11 Strategies to Increase Engagement

Have you ever found yourself at a crowded party, stuck in a boring conversation with someone who seems content to talk only about themselves? Their interests, their accomplishments ... after a while, you begin to tune them out.

Conversely, you might notice that a good conversation is more like an easy volley between tennis players, with appropriate questions and useful, thoughtful, honest answers moving back and forth in a timely fashion. When both sides are engaged in this way, everyone has a good time.

Companies in the social media space who seek to form an ongoing relationship with their audience must observe the same rules of politesse when planning and executing a social media strategy. The goal is not just to tell people how great you are, but to underscore how important they—and their feedback—are to you, and to ask them for information you can use to serve them better.

It is important to keep your goals in mind when crafting your social media plan. Do you want to increase sales? Create a stronger brand identity and awareness? Get more sign-ups for your e-newsletter? Having specific goals will help you focus your approach.

Engaging users can provide multiple benefits. For example:

- You can get people talking about your brand.
- You can learn more about your customers.
- You can learn more about your competitors.

Based on the above, you can develop—and solicit feedback on—new marketing strategies to communicate with potential customers more effectively in the future. To reap these benefits, you must be prepared to engage your audience with a number of different entertaining tactics that benefit your customers.

Below, we outline 11 effective strategies for increasing engagement:

1. Ask Questions
2. Offer A Deal Or Promotion
3. Hold A Contest
4. Create A Game
5. Host A Live Chat
6. Use Photos and Videos
7. Have An Opinion (Even If It's Not Popular)
8. Engage Your Most Passionate Fans
9. Create Stars
10. Host A Guest Post
11. Ask For Engagement
1. Ask Questions

The strategy: Engage your users with relevant questions, in the form of Twitter and Facebook posts, polls and other opinion trackers.

Best practices: Don’t worry about asking questions that specifically pertain to your business, but rather, questions that people on your site would be interested in answering, so that the result is increased engagement. You can use keyword trackers (https://freekeywords.wordtracker.com/keyword-questions/) to determine the questions your customers are already asking around a certain subject. Questions can be posed to users via Twitter, Facebook, or in the form of polls, surveys and quizzes. The more questions you ask, the more engagement you’ll get—and if your business can sustain posing a daily question, you’ll have users coming back to check for new questions and answers on the regular.

Examples: MLB.com’s daily question will necessarily have to do with the most controversial baseball matches and issues of the day, usually centered around a big game or rivalry about which fans have strong opinions. While this provides fans with entertainment, Mashable.com, a site providing news about the dot-com world, provides tech industry folks with research results they can use, by posing questions to users about their favorite tech devices, websites and the like. While the polls are hosted on their website, Mashable also cross-posts the questions to Twitter and Facebook to up their engagement factor. Users know they can return each day for new, interesting questions and results, which builds a regular audience, and a high-level of engagement between users, for both sites.

Why these work: These sites make it easy to engage. They make it clear that they—and their readers—are interested in hearing the answers. And they make sure that the questions and answers are relevant, interesting, and if possible, useful to their readers.

2. Offer A Deal Or Promotion

The strategy: Generate engagement by giving things away. Truth is over 54% of social media users follow at least one brand. More importantly, the number one reason why most people follow brands is to “get a special offer” according to several studies. So a highly effective way to increase engagement is to play to that desire.

Best practices: Offer small deals consistently to build your readership base and get them coming back to your site. You don’t need to give away your own product—any product that is attractive to your desired audience will achieve your goal of engagement. Partner with other companies to package smaller deals together for some added value and cross promotion. Consider inviting your users to follow, friend, or become a fan of your social networking site to become eligible for deals, submit their email addresses for follow-up, or simply leave a comment on your blog, to increase engagement.
**Example:** Mars Chocolate North America coordinated 50,000 Mars Random Acts of Chocolate on Sept. 6 2011 by delivering free samples of its iconic chocolate brands to New Yorkers via bike messengers in Manhattan. Mars Random Acts of Chocolate was developed to distribute nine million of the company’s chocolate products to fans across the United States this fall.

