

Pyramid Websites and Vertical Markets

Pyramid Websites and Vertical Marketing may be a big leap for those new to SEO, but in fact the principle has been around for many years. 'Themed SEO' is about addressing specific vertical markets with targeted information.

Vertical markets are the different sectors that a business trades within. These sectors might include automotive, military and aerospace, mining and medical devices etc.

Pyramid Websites, Google theming and SEO are often considered a 'black art' and outsourced as a post-production task to a specialist company. The relationships between a company's suppliers, distributors and clients are broken. If all concerned parties were contacted up-front, a website's search engine ranking could be increased with no need for specialist knowledge.

Vertical marketing is about stepping back and looking at your business as a whole and compartmentalising your market sectors.

Google takes a similar approach when it indexes a site; starting with a broad theme, then working its way down. Google will read and index a web page into its library and for a page to be found within search engine result pages (SERPs), it needs to be stored within the right section.

Vertical marketing and Pyramid Website advantages

From a marketing standpoint there are huge advantages in tracking which market sector a visitor is from:

- Improved market specific analytics
- Long term planning and strategy insights
- Faster reaction to market fluctuations
- Opening unforeseen opportunities
- Identifying niche markets
- Providing focussed content
- Brand recognition within market sectors
- Higher search engine rankings

When generating your vertical markets or Google themed branches, start with broad content, then work your way down through each sector. Horizontal market sectors should be controlled or co-ordinated by a parent section authority. Each section should be linked vertically to one parent and multiple siblings; being mindful that haphazard linking will dilute the vertical market or Google theme and a strongly themed page will benefit from higher rankings within SERPs.

If linking one page to another could support or strengthen the theme, the link should pass indirectly via the target's 'hallway' or 'cornerstone' parent. This will not only categorise a page but encourage click through, increasing the sites' hit count.

Using section 5 as an example, to link 'f alc' to 'f ald', the flow through of links would look like:

'f alc' » 'High ala' » 'f ald'

To link horizontals from different market sectors, the page linking flow might look like:

'f alc' » 'Sub Topic B' » 'Medium bl' » 'High bla' » 'f blc'

Coders can prevent theme dilution with the use of the rel="nofollow" linking tag. This can be particularly beneficial when large drop down menus are present. For a site linking matrix to be effective, it needs to be constructed leaving no page a 'dead end'. If this strategy is used in

conjunction with a CMS, the linking matrix should be kept up to date and checked regularly by someone with coding knowledge. A simple link 'breadcrumb' and a sub menu can overcome many of these issues.

Google uses algorithms that filter and categorise pages depending upon the relevance of inbound and outbound links. Several Google patents pay close attention to the keywords used within a links' anchor or text. If that link is outside of a menu and placed within the main content, it can be worth as much, or more than an inbound external link. Contextual links are considered to be more important, as they often closely reflect a pages theme.

Contrary to most peoples' expectations, your target keywords and phrases should be at the bottom of the tree and not the top. The keywords at the top of the tree should encompass the theme without be too long or specific, whereas keywords at the bottom can be longer and more industry specific. Pages at the bottom of the tree are more likely to bring in higher volumes of traffic.

Where B2B Meets B2C... Telling a Story

It's a perfect B2B technology marketing storm. The rise of YouTube, Vimeo and Flickr, coupled with the lack of effectiveness of most print ads and a tremendous improvement in the quality and ease of use of equipment have pushed video to the top of the marketer's toolkit.

If '*a picture paints a thousand words*', Video.....

Simply put, video is becoming one of the most powerful marketing and 'storytelling' media for B2B. Here are a few more reasons:

1. People retain more information from video
2. People trust video more than any other media
3. Moving images create an emotional connection
4. People like to see things for themselves
5. Travel budgets can be scaled back using webinars and you can see for yourself what's happening 'in the field'
6. In a global economy video transcends language – people can see the same thing wherever they are with subtitles or in-language voice-overs
7. Placed strategically, video is a searchable asset that is an important part of any SEO strategy... YouTube is now the world's second largest search engine
8. We see everything, everywhere on various screens, for example, TV, laptops, mobiles and iPads. People expect screens, they accept information on screens and this trend will only increase
9. Video equipment is cheaper and, like digital cameras, almost foolproof... almost

One caveat: video should have multiple uses. One-offs are not cost-effective. And video needs to be joined up with other efforts to help present what's called 'your version of the truth'.

