

# Social Media Time Management

Strategies for Tackling Information Overload



## Getting Organized

Information overload is real, but it's something that's in your control. Managing your time in social media is first and foremost about deciding where to spend your time and why, and that requires a little bit of organization to start with.

### **What Are You In This For?**

If your goal is to be engaged in social media for pleasure or just for personal connections, your approach is rather simple. You'll choose the tools and sites where you find folks with common interests, and you'll tuck the time in outside your other responsibilities.

But if you're in this for business, at least in part, you're going to need to think through some clearer goals than that. Here are five sets of questions to ask yourself:

- 1) Realistically, how many hours do I have to spend in social media each day? Do I have resources/people other than me? What can I expect of them? (Note: if you're serious about doing social, you need to find an hour a day to start with, at least.)
- 2) Which 2 or 3 tools and social networks make sense based on my listening efforts? What is my goal for participation on those sites? What is the culture of those communities and how will my participation line up with that?
- 3) Have we evaluated our current online and offline communication efforts to determine what's working and what we might supplement or replace with social media? Am I going to need to add this on to my existing responsibilities in order to prove its value before making trade-offs?

4) Has our leadership bought into this idea already, or am I establishing a presence so I can build a stronger case? Is time I spend on social media going to be viewed as an investment or a time sink? How do I make the case for the former?

5) What does success look like? How about failure? How can I measure both, even simplistically? (Hint: Objectives you can't measure against are going to be really hard to celebrate or adjust, since you won't know how you did either way).

These are just a start, and you'll think of more. But managing your social media presence and time means having a crystal clear idea of what you want out of it. The goals and objectives will help dictate the path and resources you need.

## **Personal Vs. Professional**

You'll hear lots of takes on this one, but here's our answer about whether you should be participating as yourself or as your brand:

The web is a vast, intertwined thing. If you're participating in social media, you cannot keep your personal stuff from touching your professional stuff, even if you think you're separating them by imaginary lines. The dots can always be connected, and you'll do well to keep that in mind for the long term.

For the most part, as connections and colleagues, we don't draw distinctions between you, the "personal" account and you, the "professional" one. You are you, with many facets. We think of you as a whole person, with many parts.

That said, you *\*can\** create a separate blog, Twitter account, and Facebook page to foster conversation with a business purpose. I'd advise against participating solely as a logo; if you have a central corporate page/account, please let the voices and participants be intensely human and contribute as such.

Whenever possible, provide names and faces to go along with the people on your team. Give your community people to associate with your company, and a sense of who they are. Allow them to converse outside rigid messages and corporate topics and be personable and approachable. That is, after all, the point of all of this.

And remember. If you're using your personal account in hybrid, whatever you post has a long shelf life. If you don't want internet content about you personally to reflect on you professionally, keep it off the internet. There are no shortcuts to personal accountability. And good judgment doesn't come with an owner's manual.

## Resource Allocation

Organizations that are embarking on social media are going to be at different levels of maturity. That's okay. What's most important is that you recognize where on the spectrum you sit, so you can plan your efforts accordingly, and focus on how to get to the next level. Here are a few models you can consider:

### **Passive**

Passive organizations are in observation mode. You're getting the lay of the land. Listening, paying attention, absorbing what's happening around you. The goals here are to learn what conversations are happening around your company, competition, and industry, where they're happening and how often, and start laying out your approach in line with what you learn.

### **Responsive**

Responsive companies are taking the first step in engagement online. They're still listening, but they're also making forays into responding to the active dialogue. Usually, that means basic responses to company or brand mentions, but it can also mean contributing to industry conversations on social networks that are of interest and strategic focus.

### **Engaged**

At this point, your company is ready to not just participate in existing conversations, but to start a few of your own. That can be anything from starting a blog to foster home-grown dialogue, to initiating conversations on your community or social networks like Ning, Twitter, or a Facebook page. The point here is that you're leading the conversation, not just following where it goes.