Americans were also able score free M&M’S, Snickers, TWIX, 3 Musketeers or Milky Way brand chocolates a number of other ways, including logging onto either the M&M’S, Snickers, TWIX, 3 Musketeers or Milky Way Facebook pages on Sept. 8 2011 to secure a free coupon of their choice, as well as the opportunity to give a free coupon to one of their Facebook friends (while supplies last).

“We all know that chocolate can instantly brighten someone’s day,” said Debra A. Sandler, Chief Consumer Officer, Mars Chocolate North America. “We plan to do our part to brighten moods in America by distributing more than nine million free chocolate bars, but we also encourage our fans to show how thoughtful they are by doing a Mars Random Acts of Chocolate for someone they care about.”

**Why these work:** Deals like these get users to visit your site more frequently, spend more time on the site, give feedback on the products you’re promoting, share your deals with their friends, and, if the deal involves an experience, bring their friends along when they visit your business to use the deal.

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3. **Hold A Contest**

**The strategy:** Similar to the one above. Give something away -- usually on a bigger scale, with increased participation and build-up to the announcement of the winner.

**Best practices:** Start with a goal--for example, gaining more fans and followers, improving brand visibility or identity, or driving more traffic to your site. Then look for ways to use cross-promotion to up the visibility and participation in your contest. When planning your contest, keep in mind that the spoils do not have to go to the users themselves; often, social media campaigns center around asking users to vote for a cause or organization to win much-needed dollars or resources.
Example: USA Today’s #America Wants Twitter Campaign. A full case study is available at ThoughtPick.com: http://blog.thoughtpick.com/2010/05/usa-todays-america-wants-twitter-campaign-learn-social-media-by-example.html

Quick Stats:

Social Media Channels Used: Twitter http://twitter.com/USATODAY

Target Audience: Charitable & Non-Profit Organizations

Appeal: Charity & prize (a full-page, full-color ad in USA Today, valued at $189,400)

Date: 13-16 April, 2010

USA Today is a national American daily newspaper published by the Gannett Company, founded by Al Neuharth. The newspaper vies with The Wall Street Journal for the position of having the widest circulation of any newspaper in the United States, something it previously held since 2003.

According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations, the paper has 1.9 million copies as of October 2009. USA Today remains the widest circulated print newspaper in the United States.

Idea & Objectives: The #AmericaWants hashtag contest was conceived by Social Media strategist Alex Nicholson as part of USA Today’s larger “What America Wants” brand campaign, designed to illustrate USA Today’s connection with the American experience and readers’ engagement with the brand on multiple media platforms.

The charity that had the most retweets of the message “#AmericanWants [charity name] to get a full-page ad in USA TODAY” with its name in the tweet between Tuesday, April 13 and Friday, April 16 was declared the victor.


“USA TODAY’s Kindness community is thrilled to announce that To Write Love on Her Arms (http://www.twloha.com/index.php) (TWLOHA), a non-profit dedicated to helping people with depression, addiction, self-injury and suicide came out on top with the most tweets in our #AmericaWants Twitter campaign for charity”!

Buzz Generated: All in all, users posted more than 60,000 tweets in support of more than 500 organizations. The tweets reached an estimated 67 million users on Twitter.

But what else played a role in this campaign’s success?

- Simple + quick + charitable + rewarding = ingredients for a great and effective campaign:
- Short-lived and straight forward campaigns have the power to attract and maintain attention. Depending on the type of your campaign, sometimes it is best to have a quick “in and out” strategy in order to achieve the results you are aiming for.
- A simple campaign, which utilizes one social media channel, can have the same outcomes as one which utilizes more than one channel. It is not always about quantity, quality counts as well!
• It is hard to say no to participating in charity-based campaigns! People want to give and be part of a better world.
• Rewards, in general, have the power to drive more people to a campaign. Rewards should be studied according to
  the needs and characteristics of the target audience in order to be effective and alluring!

