

THE GLOBAL SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGE

A social marketer's guide to managing brands across borders

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Introduction

Today, every brand is a global brand. Your company operates on a global stage. Customers from around the world can access your content, discover and interact with other customers, and add their own voice to the conversation about your brand. As a marketer you need to be conscious of the different needs of your audiences around the world.

This creates some major challenges. How do you meet the needs of an audience that speaks multiple languages? How do you appear responsive when your customers could be in several timezones? How do you support differing interests, products, cultures and regulations? How do you segment and prioritize your social media efforts?

This guide is intended to help marketers create a social media strategy that works across borders and achieves their global marketing goals.

What is the
challenge
brands face?

ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES

LEWIS represents hundreds of multi-national brands. One of the most common challenges they face is how to create a social media strategy that maps onto their global organization. Should every country have its own blog and Twitter feed? Who is responsible for responding via social channels if a crisis occurs in another region? How much input should markets have into each other's content, given that it can all be accessed by a global audience? Organizations need to establish a framework that makes sense and has clear ownership, while providing enough flexibility to meet the needs of each country.

LANGUAGE

Marketers have long understood the importance of local language content. But, social media has introduced the concept of self-publishing and made every company effectively a media company. So, if value-added online content is a key element of your marketing strategy, how do you continue to serve the language needs of your customers? Does that mean multiple blogs in multiple languages or a single English-language blog? Do you allow mixed-language content on your YouTube channel and Twitter feed or dilute your online equity by creating multiple channels? And how do you set up listening platforms to cover every language?

PLATFORMS

Even as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube continue to grow globally, local online networks remain a force to be reckoned with when developing social media strategies. How do you evaluate and prioritize these platforms? What is best practice for the most significant ones?



CULTURE AND POLITICS

We've all heard about the multi-million dollar ad campaigns that flopped in certain countries because the name translated to something completely different, or because the content was offensive in that culture. Marketers have to understand global sensibilities – it's part of the job. But, in social media, where you don't have control over the content that your brand is associated with, this becomes even more challenging.

TIMEZONES

Social media is all about speed. So what happens if a customer in Spain complains on Twitter about your product and no one in that timezone is authorized to act? What if no one is even listening during that time? If your organization is large enough to have listening posts and crisis response processes set up in every timezone, great. But, for many, that isn't the case and, in the hours between that first complaint and your alarm clock beeping, the situation may have spiraled to much more serious proportions.

PRODUCT MESSAGING

If you adapt your product offerings to suit the needs of each market, you also have a messaging challenge. Products designed to support regulatory or legal requirements may differ from country to country. Key demand drivers may vary across markets. Use social media to launch a promotion or new product and you have to ensure that the markets it applies to are made clear, or risk confusing and disappointing customers.

In summary, marketers need to ensure that they have a clear strategy that addresses all these challenges from the outset. Whether you're marketing a sophisticated multi-national, or a start-up with international ambitions, you need to factor in global audiences from the outset and have a plan in place to meet their different needs.

Market
breakdown:
What you
should know
about social
media around
the world



Social media

UNITED STATES

- 1 Don't worry about tagging content to a specific location. Where something took place isn't as important to US audiences as why something is compelling and relevant.
- 2 Add value to your community. US audiences are accustomed to the top brands in social providing a great deal of value in the form of premium content, interesting discussions and real-time customer service.
- 3 US audiences are bombarded by repetitive and shallow content from news organizations. Social media presents an opportunity to provide more depth and empathy than traditional media can. This is a powerful opportunity for brands.

SPAIN

- 1 Companies serious about engaging Spanish audiences must have Spanish language social media programs. (Remember, Catalan is a separate language).
- 2 Community self-regulation is common and guidelines for online behavior are becoming more widely recognized and upheld. Be aware of these guidelines if participating in or hosting communities.
- 3 The Government Data Protection National Association has grown in importance and ensures that Internet users' data is not misused. Check that your efforts comply with this organization's guidelines.

