



7 strategic purposes for social media for organisations

According to Dr Anmarie Hanlon, in a rush to be relevant, organisations have typically thought too short-term and too tactically when it comes to using social media. Driven by a 'fear of the vacuum' and not wanting to appear absent from any social space—some of which carry unique risks—many have come to grief.

To add sustainable value, social media use should be approached strategically—with purpose in mind—guiding not only which channels your organisation should be communicating through, but carefully considering the rationale for using them too.



A checklist for strategic purposes of social media

In applying the 7 purposes of social media, it is always important to consider:

- a) **Is it relevant?** Does every post clearly relate to your organisation and its brand values?
- b) **Maintaining strategic purpose?** What action should you take to ensure that you can use social media at a strategic level?—as opposed to just adding content for the sake of it.

1

To interact with customers and engage

Customer focused communication is the first priority of social media. Aim to create a dialogue not a monologue. Engagement can be passive, active or planned (e.g. Zoom or Teams seminars). It's wise to establish a system for testing posts before going live to avoid negative responses.

2

To entertain customers

Entertaining posts can work well for B2C businesses, but be very wary in a B2B environment. Posts need to be relevant to the brand and its values. Light-hearted posts can easily backfire if ill-considered.

3

To provide offers and sales

For many B2C companies making sales is the primary purpose of social media interaction. B2B companies use social channels for lead generation or as part of the customer journey (e.g. invites to seminars or to download brochures). In both cases subtlety is important.

4

To gain reviews

Good reviews = increased sales. Posting genuine, attributed reviews is a powerful use of social. Oddly, people tend to trust the views of strangers more than friends and family. Seek customer reviews where possible—reviews can also contribute to customer segmentation, product development, and marketing messaging.

7

Strategic purposes

5

To deliver customer service

Don't offer to deliver customer service via social media unless you really can. Be upfront and if customer service is not offered, give a contact number for it. If your network is geared to offer customer service (Twitter is used a lot for this) ensure everyone across the company is aware of this and fully briefed. The 'rules of engagement' on social must be clear to both staff and customers. It's always best to respond to customer queries as a named person rather than anonymously.

6

For customer segmentation

Collecting data from many sources, social media algorithms allow segmentation of customers by demographics and by online behaviour. This can facilitate more precise targeting of social messages.

7

For brand management and awareness

Much of this happens fortuitously by chance—but brands do need to protect their estate, countering myths and misinformation. To do this organisations need a clear brand management strategy, with IP protections in place, and a system for monitoring to ensure there are no infringements.