Integrate video into what you do and make it work for your business objectives. If and when you segment your marketplace and know the different customer personas, it makes sense to create tailored versions of videos geared to those customer segments.

In fact, content can be flavoured specifically for major accounts based on your 'generic' story.

Knowing where and how to place a video is the tricky part.

Remember, Google can't watch a video and getting your efforts indexed correctly can be frustrating. Vertical Marketing's SEO experts can help you achieve success.

Who Decided To Call It Social Media?

For members of the B2B community, the term social media is prejudicial: it conjures up images of after-work get togethers, inane FaceBook chats and even more frivolous Tweets.

Don't let the term Social Media confuse you.

Social media is simply a new way and a new set of tools to do what marketing has always done: get your information to as many interested people as possible. The message itself may have changed its style – the old fashioned one-way advertising message is certainly passe' – but not its content. The kinds of media you can use have expanded and become less expensive – video, for example, is faster, easier and cheaper to produce. And various forms of media have either gained or lost in popularity – ROI on most print ads is not nearly as strong as it was even 5 years ago.

Today in the more efficient world of B2B marketing, it takes intelligent planning (like always) and an even more thorough understanding of who your customers are, where they 'live' and how to reach them. And that takes experience, intelligence and creativity, PLUS a demonstrable knowledge of technology markets.

"A social brand has a clear and consistent story to tell,"

says Vertical's managing director, Paul Barlow. *"With this story in hand, the rest of social media become distribution platforms – places to send your story to customers where they live, work and are most receptive to hearing your message."*

Too bad some tweener gave these powerful marketing tools such silly names.

Don't get lost in translation

Nothing grates more than poor use of your own language, so for any company selling overseas, getting your translation word perfect isn't just advisable, it's crucial. Poorly translated copy undermines your credibility and damages your brand's reputation. It looks sloppy and doesn't say much for your working practices to potential clients.

At Vertical, we have over 23 years' experience of commissioning technical translations for a number of clients. With an approach based on intelligence, knowledge and understanding, we know that paying for good quality translation is, unquestionably, worth every penny spent.

If you decide you want to save a few pounds and go for a cheaper translation, one of two things might happen. At best you'll get clumsy copy on your ads, lose your brand's tone of voice and weaken your message. To give you an example, a company whose identity we won't reveal, turned down our offer of a translation service because we were €50 more expensive than someone else. They took out a full page ad in an electronics magazine in Germany to talk about the merits of an 'underboard stencil wiper'. Naturally the original English ad referred to a printed circuit board. Alas, the German version referred to 'cardboard'. The company's switchboard certainly

lit up but not with eager buyers. Saving €50 turned into a costly mistake. €5,000 to run the ad, plus the cost of translation, plus artwork, not to mention damage to credibility.

At worst, scrimping on translation costs can really embarrass you. Another company, (again we'll spare their blushes) spurned our services and got an article translated into Italian. Within it, a turn of phrase that started as 'solder balls' in English turned into 'small testicles of solder' in Italian. Not a balls-up you would relish explaining to your boss or your Italian clients!

Using online website translation services, is similar to a game of 'Chinese whispers'. Repeatedly translating copy back and forth between two languages quickly produces copy not even Yoda could understand.

Thankfully, red faces and wasted budgets are easily avoided. At Vertical, we work with a number of translators who specialise in different sectors, so we will always match the job to translator extremely carefully.

[Product Photography – how to gain those extra column inches](#)

“Good photography is the key to extra column inches...”

