6

Communicating with Social Media

When communicating with social media, you face many opportunities. You have almost endless opportunities to access information, to stay in contact with people in your network, to access up-to-the-minute information for decision making, and to let your voice be heard on any topic of your choosing.

Along with the opportunities, you face challenges. Social media communication can enable you to network, but it can also interfere with your work. It can get you hired but also get you fired. It can help you win a customer but also lose a customer. It can enable you to post messages to many people you know, yet it can prevent you from knowing to whom your messages are being forwarded. Other challenges include the ability to post messages in haste or in anger, to take messages out of context, and to forward sensitive messages to unintended audiences. Given these challenges and opportunities, you need to understand and apply effective communication principles more than ever before.

This chapter focuses on critical communication principles related to social media. The focus is less on specific technologies that are constantly changing and more on principles that you can apply even as new technologies emerge.

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- Explain what social media is and what its functions are.
- Apply the PACS framework (purpose, audience, context, strategy) for planning and creating social media communication.

Understanding Social Media and Its Functions

Social media communication involves the intersection of people, platforms, content, networks, and functionality. People use online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube to communicate and share content. Other people act as audiences as they read, watch, or otherwise engage with the content. This content—live or delayed—includes text, video, audio, and images. Although some platforms specialize in sharing one specific type of content, most enable you to share multiple types with audiences in your network. Your network might include customers, clients, suppliers, colleagues at work, friends, and classmates.

Social media communication builds on a model of many-to-many communication (see Figure 6.1). In contrast to a one-to-many model in which audiences passively read or watch a company's content, many-to-many communication enables audiences to actively react to and interact with your company's content. Audiences can comment on, share, critique, and analyze your content in social media posts, blogs, wikis, and online product reviews.

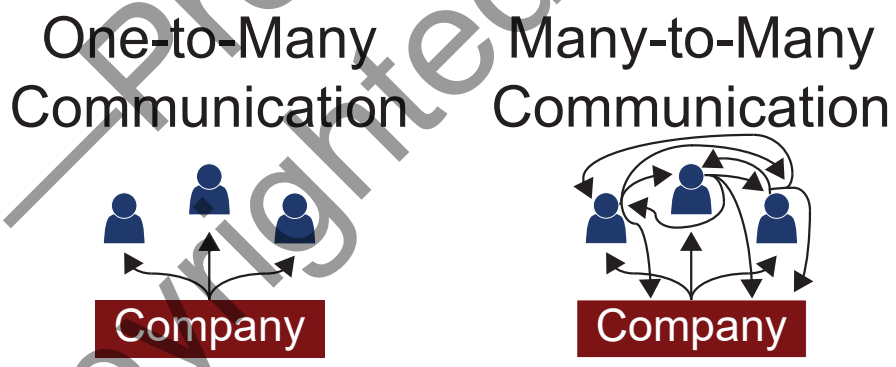

Figure 6.1 *Social media enables many-to-many communication.*

To help you understand the breadth of social media and the possible reactions of your network to the content you post, the next few paragraphs review 14 common functions of social media (listed in alphabetic order).

- **Blogging**. Blogs are websites written in conversational style and are added to regularly. The term "blog" is a word created from the words *web log*. Thus, a blog is often a log of activities or a series of thoughts written over time about a particular topic. Popular blogging sites include WordPress, Blogger.com, or Medium. A company can promote its blog's content through its other social media channels, encouraging customers to

- **Building awareness**. Awareness objectives aim to help an audience notice you, your organization, your brand, or your products.
- **Facilitating consideration**. Consideration objectives aim to help an audience learn more as they consider taking some action.
- **Enabling conversion**. Conversion objectives aim to help an audience commit to the action.

To illustrate these objectives, let's assume that you post on your social media accounts about the new product that your organization will be bringing to market next month. By posting, you build awareness of the product among your professional network of customers and future customers. If your company has prepared marketing information about the product such as white papers or technical specifications, you could create a second post linking to that information so your network can learn about and consider purchasing the product. Finally, you could post another link to a website where customers can preorder the product. Conversion occurs when people click on the link and pay for the product on the website. With these three posts, you work toward all three objectives: building awareness, facilitating consideration, and achieving conversion.