PORUGAL

- 1 Hi5 is an extremely popular social network in Portugal. If your target audience is below the age of 13, Hi5 is where you should focus.
- 2 Many brands are successfully using YouTube. But avoid standard corporate videos. Videos that demonstrate a brand's personality and that encourage interaction resonate best.

ITALY

- 1 All content and social media communications must be in Italian.
- 2 Religion, crime, and sexuality are all taboo subjects and should be avoided online.
- 3 Research by the US State Department has found that brands have limited presence in the social media sphere in Italy, with campaigns focusing on specific products rather than brand identity.

UNITED KINGDOM

- 1 UK audiences are extremely skeptical. Make sure you have your facts to hand and can back up any claims you make.
- 2 UK audiences react well to content that is humorous and witty. But beware, there's a fine line between being witty and being offensive.
- 3 It's important to be aware of the regional sensitivities within the UK. Beyond London, areas such as Manchester, Bristol, Leeds, and Newcastle are critical social media hubs.

NETHERLANDS

- 1 Most online influencers in the Netherlands have day jobs, so don't approach them the same way as journalists. Set up separate meetings, preferably out of office hours.
- 2 In the Netherlands, there are a lot of widely-read collaborative blogs. Most of them are open to new contributors, so consider joining forces to reach a large audience instead of building your own (corporate) blog.
- 3 You think your company is great, but don't push this too hard in social media. Share knowledge and let other people judge your capabilities. Nobody likes braggers, but the Dutch have a particular dislike for it.

BELGIUM

- 1 There are few A-list online influencers, so there's an opportunity for brands to establish an online leadership position in their area of expertise.
- 2 Belgians use Dutch, French, German and English to communicate online. Include multiple languages when building sites that are intended for a Belgian audience, but in social networks, forums and microblogs, be led by your audience's choice of language.
- 3 Data privacy is a big issue in Belgium – be aware that most users are sensitive about sharing personal information.

FRANCE

- 1 Always communicate in French if you want to generate engagement and a positive response.
- 2 Engage with French influencers online but do also try and meet them face-to-face once in a while. This is usually much appreciated.
- 3 Social networks and sharing sites are more popular than blogging. Consider using Twitter and Facebook to nurture and retain customers.

tips by market



GERMANY

- 1 Although most Germans do understand English they appreciate if a company uses the mother tongue, so try to tweet and post in German.
- 2 Germans are active in discussions on forums and Xing groups. If you participate in these forums on behalf of a brand, be transparent about your role by including it in your profile or user name.
- 3 Germany is extremely focused on data privacy. Make sure you know the rules for company use of social media and explain what exactly you will need any user data for.

POLAND

- 1 Local language and references are essential.
- 2 Monitor grassroots initiatives in social media that are already popular among Poles: identifying with one that is relevant to your brand is more likely to be successful than building a community from scratch.
- 3 Adopt the right tone: be informal but informative. Be careful of over-enthusiastic product-centric content as it could meet with skepticism.

CZECH REPUBLIC

- 1 Czech companies are only just starting to use social media for marketing.
- 2 Facebook is a popular platform in the Czech Republic and brands are starting to explore its use for marketing, although most company fan pages have little traction.
- 3 If you pursue a Facebook strategy, be sure to provide interactive content for users: contests and games are the most successful.

HONG KONG

- 1 Language choice is important. If you want to reach people in mainland China, use Mandarin. For people in Hong Kong, Cantonese is the correct language.
- 2 For every well-known Western social media channel exists a local counterpart (renren for Facebook, sina for blogging, Youku and Tudou for video sharing, Manzuo for deal-of-the-day and group buying, Sina Weibo for Twitter). This creates audience fragmentation so brands need to research their target markets carefully.
- 3 Because Chinese language uses symbols, 140 symbols is a lot more than 140 characters - so microblogging in Chinese allows more in-depth content.