We asked Jon Barrett, a well respected editor of various B2B trade magazines, about the importance of good product photography in ensuring your product is featured.

As professional product photography is often seen as a luxury, marketing budgets don't always allow for it, but as you'll see, it's an investment well worth making.

Here are Jon's tips:

Firstly be aware that on news and product pages, for example, your press release could be competing with hundreds of others. If the editor is faced with two stories of equal merit, they will naturally gravitate to the one with the best image. Good pictures add value to the story and improve the magazine's aesthetic appeal.

Regular photo shoots are important because no editor wants to publish the same photo twice. If you've got a new story, take a new picture to support it.

Editors are always looking for quality front cover images. By investing in professional product shots (with the right lighting and use of colour) you could be in the running for the cover. Simply buying a digital camera doesn't make you a professional photographer.

Remember, if it was your magazine, which images would you publish? Exactly, so don't let an excellent, well written story be undermined because the supporting photography is sub-standard.

Jon's view on best practice when working with the media:

- I prefer images to be sent with product and news stories
- It isn't necessarily good practice to ask busy editors to find the images themselves, either on a website or via a link on the email. This simply adds extra work to the news gathering process
- Also, the image you're asking them to find might not be suitable anyway, again wasting time

Jon's experience is that most photographs are landscape, whereas magazines are portrait. Ideally product releases should be supported with both portrait and landscape pictures with backgrounds, plus one cut-out. This gives the editor and magazine designer the greatest flexibility.

Other things to consider when weighing up the cost of the photo shot:

- One shoot can create a large library of images which will provide ongoing PR support for many months
- Vertical always makes the most of clients' investment in new photography, using it in press releases and articles, brochures, presentations, exhibition display materials, on the website and in digital marketing campaigns.

Effective Business Planning

A basic guide to creating your business plan

“Business planning is a detailed examination of a proposed course of action for a new business, the introduction of a new product or a modification in strategic direction.”

“What a business plan is not, is the justification of a course of action already undertaken.”

This document is designed to help you through the process of planning and deploying a business plan, and outlines the key areas you need to cover.

The Overall Content and Appearance

The reader of the business plan is often persuaded by the overall appearance of the plan and the ease in which the plan can be read and digested. Presentation is not everything, but where the document is being used for the support of funding or a growth proposal for stakeholders, then the appearance is definitely important. Care must also be taken with the layout and font selection. Paragraphs must be concise and focus on the points of each issue.

The content of a business plan doesn't always follow a standard format. In general it will consist of the following:

Front Cover

Simply provide a front cover with the appropriate information regarding the company, logo, date and author(s). A smart cover sets the tone of the plan and can leave the reader eager to open the document and understand the detail.

Contents Page

It goes without saying that a comprehensive contents page which enables the reader to identify the key items and where they can be found will go a long way to improving the look and feel of the plan.

Executive Summary – Structure & Content

The executive summary should ideally be one page and cover the key points extracted from the detailed plan. It should address these points:

- Introduce the project in terms of the area it is concerned with, what it is trying to do, and list the key individuals and advisors involved.
- Explain, very clearly and simply, the proposition – exactly what are you going to produce, what need does it satisfy that is not being satisfied at present (will it do something better, faster, cheaper, more conveniently, is it easier to operate, smaller in size, longer lasting, lower maintenance etc?). Be specific and do not assume the reader will immediately see an advantage that you consider obvious.
- State specifically the competitive advantages of products and/or processes in relation to other alternatives in the market, and then explain and substantiate how these are important to customers – this includes in particular confirmation that consumers are actually willing to pay for such ‘advantages’.
- Describe the stage the project has reached particularly in terms of the “readiness for market” of the products or product concepts, and any intellectual property such as patents that may support the project.
- Outline the main characteristics of your market, including size and growth, and specify the market opportunity that you are addressing. Be specific about the main consumer target groups.
- Highlight any “evidence of success” – this may be trade reviews, analyst comments, sales or partnership agreements, working prototypes etc. which help to make the project more tangible and raise confidence.
- Summarise the objectives of the company in the short and long term and outline the key strategies you will use to

achieve them.

