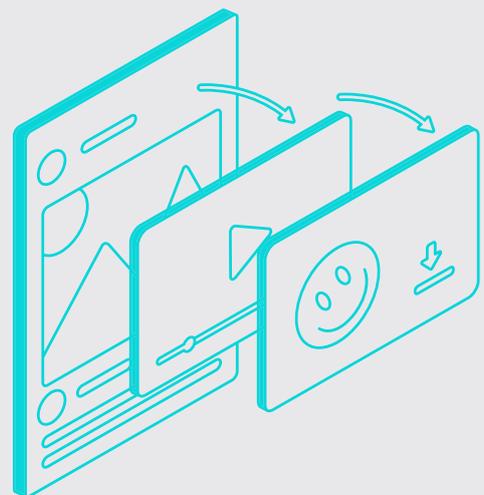


The No-Nonsense Guide to Building a Social Media Strategy

The difference between making some noise and getting lost in it.

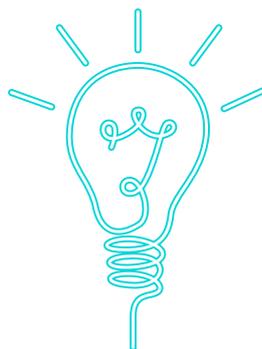


Introduction

Social media is a complex and multifaceted realm. There's an assortment of different platforms (which is expanding through the rise of niche networks), an expansive array of content formats, a lengthy list of best practices, and an ever-evolving set of the latest trends to keep up with. And, on top of that, every brand under the sun is on social media competing for attention and engagement.

In such a dynamic setting, it's crucial to develop a clear strategy to guide your initiatives. Attempting to leverage social media without a well-defined strategy is like trekking through a dense forest with no compass: you're liable to get lost — or, at the very least, you'll struggle to find the most profitable path. Conversely, with a concrete social strategy in place, your efforts will be more decisive, efficient, consistent, and, ultimately, effective.

In the following guide, we'll cover the essential elements you need to create a robust social media strategy, including goals, research, planning, helpful tools, and more.



Let's get started!



Define Your Goals

The legendary Yogi Berra once said, “If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll end up someplace else.” While this paradox was meant to be comedic, the notion rings true for both business and life in general — which is why goal-setting is the first step toward building a social strategy.

Business goals are the foundation of any social media strategy. If you lack clarity in your objectives, your strategy will consequently lack clarity.

So, let’s begin by reviewing six common goal categories you may choose to pursue: →

- **Awareness** - positioning your brand in front of your target audience to establish familiarity.
- **Traffic** - driving users to your website and/or social profiles to take further action.
- **Engagement** - spurring audience interaction to build trust and nurture relationships.
- **Sentiment** - shaping the public perception of your brand to win your audience over.
- **Conversion** - capturing subscribers, leads, and purchases to fuel your bottom line.
- **Customer Experience** - turning your existing customer base into loyal supporters of your brand.

Notice how these categories are aligned with the stages of the marketing funnel. So, for brands, the question becomes: *which segments of the marketing funnel will we prioritize in our social media efforts?*





The modern marketing funnel goes beyond the traditional stages of awareness/consideration/conversion to include loyalty and advocacy after the sale. In other words, happy customers can be one of your brand's most valuable assets.

S.M.A.R.T goals

Once you've considered your overarching goal categories, you'll then need to dig deeper by developing S.M.A.R.T goals within those categories.

A S.M.A.R.T goal is: →

- **Specific** - replacing general concepts with quantifiable outcomes.
- **Measurable** - using objective metrics that can be tracked.
- **Attainable** - setting ambitious, but realistic aims.
- **Relevant** - understanding how the goal ties into the bigger picture.
- **Time-bound** - using dates and deadlines to stay accountable.



To demonstrate, here's an example of a S.M.A.R.T goal within the Traffic category:

“Reach 5,000 unique visitors per month from social channels by February 2021.”

With your goals in place, the next step is to prepare to reach them — and that starts with a combination of thoughtful reflection and diligent research...