Why these work: By asking users to Tweet about their favorite charity, USA Today drew new users to their Twitter feed and became
associated with the good causes they sought to promote, while their followers’ favorite charities also enjoyed a boost in publicity
due to USA Today’s visibility in the media. (For the record, To Write Love On Her Arms, a charity combating depression and suicide,
garnered the highest number of votes.) Meanwhile, Southwest Airlines—whose Facebook fan page boasts over 1.6 million fans
and counting—frequently offers deals and contest eligibility to “fans only,” leading savvy travelers to follow them for deals. Both
campaigns increased engagement, grew the companies’ social media audience, and spread a message that was consistent with (or
improved upon) the brand’s identity.

4. Create a Game

The strategy: Increase the engagement of a particular customer base, and/or
underscore a particular brand message, with a customized online game.

Best practices: Before you decide this option is for you, review the cost, as game
development can be expensive. Look for opportunities to cross-promote with
a game company if possible. Make sure the game developed for your brand
communicates your brand message and expresses what you want to say. Choose
your target game player carefully (and don’t bother designing games for which
your audience has no time or aptitude). Consider the difference between a game
that will be played solo, completely within the Internet space, and an interactive
game that requires users to join teams or go places in their city.

Example: SCVNGR’s game for Swarovski’s “Discover Your Light” campaign.

Why it Works: The game, which was produced in conjunction with an
independent film and the up-and-coming game developer SCVNGR, underscores
Swarovski’s message of romance, adventure, youth and sophistication. The crystal
jewelry was portrayed as “treasure” with a treasure hunt that allowed users to
try out SCVNGR’s service as they roamed the city looking for Swarovski’s goods. It
increased engagement with both companies and likely generated useful feedback
and buzz for both products.

5. Host a Live Chat

The strategy: Invite users to witness and/or join an actual conversation around a topic related
to your brand.

Best practices: Keep content relevant, keep it moving, keep it interesting, and keep it clean.
You don’t need special software to experiment with the elements of live chat, which can be
incorporated into your existing social media. I.e. inviting people to live-tweet at an event
you’re already hosting, comment on your Facebook page about a project that’s underway,
or contribute questions to a conversation happening between two experts in your industry
online or via video. This method works especially well for specialized audiences of people
who don’t normally have the opportunity to converse IRL (in real life).

Example: WWE’s Live Chat, #Awarenessinc Webinars, Social Media Examiner Guest Chats

Why these work: WWE.com hosts a chat session around each weekly TV show (RAW and
Smackdown) and all live Pay-Per-View events that resembles a sports talk show: moderators
banter, comment on the action, and select user comments to highlight that carry the
conversation forward. Users are thus encouraged to keep posting, and to post clever
commentary, in order to make it into the public conversation. Meanwhile, Awareness hosts bi-weekly webinars with social media experts and thought leaders to allow users in the space to learn new trends and best. Interaction is encouraged by inviting audience members to ask questions of the host and presenter via twitter using the hashtag #awarnessinc. Typically, webinars lose audience over time (on average 20% as the session goes on). On the average Awareness webinar the audience grows by 20%, something organizers associate with the conversation happening on twitter.

In both cases, users can also visit the site to view past conversations. These examples represent two opposite points of a spectrum that encompasses passionate, playful conversation around a recreational sport, as well as straightforward conversation and resources offered to serious businesspeople about their industry. Both provide an interesting, dynamic and honest way of presenting information to the people who want it.

6. Use Photos And Videos

**The strategy:** The cliche says that a picture is worth a thousand words, and it’s true. You can use images and videos to say something about your company, invite opinions, tagging, and sharing. About 65% of people are mainly visual learners, in that they easily pick up information with their eyes. Visual learners often associate the things they learn with the images they saw when they first learned the material.

**Best practices:** Studies show that photos and videos generate up to 200% higher interaction rate than links do on social sites. Photos and videos not only generate higher interactions on the Wall, but they also have priority when Facebook’s EdgeRank determines what to include in the Top News Feed. More time in the news feed means more consumer engagement.

You can also use images and video to make standard elements of your website into sharable social media. For example, in addition to writing an FAQ page, film a staffer answering questions about your business and upload the video to YouTube. And don’t underestimate the value of pure voyeurism. Offering a behind-the-scenes look at a newly decorated space, a new menu, or a new project makes users feel as though they are privy to insider information and a part of the process. Also important: don’t over think this one. Photos and videos take less user investment than words and articles. Just keep the content fun and real, and invite commentary whenever possible.