INDIA

- 1 More than 30 million Indians use Social Networking sites and 60% of those are open to being approached by brands.
- 2 Bollywood and Cricket are two mainstays of Indian culture and marketers can benefit by strategically incorporating them. Many brands have successfully involved Bollywood celebrities in community building.
- 3 English is the de facto language of business, but to connect with wider audiences, incorporate Hinglish (combination of Hindi and English) to give campaigns a much-needed local flavor.

SINGAPORE

- 1 Singapore's population is made up of people from India, Indonesia, Malaysia, China and Singapore. Therefore be mindful and respectful of different races, beliefs and religions.
- 2 Be sensitive about the tone of content associated with your brand; for example, any content that appears to tarnish the reputation of Singapore will offend your audience. Equally, avoid any content that could be perceived as being critical of the Government.
- 3 Ensure that local statistics and facts relevant to Asia are included in your content.

AUSTRALIA

- 1 Australia has one of the highest internet penetration rates in the Asia Pacific region and one of the largest Facebook user bases per capita in the world.
- 2 Content must be relevant to the Australian market and not replicated from the US or Europe. APAC-wide information is generally well received by Australian audiences (particularly in the business community), however an Australian angle is more compelling.
- 3 Have a clearly defined strategy for both Australia and New Zealand - they are separate markets with unique demographics and business challenges.

Best practice
recommendations
for global brands

Understand where your communities are

The first step in any social media strategy, global or not, is to research your existing communities.

- Set up monitoring tools and search queries and watch who is mentioning your brand. Tools like Radian6 and SocialMention will enable you to search social sites to find mentions in multiple languages. If you're active on Facebook, Facebook Insights will show you which regions your fans are in. Find how many relevant people are using Twitter by using sites like Tweepsearch and TwitterGrader. Filter results by specifying the location you are targeting.
- Use Google Trends to see how people are searching for your brand or topics related to your brand. You can view results by geography.
- Forums are a great place to find active audiences. To identify these forum communities, use tools like Boardreader and filter your results by language.
- Check your own web analytics for signs of significant traffic from specific markets.

Where are your most active communities? You may find that they coalesce around specific topics, rather than language or geography. That's useful to know when it comes to defining a strategy.

Study the results to identify any differences in the way markets respond to your brand. Do you see more engagement in certain countries? More negativity in others? You can use tools like Sysomos to analyze sentiment within online conversations.

It goes without saying that, if you haven't already conducted a social media audit for your brand, then you should do all this as part of a broader analysis of your social presence.

Ask LEWIS about
its international
social media audits

Organize your channels

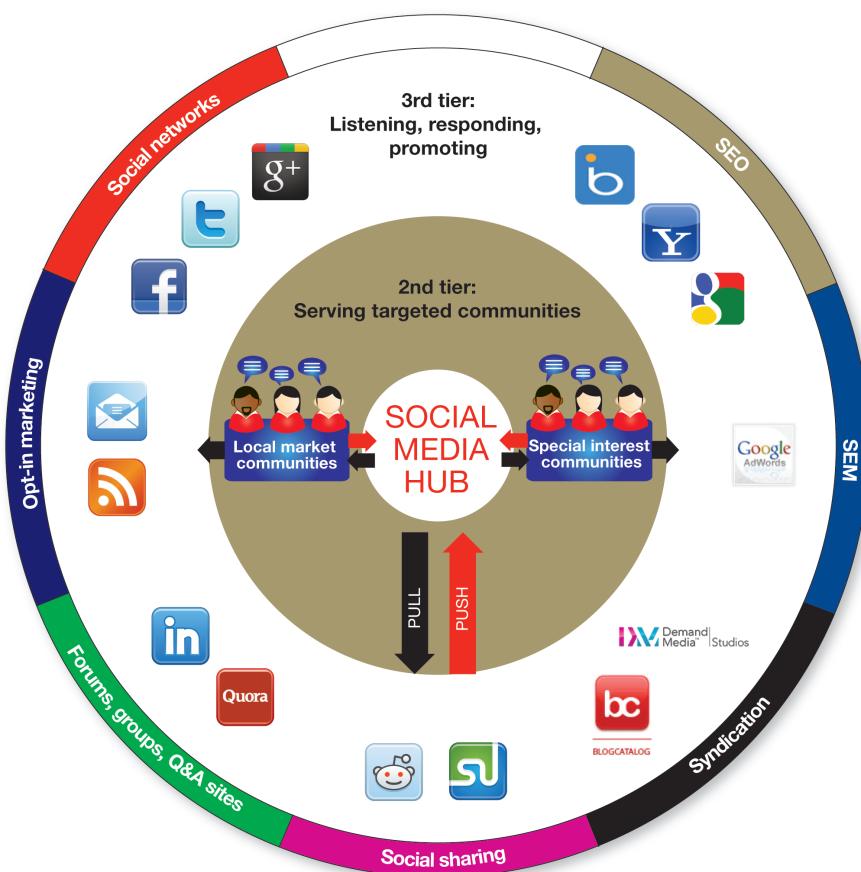
Every organization needs a clear strategy for its social channels. Best practice suggests a hub and spoke model works most effectively. This means you need to pick one channel to be the focal point and priority for your social media efforts. For many brands, especially B2B ones, this will be an owned channel such as a blog, forum or community site rather than a third party platform such as Twitter or Facebook. There are many advantages of leading with a platform-agnostic channel, which we won't go into here. But, for brands that may not have significant social profiles already, an owned channel is a better way to build an authoritative and meaningful social presence. Brands with extremely active communities already in Facebook or Twitter, on the other hand, may choose to make one of those platforms the hub of their efforts.

