
THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL SELLING



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PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Founded in 2007 in Austin, Texas, anthonyBarnum is a national public relations and social media firm specializing in complex industries including technology, real estate, professional services firms and health care. Our approach is distinguished by the ability to create systematic campaigns with quantifiable and measurable results that impact companies' most critical marketing objectives through advanced strategies.

THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL SELLING

Mid-market B2B companies use social selling to engage prospects and influencers, realize higher close rates, and grow demand generation. Here's how.

A good social selling strategy helps brands explain complex messages, build an ecosystem that engages customers and industry influencers, and amplify demand generation. It's an effective way to grow lead generation.

Getting in touch with prospective customers, and remaining on their radar, is a challenge. The old ways of going about it don't work. Ninety percent of decision makers today, for instance, say they never respond to cold calls. Since information is available on the web on just about everything, customers are increasingly prequalifying themselves before engaging with a vendor. One survey found that customers are, on average, 57 percent of the way through the purchase process before they ever engage with a sales professional.¹ Another survey found that 75 percent of B2B buyers use social media to be more informed about vendors. More than ever, a social selling strategy is critical.²

So, what is "social selling"? The LinkedIn Sales Blog defines it this way: "Social selling is leveraging your own professional brand and social network to gather insights and connections, then using that information to help you discover new opportunities, sell and get business done."³ Think of it as a lead-generation technique grounded in social media.

Want more? Check out "10 Social Salespeople Define Social Selling."⁴ Here, the term is described as "meeting the buyer where the buyer is conducting due diligence," and a technique where success "rests on the bedrock of the community network and the trust built upon it." Social selling is the ability to listen to prospect's conversation, engage prospects on topics that are of interest to them, and provide prospects with great content on that subject in a way that will ultimately lead them to doing business with you. As its name suggests, social selling is something that happens on networking sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest.

The social selling movement is growing, and brands need to not only get online, but build more robust online outreach programs. Forrester found that 49 percent of B2B enterprises have a formal social selling program today, and another 28 percent are in the process of establishing one. Only two percent of enterprises have no plans for a social selling program.⁵

anthonyBarnum Public Relations has helped many clients build their online presence, connect with customers and influencers, and execute strategies to grow influence, own categories and drive leads. This ePaper explains the reasons why social selling has become more important, offers a profile of what a healthy social selling program looks like, and presents some data on how engagement with influencers and customers online is one of the most effective ways of finding customers.

CONTROL YOUR MESSAGE

Social selling offers brands the ability to articulate their own complex messages, choose the frequency with which they're released, and gather detailed metrics on how brand messages are being received.

It's important for companies simply to have a platform where brand information is conveyed accurately. While earned media remains an influential source, the pace of change and specialization within increasingly varied and advancing markets means it can only go so far. The content a company creates is an important supplement and can offer a next level of depth that is important for decision makers.

What content brands create about themselves—i.e., the company's owned and social media—is an important way for brands to ensure their messages are conveyed accurately and in depth.

LinkedIn and Twitter are currently the most important platforms for business messaging, although other platforms—including Facebook, Instagram and YouTube—can also build out a brand's presence in more specialized ways. More than half of LinkedIn users are enterprise (27 percent) or mid-market (28 percent) companies. The platform has some 309,000 companies represented on it, including 1.2 million purchase decision makers.⁶

Twitter is a bit more oriented toward small and medium-sized businesses. It's a great place for gathering news, monitoring partners and competitors, and engaging in chats. Many vendors have found it tremendously useful for both customer service and crisis response. Twitter has about 317 million unique monthly users, and 65 percent of businesses with more than 100 employees have a presence on the platform.⁷

Primary Benefits of Using Social Selling Tools According to B2B Professionals Worldwide, July 2016

% of respondents



Source: CSO Insights and Seismic, "2016 Sales Enablement Optimization Study," July 28, 2016

CSO Insights and Seismic surveyed B2B business professionals and found they realized a wide variety of benefits from engaging in social selling.⁸

The collaborative nature of social media is why social selling works: Nine in 10 buying decisions are made with peer recommendations, and 92 percent of buyers trust referrals from people they know.⁹



BUILD AN ECOSYSTEM

The beginning of social selling is not only establishing a presence on social media, but actively using it to engage with others. Here are some tips on jumpstarting a solid social selling program:

- **Build a stellar profile.** Write directly to prospects. Be brief. Skip the business lingo and abstract or passive constructions. Twitter offers very little space, but brands can be a bit more expansive on LinkedIn. Optimize for search by getting straight to the point: Google will preview up to 156 characters in a LinkedIn brand profile description. Be sure to fill in the Specialties section with appropriate keywords describing brand qualities, expertise and industry focus. Use visuals or videos. Create custom background images to promote upcoming events, a new content series, a product launch, a hashtag campaign, best clients or new hires. Most of all: Once the primary page is up, post status updates regularly.
- **Share relevant content.** Some companies use social media to post open jobs and report on internal employee activities. It's usually better to use social media to focus on external audiences that will eventually build revenue. Short thoughtful essays about industry issues, questions and challenges are most likely to engage prospects and partners. Host events such as live speeches and webinars. Target specific demos: LinkedIn posts can not only be shared to a general audience, but brands can also use a free option called Targeting to direct posts to specific audiences. Target by company size, industry, function, seniority, geography and language. For a fee, sponsored posts will be promoted to audiences outside your existing connections. Sponsored content can raise brand awareness, generate quality leads and gain followers by extending the reach of company updates.
- **Research.** Choose which companies and experts to follow. Use the search feature to drill down and find potential contacts on the network by title, industry, buying authority and more. Keep lists of potential prospects. Integrate those lists into the company's customer relationship management (CRM) system.