- State your finance requirements and what stake in the company is available for this (see Finance Requirements and Investment Structure). What is the planned exit route for the investor (how will they get their money and profit back)?

Introduction to the Business

Generally introduce the business and what it does/will do.

- Outline concisely how the project came about, and has progressed to the present position.
- Describe what the company's legal structure is, who its shareholders are, and how activities have been funded so far.
- Explain where you are now and where you proceed from here – what you want to achieve.

The Management

Of the entire project, probably the most important factor is its management. In some cases, such as when dealing with Venture Capital companies (VCs), they will only look at the rest of your proposition if they see a strong management team. This is particularly important when dealing with large investments.

Explain who is involved, including a paragraph on each individual on the management team, listing their background and relevant experience/qualifications, as well as on any other mentors or non-executives. Include also any advisors or partner organisations, including accountants and lawyers.

For all projects you need to put forward a management team that has the ability to realise the plan. If you have gaps in the team highlight them; investors may be able to help fill them – better that you highlight weaknesses than investors

point them out.

The Products

Provide a simple and clear description of your products – a description that a lay person can easily understand. Do not assume technical knowledge by the reader. Then explain:

- Is your product satisfying a customer need that isn't currently being met?
- Performance or value advantages over competition. Does it do things better, faster, cheaper, more conveniently? Is it easier to operate, smaller in size, longer lasting, lower maintenance, and is this advantage really important to consumers – important enough to pay for?
- Other unique features.
- Intellectual property – any patents or trademarks involved or required.
- What is the selling price and the pricing strategy behind this? You must re-affirm that your potential customers can afford your products, and are willing to pay for them.
- Production and distribution costs and resulting margins on sale.
- What are the retailer margins (if retail channels are being used)?

The Market

The market represents the only reason for the business to exist. Ensure you know everything you can about the market and the participants in it.

- Market size – describe the size of the market and be specific about the size of the actual market sector that you are targeting.
- Market growth and other market characteristics.
- How can the market be segmented and which segments are

you targeting?

- Main players (competitors) in the market – identify who your main competitors are.
- How companies (competitors) compete in terms of competitive strategy.
- Analysis of industry structure.

Utilise analytical tools such as Porter's 5 Forces, and PESTLE (Political Economic Social Technological Legal Environmental factors) analysis to assist in focusing attention on the key factors that will influence your decisions. To that end consider, among others, the following questions:

- Threat of new entrants into the market – what do we believe is the threat of new players entering the market, are there any barriers to entry or exit such as large investment etc?
- Threat of substitute products – the threat of different products fulfilling the same need.
- Power of buyers – are the buyers of products very powerful and able to depress prices?
- Power of suppliers – what is the bargaining power of the suppliers to the business?
- Rivalry amongst existing players – how intense is this and how strong are they – for example, in some markets rivals are willing to sacrifice profitability to gain market share?
- How profitable are the companies in the market – do they make good margins, good turnover etc?

Competitive Market Strategy/Competitive Advantages

How is the company going to compete in the market? Will it compete on price, service, quality, convenience, new features and benefits, by targeting a very specific area of the market (niche) etc? Is this difference really important to the target

customer / buyer? Consider undertaking a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis.

Operations and Production

Will the business need changes to the way it will operate or will you need to organise a production facility from scratch? Analyse the issues involved by asking questions such as:

- How will the company be organised operationally on a day to day basis? What office space will it use, what support staff will be employed, who will answer the telephone or will a virtual office be used, who will do the company book keeping (in house or initially use a firm of accountants to assist with this), who will take orders and raise invoices etc?
- How are the products to be produced – describe the process procedures and needs? Will any investment in premises and equipment be required? If so detail this. Will the production be contracted out, perhaps to a supplier who already has the production assets in place, or will a joint venture be established to do this?
- How will this production process be managed to ensure efficiency and effectiveness?
- What are the production lead times, costs, bottlenecks/ production limiting factors, fixed and variable cost breakdown, etc?
- Is the company able to respond quickly to changes in demand – can it raise production quickly or does an increase in capacity require long term investment and planning – if so how long?

