

The logo for Third Wave, featuring the words "Third" and "Wave" stacked vertically in a bold, white, sans-serif font, set against a solid black rounded square background.

**Third
Wave**

Social Media Strategy Framework

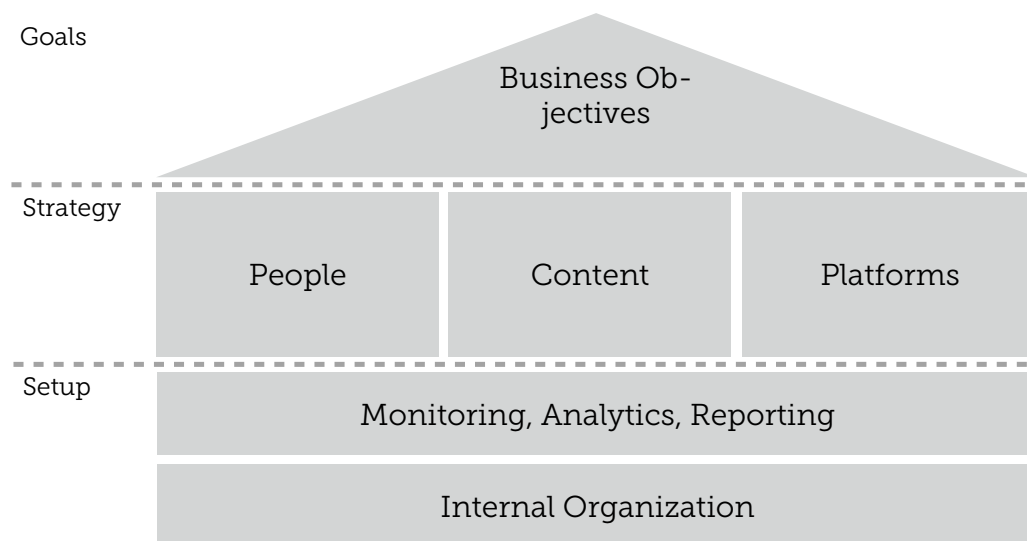
A comprehensive guide to develop and implement strategies for communicating on the social web.

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Introduction

Over the last few years, we have been developing our own approach to developing social media strategies. First individually at our former agencies and jobs, and then through the last 1.5 years together, this framework has been iterated numerous times and has grown a bit more mature with every client we've worked with. It has been informed by countless insights and inspirations from all kinds of folks in the industry and beyond. We now feel it's time to publish our approach to give back and open it up for more people to improve and advance it.

Overview



The framework is meant as a guide, which helps us work through a process with our clients in a structured way. It tackles the questions, which help us define the answers that turn make up the strategy.

1. Goals

No strategy makes sense without clear goals.

Business Objectives

What goals does the company want to achieve with the help of social media?

What business metrics are the benchmarks for the strategy's success?

2. Strategy

The strategy is developed to achieve the goals.

People

Who do we want to talk with? What is there to know about them? About their interests, their goals, their lives, their behavior, etc.?

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Content

What do we want to talk about? What are the topics and ideas? What is the added value that we want to provide on the social web?

Platforms

Where do we want to talk with them? Which platforms are the best for the people we want to reach and the content we want to talk about?

3. Setup

A strategy needs to be implemented and constantly tested and improved.

Monitoring, Analytics, Reporting

How can we listen to what people say about us and the topic relevant to us?
How do we measure what our strategy achieves? How do we gain insight and improve our approach?

Internal Organization

Who is in charge of the strategy inside the company? What roles and teams need to be designated? What processes need to be in place? Which vendors need to be brought in?

About Third Wave

We develop strategies and ideas for the digital world and are part think tank, part agency and part business consultancy. Our expertise comprises the fields of strategy development, innovation consulting, marketing & public relations and social media & social business. We are based in Berlin.

We analyze how digital technologies change our life and our behaviors. We help our clients understand and leverage these changes.

Our clients in five countries include Deutsche Welle, DLD Conference, Jovoto, MTV Networks, Netzpiloten, NEXT Conference, Postbank, redpeppix, Routehappy, Serious Fun, Westlotto, Wirecard, Wolters Kluwer and ZEIT Online, as well as a wide range of agencies.

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Part I: Business Objectives

Choosing a destination

Mike Arauz recently defined strategy as “the practice of figuring out the best way to get from here to there.” That idea is at the heart of this social media strategy framework. But before we can figure out the way, we actually have to define the “there.”¹ It’s impossible to consult a route planner without being able to give a destination.

Strategy is “the practice of figuring out the best way to get from here to there.”

This actually explains a lot when looking at many social media efforts out there. The brand or company just got out the door and started moving without knowing where they were headed. They kept making decisions about the next step of the journey by looking at their immediate surroundings and choosing what seems right without thinking about where it will take them in the long-term.

Guess what? This is a completely reasonable approach. It’s basic exploring and being guided by serendipity. It can be a really great experience, especially in a new area that there is much more to learn about. It can be an appropriate strategic approach.

