



How To Market Your Business, Yourself or Your Cause In The Digital Age

by Emily Reeves

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Overview

Looking at the digital opportunities for communication can be overwhelming as a small business, an individual or a cause with no money for marketing help. And you know you need to be on digital communications channels as more and more consumers are moving online to get their information. Approaching digital communications just like you would general marketing is the best way to not get overwhelmed and get through your planning strategically. This digital whitepaper will walk you through an approach to planning, strategies for consideration, and tips for channel selection.

First, Let's Dispel Myths

Digital communications (which includes social media) are not "free." The accounts may be free to set up, but much time must be put into them to cultivate engagement with your audience, create content, curate content and respond to the needs of your followers. Communication is both an art and a science; just because we do it on digital channels does not make it easier, less time consuming or less expensive. Just because someone "knows how to use Facebook" does not mean they know how to effectively communicate with your target audience in that space.

Start With The Basics

Before you jump into tactics, cover the basics that can act as the guiding light as you go through the planning process and then ongoing execution.

- Establish your measurable objectives. How will you know if you succeeded?
- Name your target audience. Give them personalities. Describe them as thoroughly as possible. It has to be more than women 18+, for example. That is too broad. One of the beauties of digital communications is that you can target very specific niches, with very specific messaging and calls-to-action.
- Craft your key messages by target audience. Include specific calls-to-action; digital is all about interaction and engagement.
- Make a list of terms and phrases people might put in a Google search bar to find you (the terms for which you would want to be at the top of the results).

Outline The Strategies and Tactics

How might you achieve each objective? Social media, paid media, website, email campaign, text message campaign, interactive infographics, video, photography? Some combination of several of these?

What specific channels are right for your message, right for your audience and where you have the bandwidth to contribute regular content? When you find something that meets all three of those requirements, consider it a perfect storm and take it on! That last requirement is just as important as the first two: if you don't have time to properly cultivate a channel, then don't go there. You don't want your audiences to go there and see old content and a seemingly abandoned channel. And you don't want to be sharing so infrequently as to lose the interest of your audience. Only start what you can properly attend to when it comes to digital communications that audiences can access anytime and anyplace. You no longer own the message: your audience owns it.

Content Creation and Curation Advice

All of this is general advice. You should watch the results change as you change how and when your content is posted and what it is about. Tweak your pattern based on when you see you are getting the best results.

As you are creating content for any of these channels, refer back to the list that you made in your initial planning for key words and phrases that people might use to search for and find you. Be sure to work those words and phrases into the content and messaging on all your channels to aid in organic search engine optimization.

Eighty percent of what you share should be about someone else and 20 percent can be about you. This means you are aggregating content from bloggers, journalists, podcasters, and writers whose content you agree with. It supports your thinking, the way you do business, or where you believe your industry is going. Following this rule prevents you from creating a social network that is all about you. It also motivates others to want to share your content because you are so giving through your social networks.

Experiment with frequency and time of day for content updates and shares on each channel you are using. The audiences vary by channel and your particular target audience may react to frequency/time of day differently than another target audience on the same channel.

As a general guideline on frequency:

- A tweet has a half-life of just a few minutes. The stream moves quickly.
- A Facebook post has a half-life of a few hours.
- A pin on Pinterest has a very long tail: 30+ days.
- Email — this greatly depends on what you are using it for; do research for your specific industry to determine the best frequency for your emails.
- Blog — once a week, minimum; 7 times a week, maximum.



As a general guideline for time of day:

- Twitter — noon to 6 PM
- Facebook — early afternoon
- Pinterest — 2 PM to 4 PM and 8 PM to 1 AM on weekdays; Saturday mornings
- Email — 6 AM - 10 AM
- Blogs — 11 AM



Check Yourself: Before communicating/posting anything, ask yourself: To what end am I doing this?

Channels To Consider

Website: A website can act as your brand's digital hub. All information you feed to other channels should also be found here. You should provide links to all of your other channels on your website.

Blog: A blog is your place to share longer form content, chock full of SEO terms and phrases. A blog also provides content for you to share on your social channels and drive audiences back to your site for additional information and engagements.

Twitter: Think of Twitter as headlines. People scan Twitter looking for information that catches their eye and intrigues them to click through, reply or retweet.

Facebook: Facebook is about friendship and giving people content that makes them feel good. That might in the form of entertainment, deals or stories.

Instagram: This is about interesting images. Don't share just every photo here; decide carefully which ones to share.

Pinterest: Pinterest sells. Period. Put what you are selling in a context in which the audience would use it. Photograph it well and pin it to Pinterest.

Email: Keep email short and include links for more information. People are busy and more emails go unopened than opened. Make sure your subject line is direct so that your audience knows what they are getting when they open it.

Other: This is a catch-all category for content that be shared on its own or onto other channels. This includes videos, photos, infographics, etc.



Who Are The Influencers In Your Industry?

Build a relationship with them in the hopes that they will recognize you and you can tap into their networks. Make a list. Digital communications happen on a two-way street: you can't ask for help from others unless you are also giving something to them through online engagements.

- Follow them on all their digital channels.
- Comment on their posts.
- Retweet them.
- Mention them in posts.

Measure

Do it regularly (at least every two weeks), looking back at the objectives you set for yourself. What is working? What is not? Where are you not meeting your goals? What can you do to optimize? Look at:

- Content/messaging
- Channel
- Timing
- Frequency
- Engagements
- Site traffic

Interested in learning more?

Contact Emily Reeves at ereeves@stoneward.com for help planning your brand's digital engagements.

About Emily Reeves, Director of Digital Innovation & Insight Planning

As the agency's digital champion, Emily Reeves proves that Stone Ward has the offerings, expertise and alliances to bring sound, measurable digital innovation to our clients' marketing efforts. A seasoned communications strategist with a passion for all things digital, Emily has distinguished herself as an avid blogger, social media speaker, industry observer and moderator. In her role as digital thought leader for Stone Ward, Emily collaborates with our team of agency leaders in creative, brand management, public relations, media, digital technology and video production to create relevant ways to tell our clients' stories in the digital space and to provide meaningful measurement and analytics as a tool for calculating our efforts. Emily's focus on measurement extends to her duties as the agency's research leader, where she works with Stone Ward clients to develop and execute research plans that inform integrated client marketing efforts.

About Stone Ward

Stone Ward is a full-service ad agency. Established in 1984 by Larry Stone and Millie Ward, today the agency employs 52, with capitalized billings exceeding \$40 million. The agency's offices are in Chicago and Little Rock.