If you're starting social media marketing from scratch, it makes sense to align the hub with your largest, most active, market. If appropriate, it also makes sense to make your hub an English-language site as people around the world often search the Web in English, as well as their own local language.

To start with, your social media program will focus on creating content and building authority for that hub. Use other social platforms and channels to promote that content and drive traffic back to the hub. You can also use these third party platforms to listen and respond to your communities in their language. This will be primarily a reactive effort to start with. Don't be tempted to federate your efforts too soon. It takes time to build a credible social presence. Trying to promote several sites will only dilute your impact and weaken your results. As you build momentum, you can start to add in more focused market-specific programs.

For brands with an established social media presence, the challenge is often how to streamline numerous sites and channels. Without a policy, organizations can find that branded Twitter profiles, Facebook groups, blogs and microsites keep popping up as enthusiastic employees (or even customers) launch their own initiatives. While you want to encourage participation (you'll need that later), having dozens of social profiles is at best inefficient and at worst damaging to your brand.

A good solution is to create a three-tiered strategy:



- At the center of your social media program is your chosen hub. This is written primarily in the most commonly-spoken language among your target audience and is where you'll place the majority of your effort around content creation. You'll launch new content here first and you'll make this site the focus of your overall SEO program. You'll also provide clear calls to action on the site that map back to your business goals.
- The second tier consists of social sites that provide specific content or meet specific needs for your key communities, be they geography or interest-based.

- For example, you may have a significant German-speaking community that likes to share best practice with other German-speaking peers. You could create a forum or wiki specifically for that group, with some local market information and a local language moderator. You would include links back to the main hub site and potentially even a feed of content from that site.
- Alternatively, you may have a significant multi-lingual fanbase on Facebook and so want to make a Facebook page a second tier site, with some dedicated content and programs. You'll want to pick a language for the page rather than diluting the impact with multiple languages. But you can provide details of any other second tier sites catering to specific languages or markets in the Info tab. It's ok to direct people off your page as long as you're directing them to another site within the same tier.
Limit the number of these second tier sites according to the resources you have available to manage them.
- The third tier consists of social outposts. These are social sites where your community is present but your efforts are primarily reactive. Monitor the conversations, respond and engage where appropriate, following the cues of your community when it comes to language. How many of these outposts you maintain will depend on what your communities need. If you have a sizable Spanish-speaking community, for example, you may need a dedicated Spanish-language Twitter handle for responding to tweets in that language.

...And don't forget about SEO

When implementing social media programs across regions, companies may end up spawning additional self-hosted web properties, like blogs and forums, as part of their approach.