But if it remains the only approach of getting around and journeying in an area, it’s very exhausting and inefficient. We need to choose our destination, apply our gained knowledge and figure out the path we want to take to get there.

That’s the stage that most companies are right in now, when it comes to their social media strategy. They need to move from exploring the field to choosing concrete goals and then setting out to reach them.

How to choose the “there”

Choosing a destination always starts by taking a closer look at where we are right now and how we want to advance from this place. What positive effects are we seeing, and what challenges and problems are we facing right now? And how could social media help with them?

The goals a company chooses for its social media strategy are highly individual and dependent on that company’s unique situation. We can only make some recommendations based on our experiences with the clients we’ve worked with.

¹ Companies that are not sure about their “here” have another kind of problem that we’re also very willing to help with.

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Goals should always be connected to the business side of things. That's why we labeled this element of the framework 'business objectives.' That doesn't mean that the social media strategy should have to 'sell product' right from the start. It nevertheless should be connected to that goal in the long-term. A strategy that doesn't help the long-term growth of the business is a hobby. And we think it's time that social media turns from a hobby into a viable part of the business strategy.

Goals should always be connected to the business side of things.

We've seen good results emerge from working with the management to understand the business challenges they are facing and then connecting the social media strategy to one or more of them. From establishing a new distribution channel to gaining more insight into target-group. From getting up to speed with digital communication to getting more customer involvement in product development. The possibilities are endless and social media can help with a lot of these.

A good **set of goals** comes down to these points:

- A good mix between external (new distribution channel) and internal (rejuvenating the company) goals.
- Goals should come from more than one department. If the strategy is only informed by the marketing or PR department, it will fall short.
- The goals should be organized into short-term, middle-term and long-term to provide a good mix between actionable next steps, a plan and a vision.
- Goals should be quantifiable and measurable to the extent that is possible. If no metric is available, a new one should be established². Fluffy goals sound nice in a powerpoint but won't get the buy-in from the management and the employees. For us, a good measure of the quality of the goals is if we see the clients' eyes light up when we explain the goals we've chosen. If they gain hope that social media will actually do something for them, they will get behind the effort.

When you have a clear set of goals that are a good mix and seem tough to reach but not too tough, you have defined a good "there". Now that you know where you want to go, it's time to figure out how to get there from here. It's time to define a strategy.

² We will talk in detail about measurement in the part about Analysis.

Part II: People

Most of the industry's approaches to social media in the last few years have been led by technology or platform hypes. From corporate blogs to communities to social networks to YouTube to Twitter to Social Media Newsrooms to Facebook to Quora/Pinterest/etc. Whatever was the talk of town when someone at a company discovered social media become the "strategy." And not much has changed. "Do we need to be on Pinterest?" is asked by companies all around and shows how little is still understood about the underlying principles of social media. It's still perceived as mainly new technologies, a new communication channel, new tools or a mixture of that.

We think that all of these are symptoms of a much more fundamental behavior change in how we humans communicate and interact. This shift is much slower than the emergence of new platforms and tools but also much deeper in

Each social media strategy that only plans for tools and not for behaviors will ultimately fail.

the fabric of our society. That's why we think that each social media strategy that only plans for tools and not for behaviors will ultimately fail. Thankfully, we're seeing a lot more right answers to the question about the rele-

vance of Pinterest in the form of another question: "Depends. Whom are you catering to?" This shifts the focus to the right viewpoint: people.

We have to put the people we want to communicate with at the very start of every social media strategy. Everything else evolves from that.

So, after we have defined the business objectives for the social media strategy with the client, we go into an intense workshop and research phase in which we try to make ourselves and the client as familiar as possible with the people we want to reach.

Defining a set of target groups³

There are a ton of ways to approach this, and which way is the right one depends heavily on the client's preexisting knowledge and materials. If the client already has a pretty clear picture of its target groups, we can go ahead and focus on the target groups' digital behavior and preferences in communication etc.

³ We're not very fond of the term "target group." It seems to reduce people to "buckets of consumers." Nevertheless, it's an established industry term. We're trying to counter that connotation with keeping descriptions of people in target groups as human as possible. We want our clients to understand the complexity of the people they want to talk to and embrace that in the strategy.

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If the client is not sure about whom to talk with on the social web, we take a step back and work through some questions like:

- What are your usual target groups?
- What target groups do you want to tap into in the future?
- Who likes you, and who not so much?
- Whom have you been struggling with?
- If you were to have all the resources in the world, whom would you go for?

These questions will help to get the mind open about what might be possible and also gives the client a better idea of what social media might help with.

It's good to keep in mind that there are a lot of different types of target groups. They can be based on socio-demographic data, on people with similar behaviors, on individuals or groups of people/networks. It's always interesting to explore if a different approach to a target group might open up a new and helpful approach.