Sales and Distribution

How the fledgling company will go to market or how the new product will reach its intended customer base is an intrinsic necessity that must be considered at this stage. Ask yourself:

- How is the company going to reach the customer and provide them with the information they need and the opportunity to buy?
- Will the company adopt a retail strategy, sell through intermediaries or sell direct? What margin structures will operate for each intermediary in the sales channel? How do these margins compare to those offered by competitors? In light of the pricing strategy, what will the consumer have to pay? How much prospect is there within these price and margin arrangements to discount for promotions etc?
- Who will take the orders and process them and how will they link into the company's financial, production, and physical distribution systems?
- How is the company going to physically transport its products to its customers? Will it acquire its own warehouses and fleet of vehicles or will it contract a distribution solutions company and what will that company provide and at what price? Will the company provide the adequate level of service delivery required by the buyers in terms of delivery frequency and other requirements? Will this distribution strategy require large quantities of spare stock (this will be affected in large part by your production strategy and structures)?
- What are the physical distribution lead times? From when the order is received to delivery from stock, or if the product is made to order, what delays will occur during the supply process?
- How will the company sell its products to the buyers? Will it use its own sales force or will it contract a sales force, or perhaps rely on wholesalers?

Illustrative Financial Projections

Provide a set of financial projections that show the financial implications of your plan. Make sure that you clearly state

the assumptions behind these projections, both in terms of costs and revenues, and ensure that they are realistic. By explaining the assumptions, the reader will be able to see that the figures have been thought through – whether or not they agree with them.

The projections should include:

- Cash flow statement – the cash balance and movement by month for the first year to 18 months, and then for 3 and 5 years going forward.
- Profit & loss statement – this is a statement of the trading position of the business or the division.
- Balance Sheet – this is a statement of the company's assets and liabilities.

Within this it is also useful to highlight the 'cash-burn' rate of the business; how much cash it consumes each month.

The full statements should usually cover three years ahead, with an indication of headline figures up to five years (underlying detail after three years in high potential companies is often a complete stab in the dark). The reason why it is important to give headline figures over a longer period is to provide an indication to the reader of the potential upside of the business.

Finance Requirements and Investment Structure

You need to make clear to the reader how much finance you need, how it will be used, what they are going to get in return, and when they can expect it:

- How much money is needed to execute the plan?
- What do you expect the sources of this money to be e.g.

Company assets, Business Angels, Venture Capitalists, Bank Finance, or a mixture?

- Specifically how will the money be used?
- What is on offer in terms of ownership (shares) in the company, for the money? Is 20 percent or 40 percent of the company's equity available for this investment?
- Details behind any banking facility or other forms of finance you expect (if any).
- What do you expect investors to receive in return for them risking their money?
- How do you expect investors to get their investment and return and when? Will this be through a trade sale, a flotation, or a management buy-out?

Finally any supporting data can be added as appendices rather than lose the crispness of the main document.

What's in a brand?

It goes without saying that every business wants to be a customer's first choice and building and managing a brand can play a significant part in making that happen. The concept of a brand extends far beyond just your company logo to your business' core values and to every interaction you have with customers and suppliers. In effect, your brand creates and maintains your reputation and so reflects your customers' experience of your organisation.

Customers and employees often build up emotional attachments to certain brands, resulting in strong loyalties and even a sense of ownership. This can help maintain employee motivation and increase your sales – A strong brand can make a business stand out from the crowd, particularly in competitive markets.

If you want to build and manage a brand, you'll need to focus on what your customers want and how you can guarantee to deliver it. You'll need to be consistent in your service and every other point of contact customers have with you – for example, phone calls, letters, faxes etc.