**Example:** The Mercedes Facebook page regularly posts multiple pictures, videos and albums a week. Of the 31 posts made during the month of September 2011 posts containing photos or videos generated an average of 232% more Likes 1076% more Shares and 303% more comments than other posts containing no photos or video. It makes sense that photos and videos generate the highest interaction rate as they draw the user in visually, are easily digestible and can elicit an emotional response quickly.

A lesser known example comes from trucking company Schneider National. Posts to their Facebook page contain photos generate 4-5 times the likes and comments as those without.

**Why this works:** Photos and videos make sharing colorful information about a company fun and easy. They also allow users to feel more connected to and invested in the companies who do it well. The images immediately draw attention from the observer and inherently encourage interaction.

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7. Have An Opinion (Even If It’s Not Popular)

The strategy: Drop a controversial opinion into an area where people have strong opinions and loyalties (cities, sports teams) and invite comments.

Best practices: Be careful with this one! You don’t want to be known solely as the business that bashed the beloved local sports team, or took an unpopular and unnecessary stance on a controversial political issue. If you’re opinionated, you’ll surely gain engagement from some but risk alienating others. The best way to remain above serious reproach is to comment only on issues in which your brand is already an established authority in the space.

Example: Perez Hilton’s celebrity slams, GQ’s recent worst-dressed cities feature

Why these work: Perez Hilton knows his subjects well, and spouts unapologetic and controversial opinions in every post. As a result, he has a strong, engaged following. He has also amassed a host of detractors who also want to participate in the conversation, and their commentary has only cemented Perez Hilton’s popularity in the celebrity gossip world. Meanwhile, GQ’s recent (in)famous list of worst-dressed cities in America started a firestorm of linksharing and commenting, as virtually every major city in America was mentioned. Hackles all across the country were raised—which only underscored GQ’s status as an influential voice in men’s fashion worth listening to.

8. Engage Your Most Passionate Fans

The strategy: Enable your fan base to promote your brand through social channels.

Best practices: Engage with specific users and they will feel like a part of the community. And make sure to keep barriers to entry www.awarenessnetworks.com
low—the more the merrier with fan pages, but you lose users with each hoop they need to jump through. For example, instead of making users set up entire profiles just to interact on your site, require minimal input, such as entering a username or email address.

**Example:** Major League Baseball launched the MLBlogs program a few years ago. The program allows fans to create free blogs focused generally on baseball or around their favorite team. MLB partnered with WordPress to develop and implement the concept that now boasts thousands of contributors.

**Why these work:** These spaces encourage users to indulge in their obsessions, in the company of like-minded individuals. The MLBlogs example enables fans to participate as citizen journalists. Another example is online sample retailer Rue La La, which champions compulsive shopping on their Tumblr, posting text graphics reading, “Impulse control can take a day off,” or “You say ‘addiction’ like it’s a bad thing.” These sites assure their members that it is okay to be obsessed, and that they’re not alone.

9. Create Stars

**The strategy:** Allow real people to emerge as authorities on a subject related to your company’s business.

**Best practices:** Champion the most vocal of your users. Engage with them often and ask for their opinions to position them as a liason between your company and the general public. Users trust fellow users more than a representative that is on your company’s payroll. Once your “stars” have built up their own reputations within your constructed online community, you can even give them more official roles—such as comment moderator or guest poster. Internet stardom is a popular goal among social media users, and your online community could help people get there.

**Example:** Social Media Examiner’s Top Fans, Yelp’s Elite Members

**Why these work:** The most vocal and enthusiastic users of these sites have become well known and trusted personalities that help to strengthen the brand and encourage more users to participate. Social Media Examiner ranks contributors using Booshaka to identify the most passionate people on their Facebook page and rank them. Yelp’s Elite members are often treated to exclusive events—they are the company’s inner circle and many users aspire to be among their ranks. Both scenarios reward users for their continued engagement, and create communities with established personalities in which users are more likely to engage with each other, not just the brand.