LinkedIn offers analytical tools that help brands track progress in the composition and growth of followers, as well as monitor activity on the brand's page.

- **Listen.** Social selling is about building relationships, not bombarding with messages. Brands can build real relationships with potential customers simply by paying attention – social listening, as it’s called – to the existing concerns, issues and desires for new functionality customers express. A lot of value can be gained simply by listening. See what the industry is talking about, take note of who is expressing concerns or celebrating milestones, and pay attention to whether people are expressing concerns that your brand can address.
- **Engage.** Dedicate several time slots regularly each week to check-in to social selling platforms. See who is engaging on the brand’s own posts and be sure to answer any questions that appear in comments. When others in the industry are asking questions in their own posts in an area that the brand has expertise in, engage with an informed opinion. If experts, prospects or other followers offer statements or opinions that are helpful and interesting, a simple “Like” may be appropriate. Don’t overdo engagement. But, it’s important to let people know that the brand is listening, thoughtful and active.
- **Repurpose content.** Social media posts should be part of a broader concept and content ecosystem, a point anthonyBarnum has written about earlier this year. The same or slightly varied company content can be used for web collateral, executive opinion pieces, social media, blogs, variously themed lead generation mailings, media pitches, demos, presentations and lots more. By repurposing marketing assets, brands not only reinforce key messages and strengthen message uniformity, they also realize savings and amplify reach.



MOST BRANDS EMBRACE SOCIAL SELLING TODAY

The majority of B2B companies, and a good number of B2C companies are already engaged in social selling.

Examples include:

- Microsoft boosted productivity by 38 percent using a new cloud computing offering to socially prospect for leads.
- The Vancouver Canucks use social selling to help increase hockey ticket sales.
- U.K. travel firm Corporate Traveller used social selling to reach out to potential small and medium-sized business travel clients and achieved £5.5 million in new sales.¹⁰



GROW DEMAND GENERATION

One of the most obvious practical benefits of social selling programs is that they build a brand's demand generation program. Here's how to accelerate the process:

- **Track analytics.** Track which posts are most popular. See which ones drive traffic to the company website. Monitor the domain of visitors to the website; where they go on the site; and what they click on, view or download. Cross-reference these findings with existing prospect lists and use them to update the company CRM. Track company progress in terms of composition and growth of followers, as well as monitor activity on the brand's page. Set targets for acquiring followers who match an ideal customer profile and post updates designed to attract them.
- **Build lists.** Both Twitter and LinkedIn offer easy ways to build lists, such that you can track content by company, vertical, news topic or any number of other variables. It makes sense to display some lists publicly, such as lists of customers (which might also be linked to case studies). Other lists are best kept private, such as those of prospects in various stages of the pipeline. Just as a brand should cross-reference and fortify its CRM with analytics, so too should they connect social media findings and lists to the CRM. LinkedIn allows brands to collect all the emails of connections and followers, so be sure to use this feature. And, consider striking deals with friends or partners: [anthonyBarnum](#) knows of more than one case where CEOs in slightly different industries have shared prospect lists with each other when they might overlap. That's a simple and affordable way to grow lead demand generation list.
- **Strengthen brand trust.** As noted earlier, nine in 10 buying decisions are made with peer recommendations. Ninety-two percent of buyers trust referrals from people they know. Those statistics alone help illuminate how valuable LinkedIn recommendations and referrals can be. When the brand has had a good experience with clients, experts and colleagues, approach them about writing a brief LinkedIn recommendation. Offer to do the same for them. Use social media to highlight and promote successful company case studies. Use LinkedIn connections as introductions to prospects when possible. When those introductions are accompanied with explicit or implicit endorsements, it can dramatically build credibility and help close deals.

Sometimes, prospect interest doesn't follow the course of a months-long approach, negotiation and engagement. Instead, potential clients may simply form a positive impression of a brand's capabilities via its web presence and social selling outreach, and proactively reach out themselves. This is another important reason for regular, persistent social media monitoring. When incoming queries arrive, respond quickly. One study found that when responses from brands took more than just 60 minutes, the subsequent closing rate of a sale with that prospect began to fall.

BETTER PROSPECT INFO IN LESS TIME

Several years ago, Harvard Business Review found that 90 percent of executives don't accept cold calls.¹¹ If anything, the rate today is even higher than that. The way to gather the best information, engage in the most productive outreach and use sales time most productively is increasingly via social selling.

Social selling programs work. A recent survey found that one in three B2B professionals said that social selling tools increased the number of leads they had to work with, and even more—39 percent—said that social tools reduced the amount of time they spent researching accounts and contacts.¹²

Here are some final compelling statistics about social selling:

- Four in 10 sales reps have recently closed two to five deals directly thanks to social media.
- Half of revenue is influenced by social selling in 14 common industries, including computer software, health care, and marketing and advertising.
- Sales reps who use social selling tools are more likely to fill their pipeline than those who don't use them.
- Social selling tools can increase win rates by five percent and deal size by 35 percent.
- IDC found that 75 percent of B2B buyers and 84 percent of executives use contacts and information from social networks as part of their process.¹³

anthonyBarnum has worked closely with clients to help them build sophisticated, owned content driven social selling programs that grow audiences, attract attention and strengthen brands. The impact of social media on lead generation and, ultimately, revenue is only increasing.



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Contact us for more information on how your organization can benefit from high-impact public relations and social media.

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