Understand Your Target Audience

To resonate on social media, you need to know who you're talking to. This involves identifying, researching, and listening to your target audience to craft content and messaging that's relevant to them.

In the marketing world, customer personas are a primary method for defining target audience segments. A customer persona is essentially a fictitious character (i.e. 'avatar') that you create to represent key traits/characteristics found within your audience.

A complete customer persona will include a detailed profile, with information such as:

Demographics

- Age
- Gender
- Location
- Occupation
- Income
- Marital Status
- Education

Psychographics

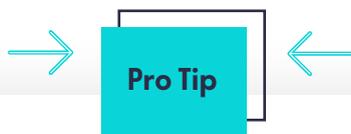
- Personality Traits
- Values
- Attitudes
- Interests
- Behavioral Tendencies

Having these detailed profiles on-hand will allow you to tailor your content accordingly, maximizing its relevance and effectiveness. But, one potential pitfall with customer personas is the temptation to create them based on intuition (rather than data). This results in a set of personas that reflect who you want your audience to be — instead of who they actually are. The solution? Audience research.



Audience research

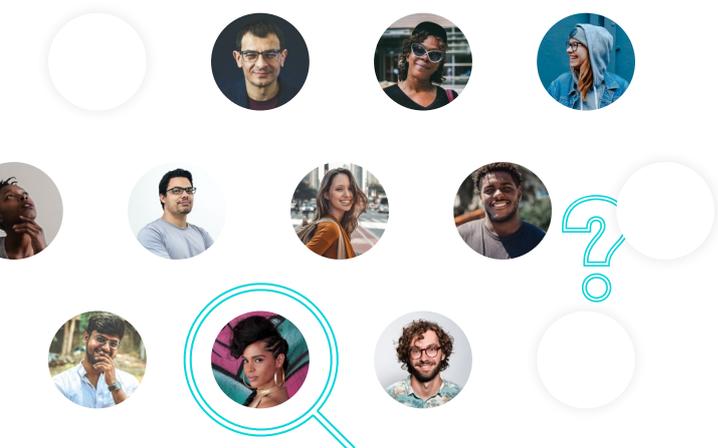
Unless your company just launched, you already have a rich source for audience data: your existing customer base. To learn more about them, implement surveys at various touchpoints (e.g. email, checkout pages, etc.). You should also be carefully analyzing your brand's online reviews, customer service logs, and CRM data to glean insights about their preferences and challenges.



For additional insight, check out your competitors' online reviews to see what their customers are saying (as they'll likely have a lot in common with your audience).

If you already have a social media following, you can use the built-in analytics tools on each platform (Instagram Insights, Twitter Analytics, etc.) to assess your audience's demographics and interests. And, even if you don't have a social following, you can use Facebook Audience Insights to study aggregate data on various segments.

You can also use public forums like Quora to see the questions people are asking about a particular topic, as this will often indicate what they're struggling with. Remember, your goal should not be to simply know who your audience is — but to understand what delights them and, perhaps even more importantly, what their biggest pain points are.



Study the competition

When formulating a social media strategy, you don't have to completely 'reinvent the wheel' from scratch. Observe what other brands in your niche are doing (and what's working for them) to get a lay of the land and guide your own strategy. You can try to beat them at their own game by doing it even better or find underutilized areas to capitalize on.

Put together a list of 5-10 of the top competitors in your space. If you need help, head over to Google and enter search terms related to your products/services. The results on the first page will likely be from the leaders in the field.

When assessing your competitors, here are some key questions to be asking: →

- Which social channels are they most active/popular on?
- What types of content are they posting? (video, images, stories, paid ads, etc.)
- How much engagement are they getting on various channels/content types?
- What tone and aesthetic do they use in their content?



You can view the ads that your competitors are running on Facebook by visiting their page, clicking 'See All' in the Page Transparency section, then selecting 'Go to Ad Library.'

A competitive analysis should not be done with the intent of copying what others are doing. Rather, you should be taking note of general principles, tactics, and trends you see, but with the end-goal of determining how your brand can make its own unique splash in the space.