To fully activate the search / social intersection, brands should be conscious of implementing international SEO best practices with any social assets developed.

Some basic items to follow, include:

Domain hosting location

Web properties perform strongest in organic search when they are physically hosted at a location within the country targeted.

Inbound link profile

When conducting link acquisition to promote the site, ensure you are soliciting links from other websites relevant to both your location and industry.

Languages used on the site

Language used on the web site and in the site's meta information helps signal to the search engines that content is appropriate for a regional-specific audience.

Location address information

If reaching a certain location in search engines is desired, including the local address as part of the site template may help the search engines understand relevance to a specific area.

Webmaster tools settings

If a site isn't using a country code TLD (Top Level Domain) such as .uk and is using a more generic .com TLD, set the geographic targeted in Google and Bing webmaster tools to inform the engines the site is relevant to a specific region.

Allocate marketing resources

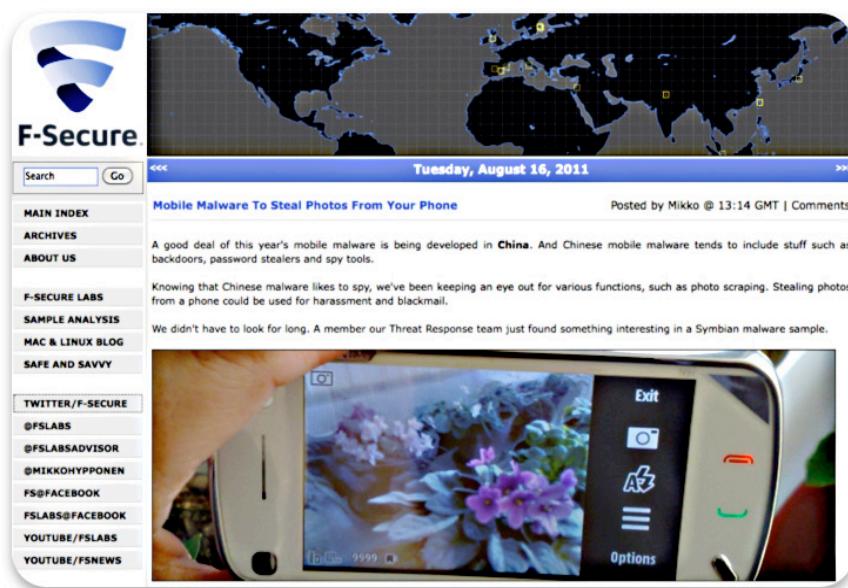
Each new domain or sub-domain is a brand new website in the eyes of the search engines, and so will require its own focused marketing effort. Multiple domains split link authority, so weigh the benefits of creating more sites carefully as it will take time to build up organic search momentum with each new site. Generally, if you are not confident you can not put long-term effort into creating content and promoting a new site, don't create it.

Develop content that meets your audience's needs

By now you know where your communities are and what they're interested in. You have a way to listen to them and communicate with them. You have organized your channels and prioritized your resources accordingly. Now you need to create content that will support your global needs.

Your content strategy needs to align to your channel strategy. That means your global hub needs to offer content that is relevant to your global audience: thought-leadership pieces, high-level educational guides, corporate news, information about globally-available products. Contributors of that content need to demonstrate a global view. It may even be beneficial to include guest content from representatives around the world.

For example, F-Secure is a global security company, headquartered in Helsinki Finland. It uses an English-language blog as the hub of its social media strategy, which is an appropriate choice given the technical nature of its content. Video is used frequently to illustrate concepts to a global subscriber base.



The screenshot shows the F-Secure blog homepage. The header features a world map. Below it, a post titled "Mobile Malware To Steal Photos From Your Phone" by Mikko is displayed. The post discusses Chinese mobile malware and includes a photograph of a smartphone displaying a purple flower image.