Tim Rose, account manager at Vertical explains: “Branding serves as the link between your product's promise and the consumer's desire. The goal is to express a set of basic principles that can be understood by everyone who comes in contact with your business – customers, shareholders, employees, etc. The brand is your reason for being.”

This guide look at what should be considered when you create a brand, how to budget for it and how to manage it.

Brand Strategy

Although branding strategies differ in tactics from industry to industry, a branding campaign usually develops along these lines:

1. Identify the message – A company defines a core message by identifying the distinctive value of its products and services – why its customers care about what it has to offer and what makes it different from its competitors.
2. Build the message – When the distinctive value is identified, it must be framed in a succinct message people can understand and relate to. This will reinforce the core value of the products and services.
3. Promote the message – What good is a message if no one hears it? The company must make a strong pledge to aggressively market its product and, over time, to solidify its image (and its associations of quality) in the minds of consumers.
4. 'Be' the message – The message is chosen, marketing and advertising campaigns are busy promoting it – but how well is the entire organisation living it? Is there a

direct connection between the brand message and the customer's experience when they walk in the door and purchases your product?

During the brand strategy phase, it is important to remember the 'Four Pillars' of branding strategies. Keeping these benchmarks in mind keeps the process focussed and will ultimately ensure that the new brand gets off to the right start.

1. Differentiation – To create a brand, you have to set yourself apart from everyone else in the market. You can't build a brand by being the same.
2. Relevance – Relevance has to do with appropriateness, meaningfulness and, ultimately, the value of your point of difference. If your product or service isn't relevant, your point of difference won't attract customers or keep them.
3. Esteem – When you succeed at building relevant differentiation, customers respond with high esteem for your product or service. Brand esteem can maintain high levels even after a brand has lost its point of difference (e.g., luxury and prestige brands).
4. Understanding – This refers to how well customers understand and believe in your point of differentiation. Understanding also represents an important diagnostic indicator of brand health. For example, when customer esteem for a brand falls below understanding, it means that people know you but they don't like you. If they don't like you, they won't buy your product.

Building your brand

Once you've defined your brand values and your customers' needs you can start to build your brand by consistently communicating your brand values. Remember that every possible contact you have with a customer or potential customer needs

to reinforce your brand values.

Key areas to consider are:

- your business name
- names you give your products or services
- any slogan you use
- your logo
- the style and quality of your stationery
- product packaging
- your premises
- where and how you advertise
- how you and your employees dress
- how you and your employees behave
- your company website

If all these are consistently in line with your brand values, your brand will be strengthened.

Your logo can be of particular significance to customers. You should create a policy on its usage, ensuring it is used consistently and its quality is always maintained. This acts as a reassurance when customers are considering buying your products or receive them after purchase. Your logo can act as an initial guarantee of quality in these circumstances. Similarly, ensure that you consider the design and quality of your invoices and receipts, which can often be the last stage in an interaction with a customer. This can affect their willingness to give you repeat custom and even to pay on time.

It is worth creating brand guidelines (a document containing your core company values and benchmarks for how you want to operate and be seen to operate). Communicate this to your employees to ensure you are all working towards the same aims, and review it regularly.

Reviewing your brand

A successful and well executed brand can enjoy a long life, provided it's kept up-to-date and in line with customers' needs and expectations. When reviewing your brand, remember that your customers and employees will have often built up an emotional attachment to it, therefore it is critical that any changes you make are sensitive to their existing relationship with your brand.

Summary

Branding can be perceived as somewhat problematic but in actual fact as long as you stay focused and stick to the plan it does not have to be this way. The most successful brands are those that are planned from the start correctly and then managed and protected. To build a successful brand you should remember these top 10 tips:

1. Focus on what your business achieves for its customers. Your brand is no good to you if it isn't delivering what customers want.
2. Take ownership of your brand. Pay attention to customers' needs, but you should still control what you want your brand to mean to them.
3. Be honest. If you don't believe in your brand, no one else will.
4. Keep your brand simple by focusing on a small number of key brand values.
5. Be consistent. Every aspect of your business should make customers feel the same way about you.
6. Be thorough. Look at all your systems to make sure they help to support your brand.
7. Involve employees. Make sure they understand your brand and believe in it.
8. Communicate your brand. Make sure every advertisement, brochure and letter helps reinforce the same message. If

you have a logo, use it everywhere, but make sure the quality is consistent.