Focus on the Right Channels

Now it's time to move forward from preparatory considerations into tactical planning. Once your brand's customer personas have been established and a competitive analysis has been performed, the results of both can help inform the decision of which platforms to concentrate on.

Factors to weigh include: where your audience is spending time (think back to your customer personas and competitive analysis), the differences between platforms, your industry, and your goals.

To elaborate, here are some key highlights of the leading networks:



Facebook.

The largest network with over 2B users. Organic reach has declined, but paid ads offer powerful targeting and Groups can be used for community-building. Virtually every audience segment is on Facebook, but younger demographics are now gravitating toward Instagram.

Instagram.

A highly visual platform, increasingly favored by Millennials and Gen Z. Great for growing an engaged following, showcasing products, and partnering with influencers. Primary content formats are images and short videos.

Twitter.

Runs primarily on short text-based updates (Tweets), making it great for brand voice, activism, humor, announcements, and thought leadership. Suitable for both B2C and B2B, with user demographics slightly skewed toward 35-65 year-old males.

LinkedIn.

For B2B brands, LinkedIn is a must. As the premier professional networking site, it's the leading option for sharing business and career-related content. In addition to posts, you can also publish articles directly on the platform, further enhancing its potential as a content marketing channel.





Pinterest.

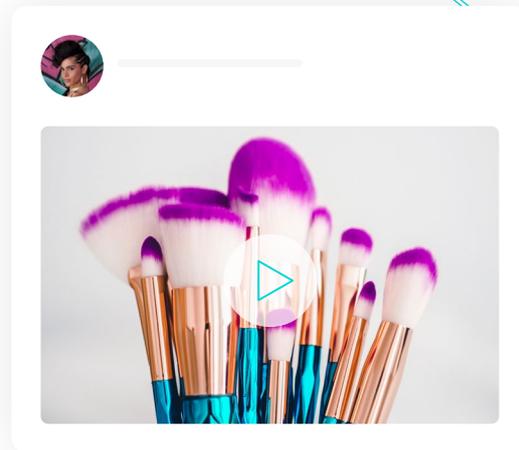
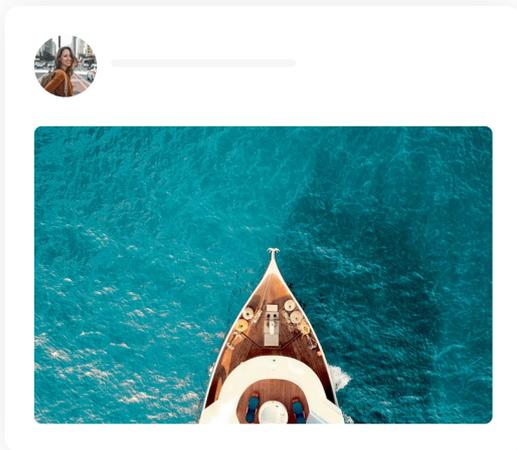
Like Instagram, Pinterest is inherently visual with images as the main content format. The core demographic is women (aged 25-54) and the platform is particularly appealing for ecommerce brands, with 89% of users turning to Pinterest for purchase inspiration.

Snapchat and TikTok.

With short, ephemeral (disappearing) video clips and a highly engaged young user base, these platforms are promising options for brands looking to connect with Gen Z in creative ways.



With your primary channels selected, the next step is to outline a plan for publishing consistent, compelling content to engage your audience within each channel.



Create a Content Gameplan

Content is the lifeblood of social media, which is why everything we've covered so far has been leading up to this critical section.

At this point, you've now compiled a substantial set of useful information to help inform/guide your content creation: →

- **You've pinpointed your goals**, which should influence the content types/formats you use (e.g. branded images for awareness, stories and polls for engagement, product images and demo videos for conversion, etc.)
- **You've defined your customer personas**, which should influence your messaging (e.g. speaking in a relatable way, celebrating the things they love and calling out the pain points that bother them).
- **You've assessed the competition** to see what tactics they're using, what's working for them (and what isn't), and how your brand can differentiate itself.

Now, by tying the above concepts together, you can develop a series of content "buckets" to categorize the content you want to publish. These buckets will bring organization, focus, and clarity to the otherwise hectic endeavor of trying to determine what to post on social media.