Contact LEWIS
about our digital
content creation
capabilities

Second tier sites should obviously focus on the community they are intended to serve. Educational ‘how to’ guides, case studies, guest posts or video interviews featuring users that other readers will identify with – all of these content archetypes will work well. Be sure to poll readers and study analytics to see what’s resonating and refine your content accordingly.

Citrix, for example, created a local blog site to serve the needs of its Dutch-speaking community. The site includes a feed from the English-speaking corporate blog, alongside local market content, including guest posts from Dutch industry influencers.

In some instances, your communities may not be geographically defined. They may instead be defined by special interest area. LEWIS Pulse worked with SAP to create a social destination site to serve a community of professionals focused on business intelligence and reporting. The Reportapalooza site included profiles, contests and tips. Because of the highly targeted content, local market differences were less relevant.



Third tier channels are largely reactive, yet that doesn't mean they shouldn't have content. Much of the content will be posts answering questions from the community.

With any Twitter program, you'll need to provide more detailed content than is possible in 140 characters. This is a good opportunity to funnel the audience to your hub site or, if necessary, to relevant second tier sites.

In general, the rules of content creation for global brands are:

- Always bear in mind that your audience is global and be careful of content that is irrelevant or inappropriate to certain markets.
- Don't rely on Google Translate to create local language content. Always use a professional translation service and have someone who is a native speaker check it.
- Use images wherever possible – pictures and graphics are much easier to digest for international audiences.
- Relevance is critical. Every individual your organization engages with needs to see how the conversation is relevant to them. For international programs, make sure you are informed about the hot topics and sensitive issues in each of your target markets. Make sure you have relevant local examples to offer.

Engage at a local level

This is where an international social media campaign becomes a huge asset for your brand. Identify the right influencers in each of your target markets and put effort behind engaging with them. If you reach out to the most important and relevant bloggers in your space with relevant information, give them access to resources and (literally) speak their language, you will be so much more effective than the hundreds of companies that blast their 'targets' with the same corporate material. Of course, it is true that a large number of the most influential blogs are English-speaking and interest-oriented rather than geographically-focused. That said, it is human nature that a blogger in the UK, for example, will respond more positively to UK-focused information, even if his readership is international, so it's worth leveraging that in your outreach.

Managing local issues

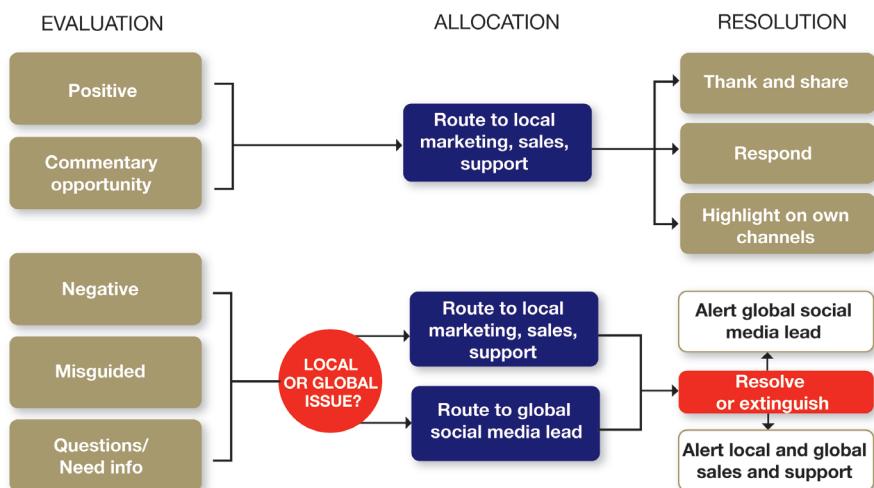
Whatever its level of commitment to social media, every brand has a responsibility to monitor for potential issues and act on them when necessary.

Of course, that's easier said than done. Earlier, we discussed how to set up global monitoring through a combination of automated monitoring tools, search queries and manual processes. If you have the resources, you will have at least one person in each timezone responsible for listening and able to respond if needed. If a major issue starts to bubble up, it simply isn't good enough to wait several hours before acting. By then, the conversation may have gathered so much momentum that it's more like a roar.