9. Meet and exceed what your brand promises. Failing, just once, will damage your brand.
10. Manage your brand. Continually look for opportunities to make improvements. Don't be afraid to make changes to reflect shifts in the way you do business or new trends in your market.

The 7 Deadly Sins of Facebook Marketing

Some smart folks at Ogilvy came up with a list of Facebook marketing sins. When you stop to think about it, these can be applied to just about all marketing efforts, but are spot on when it comes to social media.

1. **Abandonment** – you invite people to participate in your Facebook page or blog or digital company newsletter and then desert the effort... no updates, no follow through. This failure has doomed many marketing campaigns, from print ads to twitter.
2. **Irregularity** – particularly pertinent with blogs... potential customers won't stay involved with your blog and thus your company if you post once in a blue moon.
3. **Wordiness** – in the digital world, less is more... long, boring blogs without a point, padded presentations and bloviating (look it up) kill participation.
4. **Pre-written responses** – marketing is about tailored solutions not trite, stock, hackneyed answers. Individualisation, not one size fits all.
5. **Chaos** – blog sites, Facebook, forums, LinkedIn groups

that aren't moderated can reflect poorly on your company. One four-letter tirade allowed on your marketing platform? You get the picture.

6. **Isolation** – everything works together, nothing stands alone. Creating a single use video or individual web offering that links to nothing is a waste of time and resources. It all fits into the strategy or it's useless.
7. **Ambiguity** – a single plan, a single idea spread through any number of media platforms, traditional or digital. This is the Social media mantra. Multiple, confusing messages are harmful, if not fatal to all marketing/sales efforts.

7 essential steps to intelligent social media

1. Develop a plan. The intelligent application of social media begins by understanding that everything you do is an extension of your overall marketing strategy, which is why it's critical that all social media efforts reflect and enhance your brand in the markets and regions you're targeting. As always, the goal is to ensure that your identity and messaging remain consistent across all platforms
2. Identify a few overall goals, for example lead generation, customer retention, establishing expertise or increasing brand awareness and equity. These help determine which social media platforms are best for you.
3. Communicate your social media strategy to your entire organisation. Involve everyone. Key contributors from

within your company may need a 'participation schedule' so they know when to Tweet or blog, when and how to respond to a comment. It's not just about controlling the direction and tone, there are many other skills involved.

4. Do your research. Once a social media strategy is in place, invest time in finding out where your audience 'lives'. Each market, industry, country or region has its own preferences: some count on LinkedIn while others prefer Twitter, blogs, YouTube or Facebook. You can and should use all social media platforms, but it's smart to prioritise according to your customers.
5. Set corporate guidelines. As a good social media campaign involves all parts of your organisation, from sales to technical support, it's unrealistic to assume that everyone will know how to participate. It is important to set some basic rules for your staff to follow when blogging, Tweeting or responding to comments on forums. The guidelines should cover how the post/Tweet/response should be written. Remember, the use of social media is not to preach or advertise but to engage and participate. Always separate opinions from facts, and make sure your audience can see the difference. Be engaged and be informed. Know what the current conversations are and what people are saying so you can contribute to creating a new perspective.
6. Jump in. You have a strategy, you know from your research where and in which direction to focus your efforts and you have some basic guidelines for everyone to follow. The only thing left is to execute your plan. It's not enough to just make yourself visible on a social media platform, you want to create value through the content you offer. Establish your expertise through well-written, information-based articles, e-books and videos, and demonstrate your willingness to share your knowledge with anyone who asks. That's the intelligent use of social media. Start sharing your knowledge,

discoveries and contacts, as these are the 'seeds' that stimulate two-way conversation. And when someone responds to your efforts – comments on your blog, sends a personal message, Tweets, leaves a message on your Facebook page – take the time to answer!