Content Bucket #1

To demonstrate, here's a hypothetical content bucket for a fitness app company:



Goal: Awareness

Persona: Motivated Martin

Platform: Instagram

Format/Type: Inspirational branded lifestyle images (fitness)

Messaging: Uplifting remarks on setting fitness goals, rising to athletic challenges, breaking through plateaus

Brand voice

It's okay, and even beneficial, to have a diverse array of different content buckets. But one unifying aspect that should be the same throughout all your buckets is your brand voice. Maintaining a consistent voice across social posts and channels is key to establishing a brand identity.

So, ask yourself, *"if our brand was a person, what would it sound like?"* Would it be bold, quirky, playful, inspirational, dramatic, thoughtful, professional? ...the list goes on. And you don't have to select just one tone. Rather, you can compile a collection of adjectives to paint a more holistic picture.

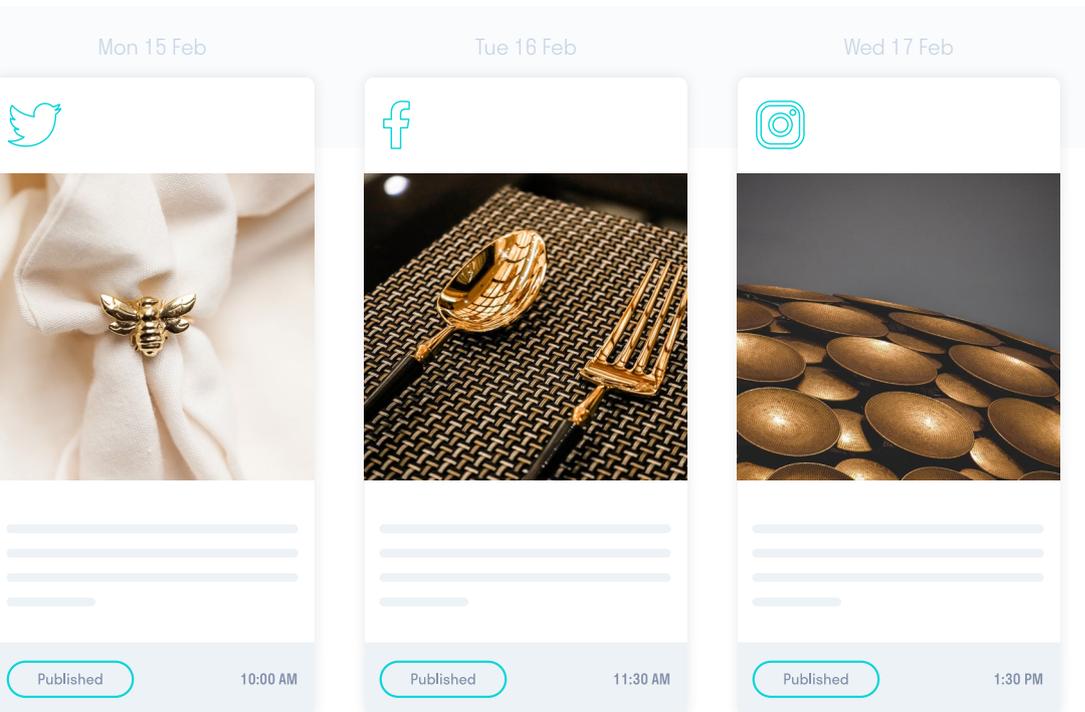
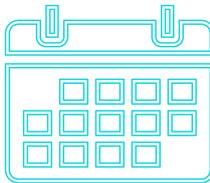


For example, here are our very own brand voice guidelines at [Falcon.io](https://falcon.io):

- **Thoughtful** but not absorbed
- **Bold** but not arrogant
- **Fun** but not silly
- **Simple** but not boring
- **Friendly** but not invasive
- **Ambitious** but not reckless

Scheduling

Lastly, you should implement a content calendar to stay on top of your posting activities. In addition to the day of the week, your publishing calendar should also take optimal social media posting times into account. You can put your calendar together manually, but it's advisable to use a social media scheduling tool to streamline the process.