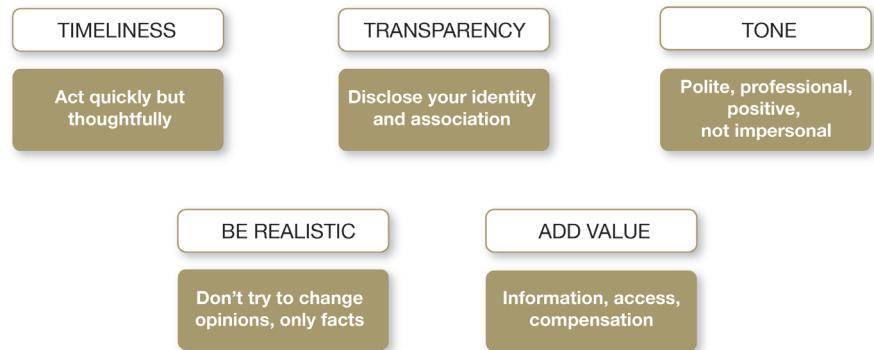
For example, SAP's biggest event of the year is SAPPHIRE NOW. In 2010, the conference was happening in two locations simultaneously – Orlando, Florida and Frankfurt, Germany. The event's Twitter feed was mainly in English, but the LEWIS Pulse team had a plan in place to support any German-language tweets that were received via @reply. An internal SAP team member was designated to monitor specifically for these tweets in the appropriate time zone, and reply in German.

Even if you have resources allocated to monitoring in each region, you will need a clear escalation process for major issues. On the next page is a sample process for multi-national brands.

PROCESS FOR MULTI-NATIONAL BRANDS



BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR RESPONSES



Implement a global social media policy

The more distributed your organization, the harder it will be to enforce guidelines around appropriate use of social media. A global social media policy is important. So what are the key components of a policy?

- Introduce your main social channels and say what they are for. The policy is a good opportunity to ensure everyone understands how the organization uses social media and to encourage people to follow the company's updates on social channels.
- Introduce the people responsible for social media in your company. They may hail from the PR, marketing, customer experience teams – or a combination of them – but make sure everyone in the company knows who they are and how to reach them.
- Establish ground rules for social media marketing. This is where you highlight who can and cannot create a social media channel or profile on behalf of the company. For example, you may decide that local marketing departments may create Twitter handles to serve their local needs as part of the three-tiered structure described above. Lay out what is permissible, who needs to give approval, how each channel must be branded, and what types of content can and cannot be shared.
- Establish acceptable individual use guidelines. A social media policy needs to include rules for use of social media at work, what may or may not be said about the company in an employee's own social networks, and what the consequences are of breaching the policy.
- Clarify the crisis procedure. Define what constitutes an issue and describe the escalation process. If applicable, include guidelines for responses that may be given locally. For more serious issues, be sure to provide back-up contacts and details on how and when to contact those individuals.

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for help with global
social media policies

- Be sure to have your policy reviewed by the legal department for any regulatory, compliance, or corporate requirements.
- It's always a good idea to end the policy by providing a way for markets to put forward suggestions. Your staff are your eyes, ears, arms and legs in a global campaign and their active participation, when properly managed, can enhance its success.

