



**By Rick Grant**  
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# Building a Strategy for Social Media

Consider your goals and your audience when taking your message online

IN MANY RESPECTS, THE BUSINESS OF being a mortgage broker has moved to the Web. Our customers typically look there first for loan products and rates, our partners can connect with us through Web-based software, and our trade publications often arrive via e-mail. As part of this evolution, social media have become the new way to network and to build the relationships necessary to earn new business.

Although plenty has been written about the need to jump into the social-media pool, less material exists about how to tread through the abundance of content without drowning while also creating an important presence centered on business goals. To make the best use of social media, mortgage brokers must discover how to do both of these things while also making their efforts effective in the short and long term.

For the purposes of this article, let's assume you already have accounts on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and the like. If you don't, you're behind the curve. Let's also assume you have a blog that represents an important part of your corporate Web site. With these assumptions made, we can look at some of the most-important aspects of social-media success.

For starters, mortgage brokers must understand that social-media consumers don't respond well to corporate marketing speak. Web marketing goes beyond selling the features and benefits of your product or service. In fact, many conversations that originate online and lead to business

don't begin as discussions about products or services. Rather, what's important about these conversations is that they focus on solving customer problems.

## Authenticity counts

Social media provide an easy way for people with problems to find help. In turn, mortgage brokers who can solve problems will find themselves building value-based relationships that lead to new clients and increased loan closings.

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In addition to building value-based relationships, brokers must be authentic in their social-media efforts. Without authenticity, you'll likely find it impossible to establish trust and build the relationships integral to business success.

Companies that use mascots or spokespeople to represent their brands online often don't perform as well as those that use real people who actively and authentically engage online consumers. This isn't to say that companies shouldn't have a policy in

place that protects the identity and privacy of employees and customers. They most definitely should. But it shouldn't be written in a way that forces employees to become someone they aren't online. People will see through the facade, which ultimately will do more harm than good to the company and brand.

Another important aspect of developing social-media acumen is frequency. A trade publication wouldn't be much good if it only showed up in your mailbox or e-mail inbox every few months or so. There is a reason that some publications are called *periodicals*; they show up on a regular basis. People learn to expect them and count on the valuable information found within. Your social-media efforts should be no different.

In fact, engaging with social media effectively requires looking at yourself as a publisher. Your audience — should you be fortunate enough to attract one — will expect to see your content on a regular basis.

Delivering a message with predictable frequency represents a major hurdle for many companies attempting to develop their social-media presence. Businesses often struggle because their leaders don't understand the importance of creating and maintaining content calendars that plan and carry out valuable contributions to social-media sites on a regular basis.

When it comes to creating and strengthening your social-media presence, the

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more you can think like a publisher, the better. Each fall, publishers and editors around the country sit down with their staffs and consider the kinds of content that will add value to their readers. There are always hot topics, important industry niches and annual features that they must place on the calendar. The best editorial teams drill down to specific problems their readers face and then come up with story ideas most likely to help their readers be more successful. Brokers should do the same thing for their blogs and other social-media endeavors.

### Types of posts

Most businesses have a number of target audiences with which they want to communicate. Some social-media Web sites cater to some of these audiences better than others. Mortgage brokers should consider this when putting together their social-media calendars and create a plan that addresses specific audiences and social-media outlets.

Although some of your content will work across outlets, it's important to think about the specific problems facing readers in each target market. Consider how your products and services ease pain, solve problems and create success. Also, don't be afraid to dispense advice or insight that doesn't necessarily relate to your products or services. If you help people solve their problems, good things will come your way eventually.

Various types of posts are easy to produce and should be placed on your calendar at the beginning of the planning process. These include posts related to:

- **Business anniversaries;**
- **Important conferences;**
- **Statutory deadlines;**
- **Executive insights;** and
- **Seasonal events,** such as springtime moving and holidays.

In addition, many things occur during your normal business process that lend

themselves to social-media posts. These include:

- **Obtaining new clients;**
- **Closing loans;**
- **Earning successful referrals;**
- **Receiving testimonials;**
- **Community-service efforts;**
- **Media coverage;**
- **Regulatory changes;**
- **Hiring new employees;** and
- **Receiving an award** or other recognition.

Some of the simplest and most-effective social-media posts a company can write involve comments on industry news and events or responses to other people's thoughts or ideas.

Whether written as a comment on another site that links back to your Web site or social-media page or as a more detailed treatment of the issue on your own site, these posts can demonstrate your industry knowledge. They also allow you to weigh in on important topics and can help establish you as a thought-leader.

Posts that relate to the general condition of the market segment in which you work also are important. Because these can speak directly to your work and the lives of your prospective clients, you should aim for at least one such post each week.

When writing for borrowers, brokers should discuss things such as loan products, interest rates, government incentives, consumer impacts related to industry news, tips for understanding the mortgage process and insights about finding the best deal.

On the other hand, if you're writing for an industry audience in an effort to build new partnerships, your content should focus on the impact of national real estate finance news and proposed solutions to industry problems. You also should consider sharing links to other online resources your audience might not know about.

If your readers find these sites useful,

they'll often remember how they learned about them.

### Shared responsibility

Although it might be tempting to hand full responsibility for a company blog or social-media site to a single executive, this often isn't a good decision or an effective use of human resources.

It also can become a burden for a single person. In many cases, the site will fall behind and the audience will fade.

A better solution involves tasking an entire team of executives to craft content and establishing a point person or department to handle administration and posting. If you have enough employees to take this route and decide to do so, make sure to capitalize on your executive team's knowledge and experience. Also, establish a schedule for how often you will update your sites. Weekly is barely adequate; three times a week is good; daily is great. Multiple times a day is fantastic.

In addition, make sure to assign an administrator who will be in charge of building and managing the editorial calendar.

The same person should send reminders that keep your bloggers and other social-media contributors on track and on deadline. The administrator also can help with the writing and should be responsible for ensuring all published content meets company standards and abides by policy guidelines.

Whatever direction you decide to take with social media, make sure you consider your business goals and the expectations of the modern online audience. ●