Getting to know a target group

When a set of target groups is roughly defined, it's time to dive deep into everything there is to know about each target group. We usually pull data from three types of sources:

- **Client data:** Everything the client already knows about the target group like internal market studies, focus groups, and personas. But also material that the client might not even be fully aware of, like insights from web analytics and statistics from existing social media activities.
- **Desk research:** We try to get our hands on every study available out there that is remotely connected to the target group and/or the market of the client⁴. From market research by the likes of Forrester, eMarketer and many, many more to media data released by the big publishing and media companies.
- **Listening:** We believe that it's crucial for a viable strategy to be based on insights about the target group extracted not only from talking about them but talking with them. It's one of the big downfalls of our industry that we usually only talk to our target groups when we want to create vox pops to convince the client of our strategy. We need to listen with a much more open mind to what they are saying (explicitly or implicitly). We should do this by asking them questions directly as well as looking at what they say online (social media monitoring/analytics).

⁴ It's one of the great joys for us in our job that with every new client, we can dig deep into another industry or industry branch and learn as much as possible.

Third Wave - Social Media Strategy Framework

A good approach is to find the most interesting voices of the target group online and then invite them for an interview.

After we've gathered all the material we can get, we condense it into the most important characteristics and insights about the target group to paint a detailed picture of them. Everything we come up with afterwards has to be in line with this picture. It informs the kind of conversation (content) the client will have on the social web and where it will happen (platforms). Like the question of whether Pinterest is a good fit for a client.

Part III: Content

After we find out as much as possible about the people we want to communicate with in our social media strategy, it's time to define the content of the conversation we want to have with them.

The basic principles of good conversation

The core principle of every conversation is acting and reacting, saying something and replying to something. As having a conversation is at the heart of social media, this also needs to be the starting point for a content strategy. A company has to define what topics it wants to talk about and what it can add to a conversation about them. But like a good participant in a conversation, it should also react to questions, feedback and discussions.

It's like being part of a conversation at a cocktail party. A group of people is standing together and chatting. A person joins the group. Now, the conversation would be instantly over if that person were to jump right into the middle and shout

“Hey, look at me! I’m so shiny and cool! Let’s all talk about me, ok? Of course I want to hear criticism. But when I’m done here, I’m gonna walk over to that group over there and only mention all the positive stuff you said about me, even if it is out of context. By the way, if you whisper my name to the bartender, he will give you a fancy keychain with my name on it so you don’t forget about me.”

No. A good participant in a conversation will be polite and first listen in to get the topic and the tonality of the conversation. She will introduce herself to give people some context but won't pitch or boast about herself. She will offer some ideas and suggestions to the current topic without hijacking the conversation. When the time is right, she will offer a new topic that she thinks is interesting to the round, based on the conversations before. She will answer questions directed at her in clear words and listen to any suggestions and feedback attentively. People simply enjoy the conversation with her. They feel like they've taken something away from the conversation and were able to offer some suggestions that have been heard. This, in my humble opinion, is how companies should behave on the social web.

Campaigns vs. continuous streams

A key insight for developing a content strategy for the social web is this classic insight by Ben Malbon:

Brands must make a dramatic shift from highly polished epic launches to a continuous and diverse stream of messaging and content.

There are still way too many examples out there of brands simply applying their usual communication patterns to social media. The results are highly polished social media campaigns that produce very little in the way of lasting results. They disregard the unique dynamics of social media like the network growth effect (exponential growth means that a campaign is usually already over before it can gain real momentum on the social web).

We believe that a company or brand that wants to participate in the social web needs a good mix of continuous conversation and engaging action. Here's how we approach a strategy for this mix.

The 3-layer-model

To define the mix, we have been working with a simple model, consisting of three layers: Grundrauschen (German for ambient noise), added value and campaigns. These three layers work together to create a unique mix of content coming from a brand or company on the social web.

1. Grundrauschen

This is the ongoing, daily conversation a company has with its customers on the social web. Talking about everything connected to the company, the brands and the products as much as what's on the customers' minds. It's everything a customer wants to know and talk about if she connects to a company on the social web.

2. Added Value

The Grundrauschen is the start of the conversation. But talking about the company and products isn't enough anymore. Customers can also get that from the company website and a newsletter, for example. A company has to offer something unique for people to come back and stay connected with the company.

To define this added value, a company should look for the unique expertise and insight it can offer. Like an FMCG brand offering advice for cooking and preparing food instead of just talking about their products. Like a car company talking about mobility etc.

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These questions might help to figure out the added value:

- What unique knowledge can I offer that makes my customers smarter, not only about my products but about the topics connected to them?
- What will make my customers say “If you disappeared from the social web, I would really miss your ...”?
- What can I give my customers that will make them look good in conversations?

The added value isn't just a one-off thing. It's an added layer to the continuous conversation. It has to be broad enough to provide material for a long time and deep enough to be presented in all kinds of formats (little tips, videos, tools etc.).

3. Campaigns

Grundrauschen and added value are the foundation for continuous conversation with the customers and anybody else interested in the brand and the topics. They are mainly focussed on the company's existing communities on social media platforms. The goal is to keep the connection alive and thriving.