### **Creating**

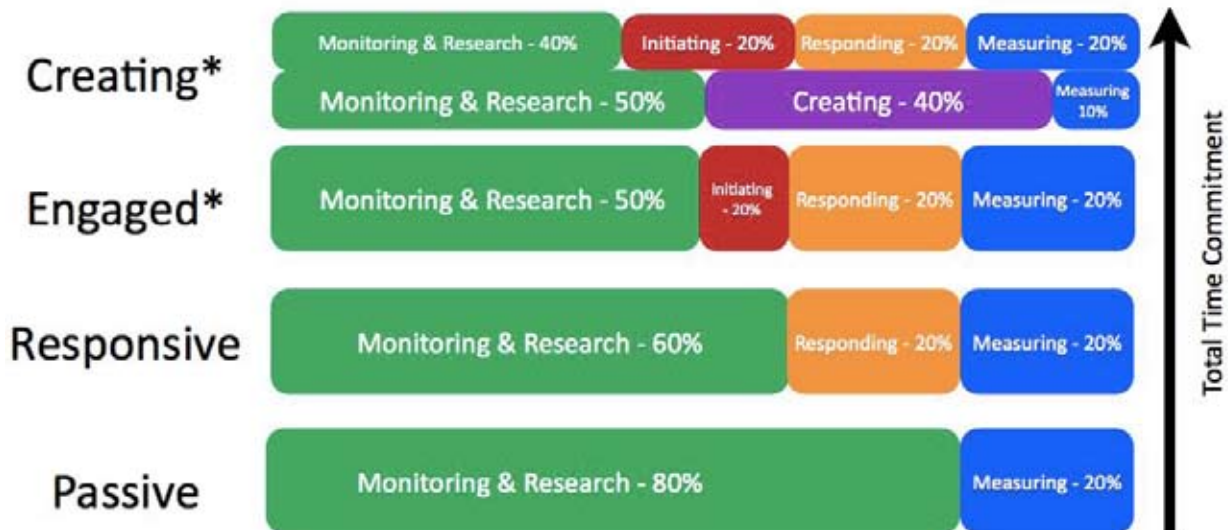
Creation is a step beyond engagement. It's more than just conversation. It's the generation of meaty, useful and valuable content for your community and potential community. Blog posts are the beginning, but here we're looking at a full content marketing strategy that includes development of independent content designed to be distributed and shared for the purpose of establishing a thought leadership position in your industry.

## So – how much time does that take?

Here's one take on it, from a generalized perspective (and your mileage will and should vary). Listening will always, ALWAYS be the biggest chunk. It's how you know where you're going and where you've been.

You'll note the top two levels have an asterisk; it's to indicate that if you're serious, you'll need more than one person (however well intended) to do it well. The last level is broken out into two lines of responsibility, one for content creation and one for engagement and outreach.

## Social Media Maturity



## What about people?

If you're an individual or a small business, this is how you might break out your team. It's often one person, which means you have to make choices about which pieces of this matter most to you and create the most value. Listening and measuring can sometimes coincide and overlap, and content can be repurposed and re-engineered for the web. But for this size business, auditing your online efforts to make social media an OR instead of an AND is really critical.