And on that note...



Leverage Helpful Tools

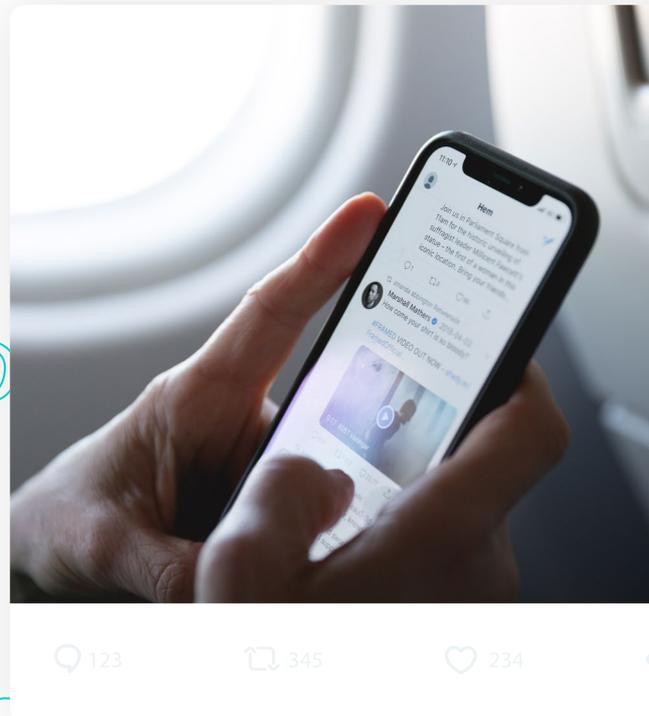
We know what you must be thinking at this point. That with all these different social media channels, target audiences, SMART goals, and strategies, you'll have to be on social media around the clock just to keep up.

But no.

There's an abundance of social media tools out there to make your life a whole lot easier—and you really should take advantage.

Like any modern marketing tactic, social media is half art, half science. The tools we're listing here will at least help you accomplish the science part.

Here goes.





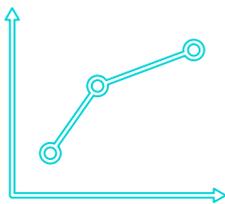
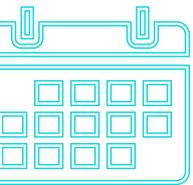
Falcon

Falcon was voted a G2 leader in social media management tools for several consecutive years. It's easy to learn and absolutely vital if your brand is (or is planning to be) posting frequently on more than one social media platform.

Our tool has many features but the sum of all its parts is that you can easily manage all your accounts and build your following on social media in a smooth, efficient way.

Features include: →

- **Scheduling your content across your channels in advance.** (tweets, Facebooks posts, Instagram updates, and whatnot from the same tab)
- **Managing** all your social messages **from the same inbox.**
- **Creating your own feeds** where you can display the messages, users, and keywords that are most relevant to your workflow. This makes, say, re-tweeting, engaging, and exploring your audience way easier.
- **Tracking your performance** in customizable reports that you can share directly with your boss and colleagues.
- Also, you can: **benchmark against competitors or industry leaders**, set up social listening projects, and manage ad campaigns to name a few other helpful things.





Canva

[Canva](#) is a real fan favorite for any social media marketer that needs to create custom on-brand graphics for their brand's social media channels. The website has so many different templates which not only inspire but also makes it super easy to create branded images, memes, infographics and much more.

It's kind of addictive, actually.



HypeAuditor

We all want to grow our follower base (the sooner the better, right?) but fake followers only look good for a second and ultimately hurts your engagement rates. [HypeAuditor](#) was built for fraud detection, but that's a bit of an understatement. You can use it to analyze your own audience and weed out fake followers, so you know your actual organic reach.

Same thing applies to potential influencers you want to work with. You can analyze influencer profiles, dig into each audience, and quickly determine if something doesn't look right. Like, say, if you detect unrealistic follower growth or bot-generated comments.

In short, it gives you a better idea about audience quality.