Out of the Grundrauschen and the added value, topics and ideas sometimes emerge that have the potential to be bigger. They have the potential to gain attention for the company and lead people to the existing communities. This is where campaigns come in. Campaigns are built on top of the Grundrauschen and the added value. They are larger, temporary activities that reach out to the social web and beyond. The best campaigns actually combine classic, digital and social media for maximum impact.

Campaigns can take all kinds of shapes and forms and their details are usually not part of a general social media strategy. They are part of the implementation and the planning.

Nevertheless, one thing should always be kept in mind: the best social media campaigns are developed and executed with the existing communities involved.

Further parts of a content strategy

Tonality

There's a well-known cartoon by Hugh Macleod that says...

*If you talked to people the way advertising talked to people,
they'd punch you in the face.*

This holds as true now as it ever has. In the Social Web, there is a conversation between companies and consumers as well as a conversation between people among themselves. Finding the right tonality is essential.

Ground Rules

We recommend following some ground rules when communicating on the Social Web:

- **Real dialog:** Act the way you would in a real conversation with a friend or acquaintance. Listen, and reply in a timely manner.
- **Engage at eye level:** Don't talk down to anyone.
- **No ads:** Don't use Social Media for advertising, but for facts and authentic conversations.
- **Honesty:** Only talk about your product's strengths if you're truly convinced of them yourself.
- **Be open for criticism:** The more confidently and respectfully a brand handles criticism, the more trustworthy it becomes.
- **Show appreciation:** Thank your fans and highlight their efforts publicly.
- **Be tactful:** You don't have to be part of every conversation. Develop a feeling for when the users just want to talk among themselves.

Obviously, there's much more that could be part of a content strategy. But following the models, guidelines and rules introduced above will cover the most important grounds and will make a good starting point for a content strategy that will have to be iterated along the way constantly.

With that, after figuring out whom to talk with and what to talk about, it's time to look at where the conversations should take place.

Part IV: Platforms

Don't start with this

As described in the part about People, this is where most social media “strategies” start these days: by choosing a platform that is hot right now before any-

Don't choose the vehicle before choosing the destination, just because a lot of people seem to like it for whatever reasons.

thing else. By now, it should be clear why we consider this to be a bad approach to social media. It's basically choosing the vehicle before choosing the destination, just because a lot of people seem to like it for whatever reasons.

Following our framework, we have already defined the business objectives we want to achieve, gotten a closer look at the people we want to talk with and have chosen what to talk about. This gives us the ability to make much more informed decisions about where the conversations should take place than just going for the latest hype.

Defining a set of platforms

There's a mind-blowingly large number of social media platforms out there. And the landscape is changing all the time. New platforms go live every day, others are bought and closed. This is usually the part of the presentation when we social media experts would show you Brian Solis' "[social media flower](#)" with the sole purpose of scaring you with the breadth and diversity of platforms available for a social media strategy. Let's just say that we need a strategic approach to defining the right set of platforms for our strategy.

That approach is actually pretty straightforward. First, we need to define a set of criteria based on everything we learned and defined so far about Goals, People and Content. Then we can prioritize the relevant platforms into a list based on the criteria.

Here's a good **example set of criteria**:

- Does it fit your 'added value'?
Is the platform well suited to distribute your content and engage with it?
- How is the reach?
Is your target audience active on the platform, and can you reach a significant part of the audience there?
- Can you build relationships?
How well can your brand build relationships with your customers on the platform?

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- Opportunities for brands?
Are brands welcome on the platform, and what are the opportunities for them to engage their audiences there?
- Existing accounts?
Do you have existing accounts on this platform and have you already gained some experience with the community?

We found that a scale from zero to three points works best for us. It's a good way to start comparing platforms without going too deep into details. At the end of this, you will have a list of platforms that seem to be the best fit for your strategy so far. Now, the final decision regarding which platforms to approach first should be informed by this list, but in the end it has to come from the gut.

A company should always go for the platforms it feels comfortable with, especially in the beginning. If I'm new in town, I most probably will head first to the parties where I know some people and share the preferred tonality before trying to find some new people and places that might be interesting to me and my business.

A company should always go for the platforms it feels comfortable with, especially in the beginning.

Keep that set of criteria close by. It comes in handy when the next hyped platform emerges, as it gives you a quick way to evaluate if you should inspect the new player more closely.

Building your own community?

A word about the possibility of building your own community platform. This still holds big appeal for companies as it allows for total control over the experience and the relationships. In times when Facebook seems to change what brands can do on their platform every week, this seems like a better alternative.

You need to find a very plausible reason in 2012 to build your own thing.

You need to find a very plausible reason in 2012 to build your own thing. People are already heavily involved in networks and communities on the web. You'd have to give 'em something absolutely amazing to convince them to invest their time and attention into yet another social network.

And yes, it is possible. If you've found a group of people with a niche interest that hasn't been catered to yet or that hasn't built its own set of platforms yet, there is an opportunity to create a community. It's a very rare case, though.

Social as an integral part of communications

We think that it's not only important to choose the platforms according to the strategy but also to integrate them into the overall communication efforts of a company from the start.