## Allocating Resources

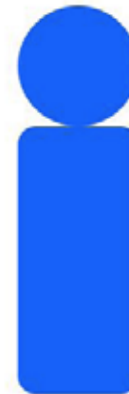
### Integrated Social Media - SMB



Listening  
1 team member  
10-15 hours per week



Engaging, Initiating & Creating  
1-3 team members  
1-3 hours per day

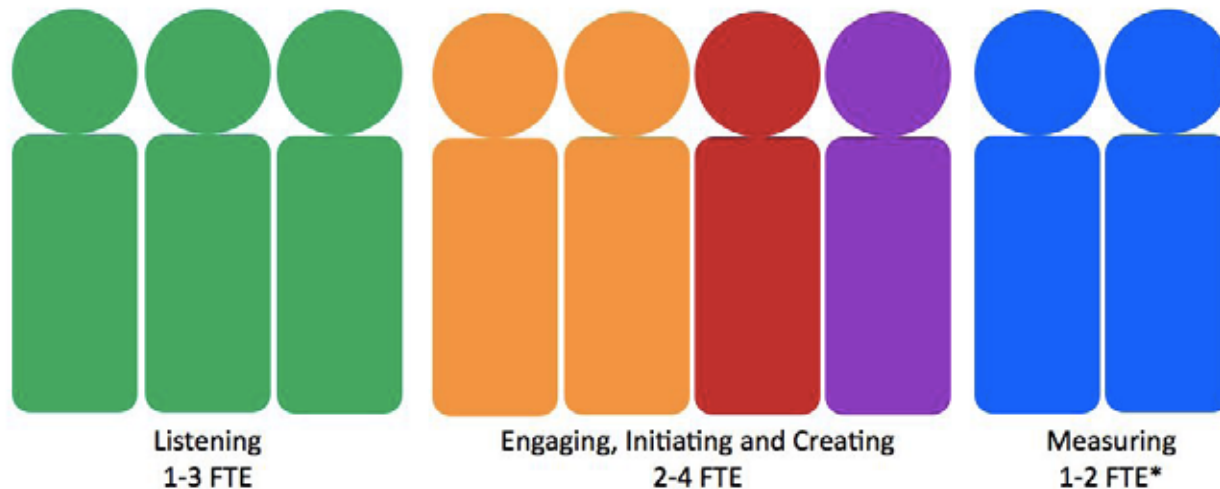


Measuring  
1 team member  
5-10 hours per week

If you have a larger organization and are looking to develop a team approach, here's what that might look like. You'll need to think about how to create workflows in your organization to get information throughout your team and into other areas of the organization that need it in order to inform business decisions.

## Allocating Resources

Exclusive Social Media - SMB  
Integrated Social Media - Larger Biz



As an example, you might have a few folks on the front lines collecting, routing, and assigning posts for follow up. You might have one or two exclusive “behind the scenes” content creators that help seed your libraries and outposts, and select people that handle the bulk of the visible engagement and outreach activity. The measurement folks and the listening folks are often one and the same, dividing time and processes with input from the rest of the team.

Ideally, you’re growing into an organization that has point people on this team from each department. You’ll have customer service, sales, and community folks on the listening and engagement side. You’ll have marketing, PR, and community people building content. You’ll have HR, product, finance, legal and executive people on the reporting and communication pipeline so they stay plugged in even if they’re not actively participating. Your workflow will be very individualized, but think it through globally, not just in the silo of your department.

So, that’s a high level view of what your resource allocation might look like, and the time commitment it’ll take to do it well. Is it easy or fast? Heck no. No one said it would be. This is a business model. Not a tactic.

## Selecting Tools

When you've planned and are ready to actually start engaging in social media, selecting the right tools can go a long way to helping you manage your time.

Remember, the tools you select should reflect what you've learned through your listening efforts, and help you accomplish the goals you've set.

When it comes to social networks or types of social media, select two or three. Don't try to be everywhere or do it all. That's an inevitable time sink, and you'll do nothing well.

When it comes to the tools themselves, avoid shiny object syndrome and pick the ones that get you to your goals, and no more. Low tech is okay. Some suggestions for the varying areas of focus are below.

### Listening and Monitoring

If you're bootstrapping and on the DIY track, look into tools like Yahoo Pipes to build yourself a nice little aggregation environment. Or, try putting together a dashboard using NetVibes, and pull in the RSS feeds for your searches from sites like:

- Twitter Search
- Technorati
- Google Blog Search
- Backtype.com
- BoardTracker and BoardReader

- SocialMention.com
- YouTube
- BlogPulse

Or, if you really want to start with some basics, tap your search terms into a site like Addictomatic or IceRocket and get the pulse of what's happening around you.