10. Host A Guest Post

**The strategy:** Find experts or colleagues in the space willing to cross-promote your interests provide you with interesting new content, and lend credibility to your brand with a guest posting.

**Best practices:** This works two ways—you can post content on a partner’s site, or you can enlist a relevant personality to post on your site. Newer brands might partner with more established brands to gain credibility, or older brands might want to partner with individuals or organizations to prove their brand’s relevance. It’s also a great way for bloggers to gain more exposure. Opportunities are everywhere! (Helpful link on finding places to guest post: [http://socialmediatoday.com/kwameboame/178154/10-places-find-blogs-guest-post](http://socialmediatoday.com/kwameboame/178154/10-places-find-blogs-guest-post))

**Example:** Style collaborative The Delightful Dozen is a group of twelve bloggers who take turns posting to the Delightful Dozen page ([http://www.delightfuldozen.com/](http://www.delightfuldozen.com/)), as well as guest posting on each other’s blogs.

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Why this works: A user can be directed to the Delightful Dozen site through any of the twelve bloggers or their social media accounts. Once there, users are exposed to content from all twelve bloggers. Additionally, if a blogger needs to take time off from posting, guest posters can help pick up the slack with content of interest to their users, maintaining the continuity that is critical for gaining and converting casual readers into regular ones. And as users are funneled from one blog into the larger blog, they can come into contact with one another and join the conversation with the Dozen via blog comments. The Dozen also host a “Reader Spotlight” section of the blog, inviting readers to send in their own clothing commentary for a chance to be featured alongside the fashionistas on the site.

11. Ask for Engagement

The strategy: Be bold and ask your audience to engage with you. On Facebook, ask them to comment, like or share content. On Twitter ask for responses or a retweet. On Blogs ask for comments. It’s that simple, just ask.

Best practices: Asking users to engage is a highly effective call to action. On Facebook You may already be aware that a question-style post will get you more engagement than simply putting up pictures and links. But you can generate even more engagement when you don’t just put up a question – you also ask readers to respond! (e.g. “Tell us what you think about…”). When it comes to your blog, ask for comments at the end of every post. Why not pose a question and then invite your readers to weigh in on the topic you’ve just covered? But don’t use some pie-in-the-sky generic statement like “Post your comments below”. Be specific! Write a unique request for comments that’s directly related to the blog post content. (e.g. “Do you agree with…..? Use the comments box to tell us your experience.”) On Twitter Including a call to action in your tweets will get you a much higher retweet result. Tweets that end with “Please Retweet” have a retweet rate of 51% – compared with only 12% for those without the call to action. Interestingly, the abbreviated version “Please RT” has a retweet rate of 39%. Which just goes to show that calls to action need to be clear and specific – even with social media.

Example: Amazon Movies and TV use the ‘please retweet’ tag regularly to spread the word on deals

Why this works: People generally respond to call to action. Whether you are asking to retweet, comment, post or like asking your audience to respond generates the highest likelihood for engagement.

So if you’re perched on the margins of the conversation that’s happening in social media, unsure of what to say, or how to get users to talk to you, the above tried-and-true strategies are sure to give you a place to start. The choice you make about which tactics to try should center on your company’s goals—whether you want to update your brand identity, collect email addresses for your enewsletter or get feedback from your customers.

There’s a lot of trial and error involved in finding the perfect strategy for your
company: some strategies will win you scores of fans but may not an online community make, while others may not be sustainable in terms of cost or time. Regardless, most social media strategies work best when they focus on testing one or two tactics at a time, so choose carefully, lest you confuse your users or spread your marketing resources too thin. Hopefully, as you improve your approach toward engagement and hear more about what your particular users have to say about your brand, you’ll develop your own best practices along the way.
About Awareness

Awareness is the leading provider of enterprise-class, on-demand social marketing management software (SMM5) for marketers to publish and manage social content, engage with their audience and measure the effectiveness of their social media activities across multiple social media channels. The Awareness Social Marketing Hub is built upon Awareness’ expertise with some of the world’s leading brands and marketing agencies including MLB, Sony Pictures, Comcast, Likeable Media, Associated Press, Cox Communications, Mindjumpers and American Cancer Society.

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