Set Metrics. After setting your goals and objectives, you will want to measure whether you are achieving them. Social media platforms track the performance of your posts and report it to you in the form of data metrics. You can use these metrics, often called *social media analytics*, to track your progress toward your objectives (see Figure 6.2).

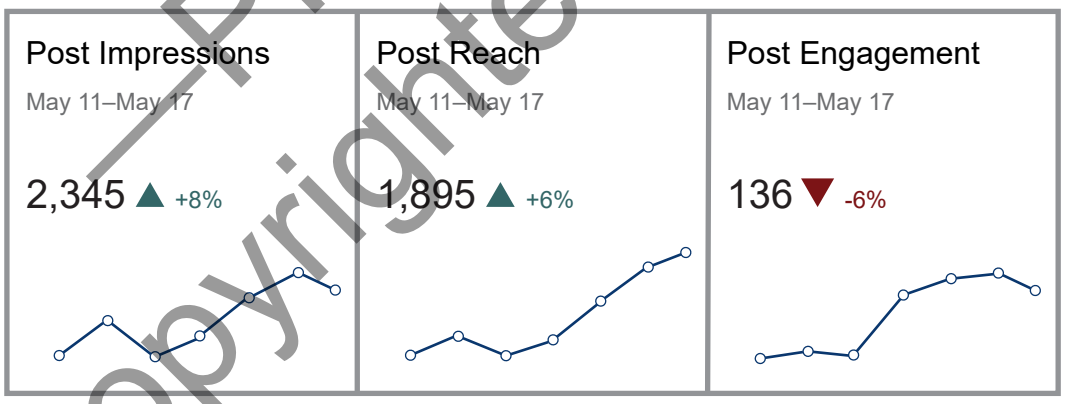

Figure 6.2 *Social media analytics enable you to track your progress toward your objectives.*

The following sections include a few common metrics (and their calculations) that may be available to you through your social media platforms. These metrics are organized by the objectives they measure.

Awareness. Common measures for awareness include Account Net Audience Growth, Post Impressions, and Post Reach.

To plan this content, create a social media calendar (see Figure 6.10). A social media calendar is a schedule that lists the date, time, content, and platform of the social media communication you plan to post. Creating a social media calendar enables you to think through the timing, frequency, and content of your social media posts in advance.

19	20	21	22 EARTH DAY!	23
Blog *8 a.m.* New post reviewing batteries	**Blog**	**Blog**	**Blog** *8 a.m.* New post on our company's Earth Day initiatives	**Blog** *N/A*
Twitter *8 a.m*. "Check out our review of the top 5 electric scooter batteries on the market"	**Twitter** *8 a.m.* Preview Thursday's Earth Day contest	**Twitter** *8 a.m.* Remind about Thursday's Earth Day contest; post promotional video	**Twitter** *8 a.m*. Call to action for Earth Day sale going on through the end of today; link to sale webpage *12 p.m.* #TBT image of first electric scooter produced by our company	**Twitter** *9 a.m*. Announce Earth Day contest winners
LinkedIn *4 p.m.* New post reviewing the state of battery technology for electric scotters	**LinkedIn**	**LinkedIn**	**LinkedIn** *4 p.m.* New post based on interviews of college students who use our scooters	**LinkedIn**
Facebook *8 p.m.* Post new video of our electric scooter lab's battery review	**Facebook** *8 p.m.* Preview Thursday's Earth Day contest	**Facebook** *8 p.m.* Remind about Thursday's Earth Day contest; post promotional video	**Facebook** *8 a.m.* Promote Earth Day contest 8 p.m. Post about closing time of Earth Day sale	**Facebook** *9 a.m*. Announce Earth Day contest winners

Figure 6.10 *Create a social media calendar to think through and plan the timing, frequency, and content of your social media posts.*

As you create your calendar, you can find ideas or data online about how frequently you should post content on each social media platform. However, recognize that such information is often based on average preferences and not on the specific preferences of your audience. Therefore, be sure to also base your posting times and frequency on your own best thinking and the metrics from your own posts targeted to your specific audience.