There's also a huge case to be made for investing in a monitoring tool. Once you're spending more than a couple of hours in a day aggregating posts and information, and more than a couple of hours a week doing analysis on the data, it's time to look at graduating to a solution that can help automate some of the work and free you up to actually discover the insights that can move your business forward.

If you'd like to learn more about Radian6, [head over here to sign up for a live web demo.](#)

## **Responding, Initiating and Creating**

The number of social tools and sites available to you as a business are seemingly endless, right? The thing is, the only ones you need care about are the ones that are hosting conversations you want to be part of. That's where the listening bit comes in. That's how you know where to be. It's never about what cool new toys and sites "they" are talking about.

We've covered a few of the most popular social sites and tools in an ebook called the Social Media Starter Kit. It's free, and it goes into detail about Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and LinkedIn and a few tidbits about some of the productivity and content creation tools that we've found useful. That should give you a start. (And by all means, if your industry is still chatting it up on forums and such, be there.)

Also, please don't forget about "legacy" tools like email. Coupled with solid social media outreach and engagement, well crafted email newsletters and communications can be an essential part of what you're doing, and help you cross pollinate your communities.

If you're blogging, please do yourself the favor of using a platform like WordPress. The plugin resources and development community alone make it well worth the investment (you can get a snifty blog, built on WordPress, customized and prettied up for as little as a few hundred dollars. This beats the pants off of a lousy website). And get yourself a Google Reader account to stay connected with the blogs that matter most to you. Spending time commenting and contributing on other blogs is most likely an important piece of your engagement commitment.

## Measuring

First things first. Have a spreadsheet program? Good. Calculator? Good. When it comes to measurement at a basic level, you really can get by with these things (though it's going to take time, yes). The key is knowing WHAT to measure (which is a whole different post series, but for a start, [here's a presentation we did recently on social media measurement](#) that might offer a few suggestions).

Deciding what to measure is super straightforward if you have clear goals in place. For instance, if your goal is to increase your overall awareness in social media across the next 12 months, you might track metrics like Share of Conversation, overall on-topic post volume (posts that are about you or mention you), and your specific share of posts in your selected social media types over that period (watching how your volume increases or decreases over time on, say Twitter, forum posts, and blogs.).

Benchmarking is crucial. You can't track progress against something you aren't measuring in the first place. If you want to increase customer loyalty, you need to know what indicators you're tracking that point to that goal (repeat activity or purchases on an account, number of referrals from that source over a set period of time, increase in average purchase size, etc.).

For each objective, pick no more than three metrics to track. More than that, and you're in the rabbit hole of measurement. The win isn't that you measured. It's that you measured something that provided an insight into your progress toward business goals. Choose wisely, and stay focused.

Some tools you might consider:

- Social media measurement and analytics: Radian6
- Twitter Analytics: HootSuite, Twitter Analyzer, TweetStats
- Web Analytics and Tracking: Hubspot, Google Analytics, Compete.com, WebTrends (paid), Omniture (paid)
- Blog Analytics: PostRank, Google Analytics (try the Social Media Metrics plugin, but it's not perfect by any means)
- URL Shorteners like Bit.ly
- Facebook Ad analytics and Facebook Lexicon

When it comes to time management, selection of tools and resources is important, but it needs to be done with an editing eye and with a systematic approach. Random and haphazard tool selection leads to similar results. Do your homework, and the tools you need will often make themselves clear. Ignore the rest.

# Social Media Time Management: 9 Guiding Principles

## **1) Manage Disruptions**

The key to managing disruptions is to have daily priorities. Sounds simple, but isn't. Pick three things that you have to get done today, and focus relentlessly on those. (Hint: they should always be tied into your bigger picture goals, or you're wasting time). If that means you have to say "I'm blogging for an hour", do that, and let nothing but emergencies stand in your way.

