to measure positive or negative sentiment based on keywords and even track which posts performed best. The Community Manager can track this data over time and create an action plan based on results, thus improving the social media presence over time.

#### Intrinsic Knowledge

At its core, the Community Manager must have significant intrinsic knowledge of Facebook and Twitter (at a minimum), ideally developed not only through professional, but also personal use.

The casual user is not who is looked for; rather, it's the person who understands why certain post types are universally annoying, who knows a trend when they see one, who admits to being addicted to social media and just "gets it". The very casual user will look at social media as a technical tool; the real user will look at it as an ongoing opportunity to connect with as many users as possible—especially those who can grow the business.

Additionally, the Community Manager must have a deep knowledge of the demographic(s) of the brand being managed. While much of this information can come from analytics, consumer data and marketing briefs, it also comes from paying attention to content shared on a brand's page by users. Effectiveness comes from knowing the types of posts that will get a certain reaction as well as those which should be avoided altogether. Much of this intuition comes from a past role that can range from marketing to customer service.

Deep brand knowledge is also essential to an effective Community Manager. Does he or she know the answers to your FAQs (or at least where they can find the answers)? Can they direct customer service questions through the proper channels? A Community Manager needs to know how to get information quickly and convey it efficiently. For this reason, those with a customer service background can make resourceful Community Managers.



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## Empowerment

The best Community Manager in the world will not be effective if he or she must ask permission or consult a team before posting anything. A great deal of autonomy is required to turn around inquiries on a short timeline. While it is recommended that the Community Manager align across other efforts such as traditional marketing and brand websites, the person in this role should be able to function independently without fear of discipline or the constant questioning of decisions. The ability to be confident and effective while managing an online community stems largely from the empowerment of the Community Manager by the company.

## Trust

Closely related to empowerment, the trust placed in a Community Manager is the difference between an effective program and an ineffective one. Community Managers must be trusted to directly communicate with consumers on social media and make judgment calls on a daily basis.

## What is Lacking Today

### Trained Community Managers

In many companies, the Community Manager role is an additional responsibility for Marketing Managers or a public relations resource. Even worse, this role is sometimes taken on by someone with minimal social media experience but has the bandwidth to post status updates. In these cases, strategy, governance, a crisis plan and other important elements are often missing.

### Strategy for Community Management

Strategy is often rudimentary in organizations that do not have a dedicated Community Manager because the same person is often posting to Facebook and Twitter, creating marketing plans and designing traditional advertisements. They do not have the bandwidth or the focus to build and maintain their community and contribute to a comprehensive social strategy. Establishing silos with fluid communication across roles helps maintain checks and balances and ensures an overall strategy is custom-fit to each point of contact in a company.

## Application of Findings

Many free and low-cost social listening and analytics tools are

available for business use; however, what is often lacking is the systematic analysis and application of findings. The practical aspects of these tools allow Community Managers to adjust posts and content, review strategic goals and involve other departments in future plans. One study found that a good deal of companies do collect data, but only about a quarter will actually use it: “Business initiatives targeted by social media data collection and monitoring include brand and reputation management (45%), marketing communications (45%), and customer service (40%). Only 25% indicate they will be integrating social media metrics directly into their business processes.”

## Community Management Services

Gartner defines a helpful maturity model for social programs. This model helps to delineate between rudimentary programs and those which have reached maximum potential. In leveraging this same model, Corbus has helped clients increase the value of their social media programs by providing consultation, training and operational support.

**Level 1: Reactive** - Any Activity is uncoordinated and often underground.

**Level 2: Exploratory** - Pioneers dabble to explore social media opportunities, and share findings and experiences informally

**Level 3: Emerging** - Groups form to set the rules, coordinate activities, share best practices and respond to issues.

**Level 4: Integrated** - A formalized approach exists to organize, integrate and measure social business impact.

**Level 5: Optimizing** - Social becomes less of a focused program and is subsumed into mainline business process and programs.

Source: Use Gartner's Social Business Program Maturity Model to Plan Your Next Move (2012)



## Community Management Services

With an array of highly skilled and experienced resources, Corbus provides a comprehensive solution for your client social media needs. By outsourcing the Community Management role, companies gain additional access to tool and knowledge while allowing their own resources to be freed for other relevant and strategic initiatives.

### Community Management Training and Evaluation

Though a community management program may exist, it is helpful to have a consultation and training session to evaluate internal communication, perform a competitive analysis, apply the latest best practices and ensure the company is well-prepared to improve current programs for maximum results.

### Community Management Operations

Companies are now opting for third-party management of their communities. While considering specifics and brand demographics, day-to-day operations of a community—everything from posting to reporting—are performed while ensuring these functions are executed within a larger strategy. Additionally, these highly specialized resources can be on call during a crisis with access to a vast array of resources.

The organizations that are investigating and applying the above method into their operating model are those beginning to separate themselves from their industry competitors.

### Conclusion

Social media can be both rewarding and risky for any company's products or services. It takes minutes to sign up for a Facebook or Twitter account for a brand, but can take months or years to undo damage caused by just one unmonitored or ignored post. Companies should ensure a well-equipped and empowered Community Manager is in place to manage their brands as well as confirm efforts integrate with a larger social and marketing strategy and crisis plan. With the limited capacity seen in most organizations, the outsourcing of training or the Community Manager role gives companies access to resources needed to identify issues and offer solutions as well as perform operational functions and ensure solid plans and meaningful measurements that achieve results at lower costs.

### References

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### About the Author

Jennifer Reed is a senior project manager at Corbus, where she is instrumental in developing an end-to-end process for social media vendor and application governance. With a background in user experience, social media, digital marketing and eCommerce, she helps brands engage consumers and create meaningful conversations online; Jennifer has worked with some of the biggest CPG, luxury and mom/kid brands in the world. She holds a B.A. in English Humanities from Shawnee State University and an M.A. in Communication from Northern Kentucky University, where her area of study was computer-mediated communication.