Social media should never happen in isolation, in a sandbox without context and connection to other campaigns and service initiatives. The customer is not distinguishing between the different types and formats and neither should we. Only when social media has its place in the combined efforts of a company can it find its purpose and special role for a company.

To work out how all the different entities should work together, we've seen the best results from working with the Bought-Owned-Earned media model. No doubt, there will be contexts where a different model will be more appropriate. And there will come a time soon, when this model is outdated, no doubt about it. But until then, this model remains one of the most accurate for us.

1. Bought Media

This is the classic media stuff, the attention you can buy with hard cash. The TVCs, the posters, the Above-The-Line-stuff. But also the AdWords and SEM campaigns, the social/engagement ads, the seeding of virals etc.

This stuff isn't going anywhere and still has its mission. It's here to gain the attention of our customers. And it does that much better than any of the other media types because it's so fast and can go anywhere. You can set up a Facebook page for a campaign and see almost no traction before the campaign is already over. Put some money into Facebook ads and your page will get the attention you want. Now, instead of building a campaign page, do it all on your brand/company page so that you can have a continuous conversation with the people you gained through the campaign and with the bought media and you will get some long-term results.

2. Owned media

These are all the platforms and accounts that you own, where you can call the shots and define the experience. These are your stores, your websites, but also your social media accounts like your Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. This is where you want all your leads and customers to end up so that you can have a continuous relationship with them. Unfortunately, you have to get them there first, since they won't be on your platforms from the start. This is why you need the help of the other media formats. But the other media formats are also a waste of time and money if you don't have your own platforms where you can cultivate the relationship. Without owned media, every bought media campaign has to start from zero attention and will take much more budget and momentum to get going. But with a cultivated customer base, that grows bigger with every campaign, every new campaign gets a bigger head start.

An ecosystem of owned media should be well balanced to foster to the interests of the customers. Usually a company will use its websites to provide all the information a customer wants about the company and the products.

An ecosystem of owned media should be well balanced to foster to the interests of the customers.

A Facebook page will connect the customer with other customers and keep her posted about new things happening. Twitter accounts might provide coupons for upselling or a 1-to-1 channel for solving service problems. All of the platforms are heavily cross-linked.

That's just an example. Defining this ecosystem of owned platforms and accounts is an important part of a platform strategy and should be highly individual for any company and its customers.

3. Earned media

I always call this the "Holy Grail" of social media. It's all the attention you can't buy but have to earn⁵. It's customers being so happy with your products that they tell all their friends. It's bloggers blogging, Twitterers twittering, Video-Bloggers publishing videos etc. It's 5-star ratings on customer review portals.

The "Holy Grail" of social media

In times when people trust the recommendations of their peers much more than traditional advertising, it's the gold currency. Earned media is very tough and slow to gain, but once it's getting momentum for a company, it will create enormous, long-lasting results, bigger than any other media format. But it's also very fragile and can be gone in a second if a company messes up.

Now, as earned media has to be, well, earned, a company can't force it into existence. Nevertheless, part of the strategy should be a plan for fostering it. This ranges from making sure that products and service are top-notch to encourage customers to leave reviews and give bloggers access, etc. But the main way to gain earned media is to give customers the clear feeling that company puts them first. This will come through in everything a company does. How it communicates, how it cares about problems, how it listens, etc. This is much bigger issue for a company than just its social media strategy. It's one of the most interesting aspects about social media: if a passion for the customers doesn't come from the heart of the company, its social media efforts will always show that.

So, this is how the bought-owned-earned media model can help to define an integrated ecosystem of platforms and communication efforts where every entity does what it does best and works with the others.

⁵ Some might argue that you can buy bloggers to write about you, for example. But for me that's plain bought media then, because that's how the people will perceive it. Most people are usually pretty good at spotting bought media disguised as earned media.

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We now have defined our social media strategy by looking at the people we want to talk with, the content we want to talk about and the platforms we want to have the conversation on. Next up: defining how this strategy is iterated and implemented.

Part V: Analysis

Measuring Success

We like to work from data. To know if you're successful, you should try to measure your activities against pre-defined metrics that match your goals. So let's talk a bit about analytics & measurement.

Iterative Strategy Development

Digital communications are complex. So your strategies, actions, tools and campaigns should be permanently tested, analyzed and adapted.

“You can only improve what you measure.”

The traditional model was to work from one big strategy through a test with a consumer focus group, and after some little adjustments to launch a big campaign. You'd measure the results and then start over. It's a powerful process, but a slow, sluggish one. If it fails, it fails big. Chances are, it will.

Instead, we recommend working from more and smaller ideas. “Little Strategy”, [David Armano](#) calls it. You take this little strategy into an iterative cycle of planning, launch, constant measuring. The insights you generate along the way help you adjust while you keep going. It's much more agile, in the sense that software developers use the word. You get to results faster, and if you fail it won't hurt but rather strengthen you. At the core of this is constant analysis.

A scenario of future communications planning

We think that marketing managers will work much more like stock brokers in the future. Instead of one big campaign that gets all the resources, they will have somewhere between 10 and 100 little initiatives going simultaneously, all with only a little budget behind them.