Lightroom

Adobe's [Lightroom](#) is a photo editing tool that's easy to use even if you don't have that much editing experience. When you're dealing with a medium as visual as social media, it's important to create vibrant, on-brand photos. With this tool you get sliders, filters, and presets in a complete and truly intuitive photo editor.

Best part is that Lightroom is available on both desktop, mobile, and tablet, and that all edits are immediately updated on all devices.



BuzzSumo

Okay, so with [BuzzSumo](#) you can analyze the most popular content on any given subject. This is incredibly valuable when you're trying to understand what kind of content you should be producing to keep your audience interested and engaged. It also can help if you're working with curated content as part of your social strategy.



Quora

Most people know [Quora](#) as a helpful question-and-answer website where questions are asked, pondered, discussed, and answered by its opinionated community. For marketers, however, that is only step one. Not only is Quora great for getting your questions about social media answered, but you can also use it to identify the most common questions people have about your industry (which, of course, should give you a lot of ideas about what content to create and share with your audience).



Analyze & Refine

With the concepts and guidelines above, you now have everything you need to create a clear, robust social media strategy for your brand. As mentioned previously, having this strategy in place will allow you to be more decisive, efficient, consistent, and, ultimately, effective on social media.

That being said, you shouldn't take off your 'strategist hat' the moment you complete your initial strategy document. Rather, once you begin acting on your strategy, you should periodically review your performance to learn from your successes and identify weak areas to improve.

When assessing your social media performance, the truth is in the data — which means you'll be digging into your KPIs and other metrics. Need some help? We've got you covered! For further reading, be sure to check out our free ebook, [How to Measure Your Social Media ROI](#).



To Inspire You:

The following strategy is a hypothetical example for a fictitious fitness app company.

Fitnesta - Q1 Social Media Strategy

Goals	Awareness: 15k new followers by April 2021 Conversion: 5k new app downloads by April 2021
Customer Personas	 Motivated Martin: male, age 30-38, urban area, corporate job, feels like he's falling out of shape in his 30's and is eager to reverse that.  Busy Brenda: female, age 28-35, suburban area, middle income, struggles to find time for fitness, balancing work, young kids, etc.
Primary Platforms	Instagram and Facebook
Brand Voice	Upbeat, motivational, understanding, with a dash of humor

Content Buckets

<p>Bucket #1</p>  <p>Goal: Awareness Customer Persona: Motivated Martin Platform: Instagram Format/Type: Inspirational branded lifestyle images (fitness) Messaging: Uplifting remarks on setting fitness goals, rising to athletic challenges, breaking through plateaus</p>	<p>Bucket #2</p>  <p>Goal: Awareness Customer Persona: Busy Brenda Platform: Instagram Format/Type: Short video clips demonstrating simple yet effective at-home calisthenics with no equipment Messaging: Highlight pain point of finding time to work out and convenience of these exercises</p>	<p>Bucket #3</p>  <p>Goal: Conversion Customer Persona: Busy Brenda & Motivated Martin Platform: Facebook & Instagram Format/Type: Paid ads - Demo videos of the app with CTA to download Messaging: Benefits of the app, conversion copywriting</p>
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Final thoughts

Reading the eBook is half the battle.

Now you know exactly what it takes to stand out and how to make social media work for your business.

You know the ins and outs of **SMART goals**, **psychographics**, **content gameplans**, and **brand voice**—all invaluable when it comes to building a following with scroll-stopping social media content.



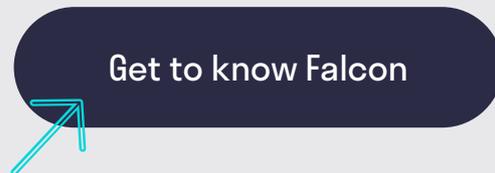
Since you're all good on SoMe, you might want to read one of our other free and helpful eBooks:

- [Our Fluff-Free Guide to Instagram Marketing](#)
- [The Easy as Pie Social Media Return on Investment \(ROI\) Guide](#)
- [10 Digital Marketing Trends You Need to Know](#)



Or...

If you want to dive even further into the benefits of using premium social media management software, then...





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