Measure, iterate, refine

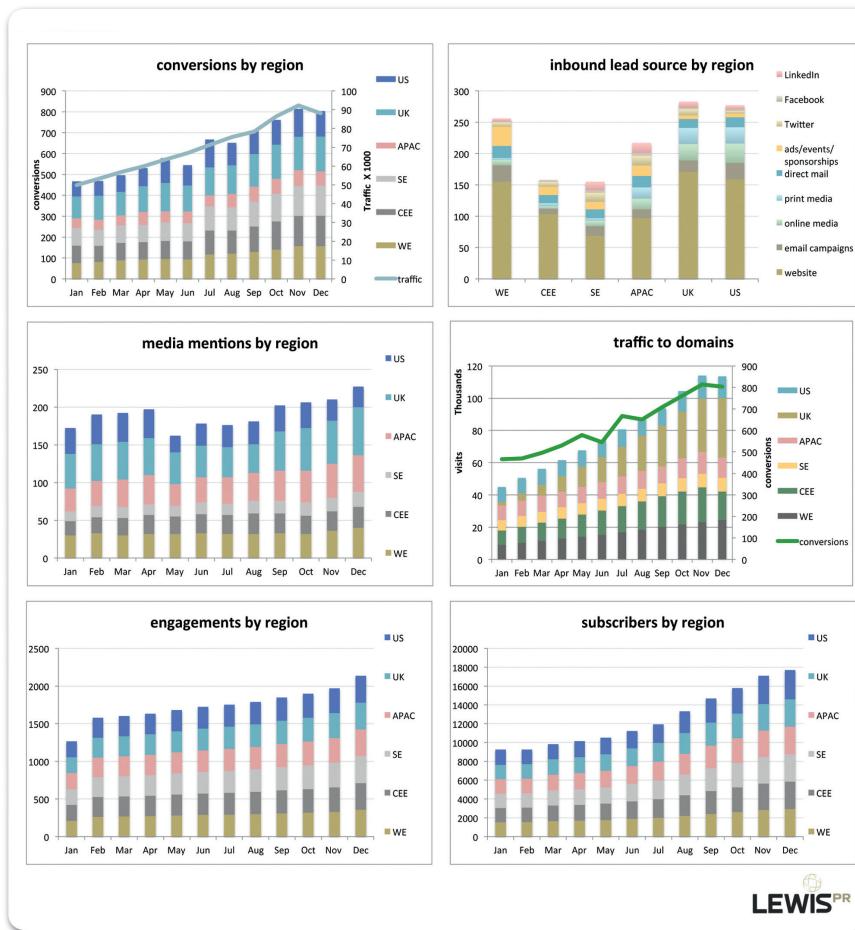
Measure a global social media program in the same way you measure any social media campaign. Be sure to establish outcomes that reflect your business goals, then Key Performance Indicators to show progress toward those outcomes.

Your most important goals will focus on your hub channel. If that's your company blog, for example, showing continued growth in subscribers and links will be key. If your focal point is a web site geared toward lead generation, the number of conversions on that site will be your top metric.

Be sure to review Web analytics and platform analytics for each of your channels. They can be helpful for refining tactics. But bear in mind that you're working toward achieving your key outcomes and so the most important thing to establish is whether your channels are contributing to that outcome.

Be careful about comparing metrics across markets. Social media adoption varies greatly and it's very hard to gain a true like-for-like comparison when focusing on quantitative metrics. Instead, focus on qualitative metrics: What is the overall tone of conversation? Which messages gain the most traction? What is the level of engagement in proportion to the community size in each market?

EXAMPLE OF A GLOBAL CAMPAIGN DASHBOARD
EVALUATION TOOL, BASED ON THE LEWIS LSCORE



Ask LEWIS
about its LSCORE
Evaluation tool

Conclusions

Social media gives global brands a valuable opportunity: it enables them to gain direct insight into what their customers around the world want. Without costly global surveys and focus groups, organizations can now serve up relevant content and respond to stakeholder needs quickly.

But, social media is also an area that global marketing can quickly lose control of. It's common for large brands to have dozens of social profiles – many of which they aren't even aware – as departments and individuals set them up on their own initiative. If no one is setting a strategy or enforcing a policy, social media can be perceived as a free-for-all and a cheap means of bypassing corporate approval processes. Brands need to be proactive about this and manage it strategically, without stifling innovation or ignoring local needs and nuances.

There is a way to be both global and local with social media.

- Listen carefully
- Organize channels thoughtfully
- Create relevant content
- Allocate resources to engaging with local influencers and communities
- Measure appropriately and refine based on data

By following this formula, global brands can be successful in social.

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www.lewispulse.com

Blog: <http://blog.lewispr.com>

Email: content@lewispr.com

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