Powerful analytics tools will help the manager to make real-time decisions about each initiative. Which one is performing well? Which one could do better with a little bit more energy behind

it? Which one is clearly failing and can be canceled? Most of the budget will be in a big pool that the manager can draw from for individual initiatives that perform well. We think that this is most probably the only way to work the uber complex network of niche interests and nuanced target-groups. It's almost impossible to predict the outcome of a big campaign so we have to change our approach to a thousand fires of small communications, investments and ideas.

We think that marketing managers will work much more like stock brokers in the future.

Monitoring, Analytics, Reporting

When we say “analysis”, we use it as an umbrella term that spans monitoring, analytics and reporting.

- **Monitoring** helps you listen outside your owned platforms.
- **Analytics** help you listen on your owned platforms.
- **Reports** help you make sense of what you’ve heard.

Monitoring tools help you analyze the public conversations on Social Media platforms. Monitoring gives you a glimpse into your customers their sentiment towards your brand and products, their interests and needs. These tools are available from a wide variety of vendors, and you need to test which one fits your needs best.

Analytics are strong in Social Media, and easily accessible. More than in most other communication channels, engagement can be measured well here. Many platforms offer detailed measurements and analytics around users’ engagement with your content.

Reporting the results of Monitoring and Analytics is the basis on which to develop true insights, which will help you adapt and optimize your strategies.

Let’s expand on these a bit more.

Monitoring

Successful monitoring requires two things:

- **Clearly defined questions:** To get to useful insights, you need to know what you want to know.
- **Establish processes:** In order to make most out of the insights your monitoring generates, you need processes that make sure that these insights get to the right people and places, and can be implemented.

To give you a better feeling for monitoring, typical approaches may include:

- **Topic radar:** A regular snapshot evaluates the online conversations around your key topics (retail, banking, design...).
- **Opportunities for engagement:** Constant monitoring identifies opportunities to engage with users around the topics you’re an established expert in. This could mean answering questions about these topics in general, or about your brand in particular.
- **Feedback:** Expand on the regular snapshots to include opinions about your brand or products, and based on this develop concrete recommendations for further action.

About the monitoring industry

We're still in the infancy of the vendor industry around social media monitoring. Most monitoring tools available out there are still mostly a display of their technical capabilities but fail to act as a true source of insights. This has led to most monitoring strategies being driven by whatever the chosen vendor can offer, instead of developing a clear strategy of what insights a company wants to see before choosing the vendor.

Analytics

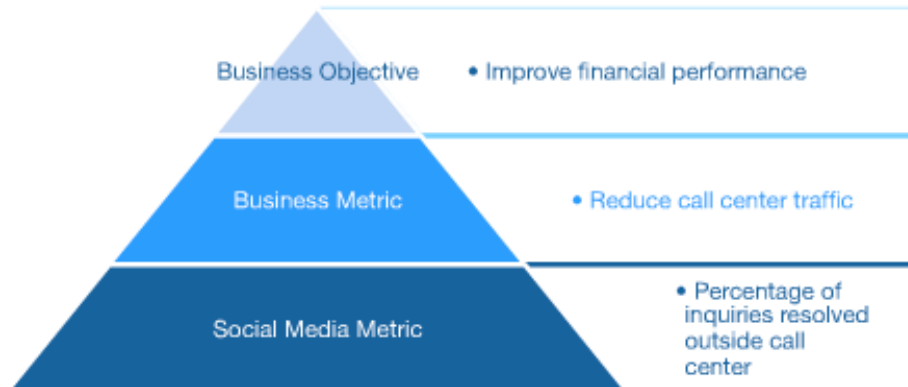
"There is no single ROI for social media."

–Richard Binhammer, Dell Inc.

How to measure Social Media? The discussion around the best Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) has been going strong for quite a while now. While no universally accepted KPIs have emerged as of yet, there is a growing consensus on the basic approach:

1. Define clear goals that match your business processes and metrics.
2. Regularly adapt your KPIs and metrics according to new insights and industry consensus.

Altimeter Group developed a [measurement framework](#) that helps define the metrics you need. Imagine a pyramid that is made of three layers. Top to bottom: Business Objective, Business Metric, Social Media Metric.



Source: Altimeter Group

Business Objectives are the clearly defined objectives that a company or department strives for. Typical business objectives include increasing sales, exploring a new target audience or increasing brand awareness.

Business Metric: To make the business objectives measurable, metrics are defined for every one of these objectives. The metrics could come in different flavors ranging from sentiment analysis to lead generation or cost reduction.

Third Wave - Social Media Strategy Framework

Initially, each metric is watched closely. Based on the insights, objectives are defined around these metrics over a certain period of time.

Social Media Metric: At the lowest level, social media metrics are measured. They can show quickly which activities lead to good results. Typical social media metrics include Likes, fans, followers, views etc.

This brings us back to the first part of the social media strategy framework: the definition of business objectives. The set of metrics chosen should be as close to the business metrics as possible to make sure that the social media engagement keeps on track to achieve those goals.