Recognize that social media platforms or other external applications (e.g., HootSuite) enable you to create, store and schedule your content in advance. Then at the appointed time and date, the content will be posted on the platform you have designated. If you schedule your content in advance, scrutinize the days you select so you don't post content that would detract from or seem offensive on a holiday or other significant day. Further, if a public-relations crisis or some other crisis occurs, consider suspending any automatic posting so you can carefully control the messages being posted in light of the new internal or external context.

A benefit-focused title

PAST: A CHECKLIST FOR AVOIDING EMAIL REMORSE

Hook

Most of us have likely experienced that moment of sender's remorse when we click "send" and then realize that we have forgotten an attachment or misspelled something in the message! Such remorse may be delayed, yet be equally poignant, when we send a message and then receive an awkward reply that reads, "You forgot the attachment," or "I think you meant to send this to Julie Benson instead of Julie Baxter." To avoid such situations, use the PAST acronym.

Main point

Headings that reinforce the agenda.

P: Proofread

Before sending a message, I quickly proofread it, looking for both lower-order and higher-order concerns. Regarding lower-order sentence-level concerns, many of my grammatical mistakes occur after I've written something and then have revised—fixing a verb here or a noun there without carefully reading the correction in context. Therefore, in my proofreading step, I quickly skim the message from beginning to end, finding the errors that can be caught only in context (subject-verb agreement, ambiguous pronouns, etc.). Skimming the entire message also helps prepare me to address higher-order concerns, such as the organization or strategy.

A: Attachment

After I proofread, I check to see if I have included any attachments referred to in the message. Checking for attachments after writing the message serves as a nice verification step for me, but I've also heard of others who take a more proactive stance—they attach the attachments before beginning the email or when they mention the attachments as they write the email.

Body paragraphs follow CLOUD standards

S: Subject

Reviewing the subject line helps me catch two types of problems. The first review checks for coherence between the subject line and the content. Because email programs present the subject-line field before the message field (scrolling top to bottom on a screen), I usually fill out the subject line before writing my message. Then, if my message topic or purpose shifts while I'm actually composing the message, the subject line no longer fits and a change of the subject line is needed.

A second subject-line review checks for appropriate reader appeal. If my subject line is vague or conveys the idea that the message is low in importance, the recipient may either delay reading or not read the email at all. After proofreading my message, I have a clear idea of what I want the recipient to do after reading the email, and I can update my subject accordingly. In this way, I ensure that the subject is clear and accurate and communicates appropriate urgency, increasing the likelihood that the reader will read and respond the way I hope.

T: To

The final step in the PAST checklist is to double check the To, CC, and BCC fields in my emails. Too frequently we hear about individuals who are fired because they accidentally copied a customer on an email that was meant to be sent only to a coworker. It's easy for me to understand how such a mistake can be made. For example, I might type "ju" into the "to" field, expecting "Julie Benson" to auto-populate. However, "Julie Baxter" might pop up first, and I might accidentally select the wrong person if I'm not careful. I also know how easy it is to hit the "reply all" button instead of the "reply" button. By taking just a moment to check the To, CC, and BCC fields before sending, I reduce the likelihood of sending these types of potentially job-threatening emails.

PAST Benefits

Using the PAST acronym will take a little more time than some writers might prefer to spend on emails. However, because so many of my email mistakes occur when I am in a rush, taking a moment to run through the PAST process helps me to slow down a little and prevents many errors from happening.

Closing that summarizes and restates benefits

Although other technology-based strategies can also be employed to cut down on sender's remorse (e.g., setting a time delay on all messages sent in Outlook or enabling Gmail's "undo" feature), a quick PAST review will catch errors that technology will miss. Therefore, consider using the PAST checklist as you send your future emails!

If you use any other methods to cut down on sender's remorse, I'd love to hear about them in the comments.

An invitation for the audience to engage

Figure 6.12 Blog posts should be tailored to your specific circumstances but can include a hook, main point, headings, body, and closing.