7. Don't count, measure. Tracking the results of social media efforts can be problematic, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't try. Remember, social media is an opportunity to create and amplify relationships, to get involved in direct customer engagement, get real-time survey data, and experiment with ideas. Time frames, too, are different. Yes, there is instantaneous response on some social media platforms (and this information can be invaluable) but the deeper effects, the trust and influence you're trying to build, take time to fully manifest. Review:

1. How often do your posts draw a response?
2. How often is the information you offer shared, re-posted or uploaded?
3. Is there an increase in the number of visitors to your website and Facebook page?
4. Are your SEO efforts making progress?

Remember, social media efforts are relatively inexpensive; you can afford to change tactics, experiment with various platforms, try a different style or tone. And if you don't have the time or resources to organise social media activities, or if you need help establishing a cohesive marketing strategy that includes social media, that's where an agency like Vertical can really help.

VM 2011 Marketing Survey - Results

Our B2B Marketing Survey said...

We asked our clients, and others, about their views on marketing agencies, communications activities, social media and B2B marketing. Do they think social media is important to B2B marketing or just a FaceBook fad? How effective are traditional media versus social media? What are their plans for implementing social media?

B2B Market Research :

1) When working with an agency, please rate the following in terms of importance: (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being highest importance)	
Knowledge of your industry	3.8
'Out of the box' thinking	4.7
Graphic design capabilities	4.3
Content generation capabilities (articles, releases, blogs, etc.)	3.8
Branding capabilities/ideas	4.1
Knowledge of latest marketing opportunities	3.8
Internet / Social Media capabilities	2.8
Use of metrics to measure effectiveness	3.6

2) For each of the following marketing activities, would you say that your company will do more or less than last year?	
Email blasts	71% more, 29% same
Social media	70% more, 15% less, 15% same
Mail	33% more, 45% less, 12% same
Events / training	66% more, 33% same
Webinars	86% more, 14% same
Web-based initiatives	84% more, 16% less
Print advertising	28% more, 44% less, 28% same
Online advertising / banners	71% more, 29% same
Video	100% more
Audio	33% more, 16% less, 51% same
eBooks	80% more, 20% same
3) In general, how would you rate the effectiveness of your traditional media efforts?	
Print advertising	28% effective, 15% ineffective, 57% somewhat effective
Press releases	71% effective, 29% somewhat effective
Trade shows	43% effective, 14% ineffective, 43% somewhat effective
Company events	100% effective
Company literature	67% effective, 33% somewhat effective

White papers	43% effective, 29% somewhat effective, 14% not sure, 14% N/A
4) Have you personally used any of the following social media options when researching a product for your company and / or personal use?	
Facebook	14% yes, 86% no
LinkedIn	43% yes, 57% no
Twitter	29% yes, 71% no
YouTube	71% yes, 29% no
Blogs	29% yes, 71% no
Slideshare	0% yes, 100% no
5) In your view, how important is social media to B2B marketing and to your company's strategy in particular?	
Extremely important	15%
Very important	41%
Somewhat important	29%
Not important	15%
6) For existing and / or future online / social media initiatives, what are your primary objectives? (listed in order of importance)	
1. Building awareness	
2. Lead generation	
3. Listening to prospects and customers	
4. Community building	
5. Website traffic	
6. Reputation management	
7. Search engine rankings	
8. Reduce customer acquisition costs	

7) When it comes to implementing social media, which of the following poses the biggest challenge? (listed in order of importance)

1. Getting started

2. Identifying where to participate

3. Tracking conversions

4. Finding out who the communities and influencers are

5. Understanding how / where social media works for my company

6. Developing content

7. Cost / resource impact

8. Coordinating social media activities

NOTE: Totals may exceed 100 because of rounding.