Reporting

Just *having* data won't help much to improve a strategy and engagement. We have seen companies drowning in data collected from the social web who, having no idea what to do with all the information, just stopped collecting.

Regular reports can be a good way to take all the data collected from monitoring and analytics and analyze them for learnings and insights, which then can be applied to the company and the strategy and turned into actionable recommendations. This a part of the strategy that profits greatly from pure experience. Pattern recognition capabilities and a vast pool of knowledge are needed to look at data and draw the right conclusions from them.

To give you an example, reports could be structured like this:

- **Monthly: Social Media Metrics Report**

An analysis of last month's social media metrics and overview of the monitoring results. Recommendations for concrete activities in the daily social media engagements.

- **Every three months: Business Metrics Report**

Analysis of business metrics and recommendations for optimizing the social media strategy for short-term and mid-term objectives.

- **Every six months: Business Objectives Report**

Analysis of the progress towards business objectives based on the ongoing reports. An executive summary of key findings and recommendations for the top level management. If applicable, a revision of the mid-term and long-term objectives.

No report will change anything if it's only glanced at and thrown into a drawer. Reports are there to improve the strategy and that's how they should be built: with a complete focus on the meaning of results and clear actionable next steps.

Third Wave - Social Media Strategy Framework

A strategy that is iterated constantly stays current and flexible. It adapts to new objectives, target-groups and platforms on-the-fly. And it will never be outdated. But in the end, its success comes down to a different aspect: how it's implemented in the company. That's what we will look at for our final installment about our social media strategy framework.

Part VI: Internal Organization

Why social media strategies fail

There are numerous reasons why a social media strategy might fail. It could have started without any clear goals. It could have chosen the wrong platforms. It may have missed the right tonality. And many more.

But when I look at most of the social media efforts out there that have stumbled in one way or another, the source of the problem almost always comes down to an internal failure in the organization.

I've seen companies with the best intentions, which had solid social media strategies fail because of internal politics and unclear processes and structures.

This is the main reason why our social media strategy work with our clients has been shifting constantly into business consulting territory, away from just communications in marketing and PR. All we have learned over the recent years suggests that for social media to be successful for a company in the long term, it has to be deeply integrated in the company's structures. This takes time and effort, and helping to build these structures takes both a different skill set and a different mandate than the average agency out there might have.

Here are some of the most common hurdles that stand in the way of a social media strategy's success, and how to overcome them.

Working with internal politics

In my experience, there is no greater threat to the long-term success of social media strategies than the internal politics of a company.

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Everything we talked about in this social media strategy framework can be worked out perfectly well. But when it comes to the questions of budgets and positions, the

questions of "who owns this?" and finally "who will get more power?", everything might go up in smoke. Because in the end, all the business objectives and metrics usually take a back seat to the individual interests of the different stakeholders involved. This is deeply engrained in the incentive structures of many large organizations.

As an consultancy, we try to plan for that by first getting to know as much as possible about the internal politics right from the start and then to work them into our strategy, making sure that each stakeholder gets their fair share as long as that doesn't get in the way of the overall goals.

Third Wave - Social Media Strategy Framework

But we also let the client know that this will only work to a certain extent and that they have to put their personal interests behind a common interest if they want their social media strategy to work.

Internal politics are difficult for every business strategy. But social media is still in its infancy and often misunderstood, so getting the buy-in from everyone is tough. It takes a certain amount of vision to grasp the role of social media in the future and that it's worth putting the whole company's interests first for this.

Our recommendation for companies working on their social media strategy is to put the politics on the table from the start. The longer they are ignored in the process, the more likely it is that the strategy will backfire in the end.

Fighting silo thinking

Social media has this strange capability to display the internal structure and politics to the outside world. If a company is thinking as one, everybody working together, it will show. But it will also show when a company is riven and torn apart by individual politics of each department: just as social media can amplify your brand message, it also amplifies the visibility of your internal problems⁶. Your structure is showing.

Each product manager creating their own Facebook page with content that oftentimes overlaps. Marketing and PR departments fighting for the lead on the social web. Customer service talking to people complaining on the social web, not realizing how that might reflect on the brand. Crowdsourcing contests that obviously haven't been worked out with the product development team and where the results will never get where they need to go.

Your structure is showing.

The problem with all of this is that it confuses the customer and reflects badly on the brand. Typical examples of this?

- A customer wants to know more about a brand, and instead she finds four different Facebook pages that all have kind of the same content.
- Different Twitter accounts give different information about a product detail.
- A service question on a campaign page doesn't get answered.

⁶ I remember pitch situations where I was able to predict not only the internal structure of a company but also who was working with whom and who did their own thing without talking to anyone else just by mapping out everything the company did on the social web.

Organizing for social media

The key task in this part of implementing the social media strategy is to create an internal structure that can bring all the involved departments and stakeholders – and that can mean most of the company’s teams – together to speak with one voice on the social web⁷. It means to find a way to coordinate all the different social media engagements of a company to work with each other.

What this structure could look like is highly individual for every company. But there are a few best practices that can be a starting point.

The Social Media Committee

To really push the point: social media has to be a joined effort. It must not be owned by one department! This will clash with the usual hierarchical structure of most traditional companies. So we have to find a way to get interdepartmental cooperation, usually with a project group or committee that each department sends a participant to. This committee will steer the social media effort of the whole company. It will help coordinate and synchronize all individual engagements and make sure that the company speaks with one voice.

Social media must not be owned by one department!

This committee is responsible for creating, implementing and iterating the social media strategy of the company. The more each participant buys into a shared vision of the company’s social media engagement, the better it will work.

The Social Media Manager

The social media committee appoints a social media manager. Her role is to be the internal expert and manager for everything social media. She knows about all the individual social media efforts and works with each department to help with knowledge and insight. She’s not the one creating content for Facebook pages, etc. But if a department needs some help with that, she will find someone.

This person should be someone who is well connected inside the company and can handle the internal politics properly. Each department might appoint its own social media manager. The company’s social media manager will lead those and coordinate between them.

⁷ One voice in this case doesn’t mean that it only has to be one person speaking, or that communication has to sound as if it’s all coming from one person. But it should mean that different people don’t contradict each other and that all the activities are coordinated.

The Community Manager

While the social media manager is focused inwards, the community manager is the connection to the outside, the communities on the social web⁸. She deals daily with the communities, the fans, the followers, the customers. She knows who they are, how they think, what makes them happy, what makes them angry etc. She gains tremendous insight about the communities over time and plays a vital role in any social media effort by the company.

She is the direct line between the company and the communities. The communities, in turn, see her as the human face of the company. If they have a problem, a wish, a request, they talk to her. They trust her to have their best interests in mind and to represent them inside the company.

For the company, she's the spokesperson of the communities. She should be part of every meeting where inside-knowledge about them is needed. She will say things like "No, the community will hate that." She's also the direct channel of the company into the communities if there are questions to ask them, or if the company wants to collaborate with the communities.

Depending on the size of the company and other factors, a company can have one or more community managers that can be organized as an individual team or can be connected to different departments or projects.

Collaborating with vendors

Outsource as little as possible! We strongly believe that a company should keep its social media efforts internal to the extent possible, and only outsource when absolutely necessary.

First off, customers want to talk to the company directly on the social web. That's the big advantage of the social web: a direct channel into the company. If the company puts an intermediary between itself and the customers, they feel like the company is not really interested in the conversation with them. If this is really the case, it will show.

But the bigger issue is that the ongoing conversation with the customers on the social web creates communities that are based on the company's relationship with its customers. This relationship is of tremendous value for the company. It delivers insights and feedback from the customers and provides a continuous line of communication directly to the most engaged fans of the brand.

The relationships with customer communities are of tremendous value for the company.

Does a brand really want to outsource this relationship to an agency or a ven-

⁸ Communities here are understood as all the fans, followers, customers or any other people who are somehow connected to a company on the social web. The people who have liked the company's Facebook page are a community. As are the followers of a Twitter account, for example.

Third Wave - Social Media Strategy Framework

dor? And what happens when the contract expires or the company wants to change the agency? The relationship to the communities and all the knowledge gained about them will be gone with the agency, or the company will be bound to the agency for a long time.

No, this knowledge and this relationship have to be deep-seated inside the company, as they will gain more and more influence on the decision-making process, and will become a long-term investment that has to be cultivated and protected.

The role of agencies and vendors is to give advice and help execute the tactical measures of the social media strategy like campaigns and design. They can provide the technology and the tools to help the company with analytics and managing the conversation. But they shouldn't be the keyholders to the community.

Company culture

As this series about our social media strategy framework has shown, we see social media strategy as the gateway to the future of a company. Social media has this amazing power to put on display how ready a company is to move into a future marketplace that is very different from the one we can already see changing now.

All of the factors described in this article that influence the implementation of a company's social media strategy are part of that company's culture. The structure, the politics, the collaboration between departments, the interest in the customer, and many more. In relation to social media, these can give a company a pretty good idea of where it stands. Is it embracing the opportunities of the social web to get much closer to its customers, or does it feel driven by the changing world of markets and communications? Where between these two poles does it stand?

This is why we see the development of a social media strategy as a long-term process, something that changes the company over time. First come internal changes, before moving on to engaging in external conversations. Depending on the company culture, results can show more quickly, or take a bit longer.

The journey with companies towards a more social future is at the heart of Third Wave.

And you know what, it's okay to take a bit longer. We really don't expect companies to change overnight, particularly because of something that still seems to be very fuzzy and prone to change in the future. We're still at the beginning of how social media will really change communications, and from there on out, the whole company. Right now, the only way to catch a clearer glimpse of that future is to take a leap of faith.

Taking journeys with companies towards a more social future is at the heart of what we enjoy working on at Third Wave. It has its risks and it takes time, but we truly believe that social media can be a catalyst for more humane companies. And if you're interested in that journey, we would like to help. Let's have coffee.