Realistically, unexpected stuff pops up. Document it, find a home for it so you can address it later, and give yourself permission to forget it until the time comes where it makes the priority list. If you have to address it now, take note of what you're working on and come straight back to it when you're done.

## **2) Control Information Overload**

Stop trying to be everywhere. In social media, information overload is yours to own and manage. Pick your two or three social sites and, unless your JOB is to spot the next big things, stick with them. Adopt new tools or strategies only when there is a compelling business reason to do so.

Subscribe only to the blogs you read, and unsub from the ones you don't, without apology. Delete email you aren't going to respond to (be honest), and never use your inbox as a to-do list (see #6). Turn your IM off when you're trying to work. Lots of ideas getting in the way of execution? Create a parking lot for them so you can capture them and get them out of your mind. Visit this once a week, and see if any ideas on the paper warrant a move to reality.

### **3) Leverage Tools**

Use a desktop tool like TweetDeck, Seesmic Desktop, CoTweet or HootSuite to streamline your Twitter use. Blog using a fluid tool like WordPress that has a suite of plugins to make your life easier, and use the scheduling function to write posts in advance. Make folders in Google Reader so you can prioritize your blog reviewing depending on how much time you have available.

However, resist the urge to automate your interactions. Automate and consolidate everything you can up to that point, but the engagement on social sites needs to be you, not a robot. THIS is where you need to spend the time.

### **4) Annotate and Share**

If you don't have one already, get a Delicious.com account and use it for your bookmarks. Bookmark freely, even if you never get back to reading it. If you want to find something, it's easier to go back to it. If you don't, your links can be a valuable resource of information to others (and you can send them to your specific tags if you get repeated requests for the same information).

Use sites like Slideshare.net to share your presentations, and get ideas or frameworks for ones of your own. Try Flickr Creative Commons for sourcing images and sharing your own. Get to know and love the collaborative power of Google Docs or Zoho, so you don't have to send stuff around in emails. Leverage your intranet or project tools like Basecamp to share information. The less time you spend looking for stuff, the more time you have to DO stuff.

## **5) Sometimes Templates are Okay**

If you're asked the same question several times a day in an email, write up a little framework of a response that you can personalize for each recipient, but that contains the bulk of the information you need to share. Same with Twitter. No, this doesn't mean an autobot, this means having a set of standard links on hand or responses to common questions that you can respond to as needed without having to recreate it every time.

Build an FAQ page on your site to point people to. Create sharable documents that contain frequently requested information and have them on hand in a folder for easy access. Build your tags in Delicious so that you can send people there for broad categories of related information, like statistics or case studies.

## **6) Wrangle Task Management**

When you're processing email or items in social media, every time a task pops up, you need a place to put it. Check out Things for Mac, Remember the Milk, or even the (gasp) task list in Outlook.

When you're overwhelmed by what you're supposed to do (say, the notes from a seminar you just attended or the volume of stuff in your inbox), process one thing at a time and ask yourself "What do I need to do with this as a next step?". Whatever that task is, create an item for it on your task list and archive the rest of the information for later reference. Bonus step? Tag the items on your list that are doable in less than five minutes so you can take time each day (say, 35 to 45 minutes) to plow through a handful of those.

## 7) Communicate Expectations

Sometimes, you don't have the answer. Sometimes, you don't have the time to get to something right now, but you will at some point. Honesty and humility go a long way to helping manage expectations for responsiveness online. Try these:

- "I'd love to get that information to you, but I need 48 hours. Will that be okay, or do you need it sooner?"
- "I don't have the answer to that, but I'd like to send your request to someone who does and have them respond. Is that okay?"
- "Hey there, I got your note but need a little time to respond. I'll be back to you within the day."
- To your boss, perhaps: "I'd like to complete this project, but here's the information/resources I'm missing to get it done..."

This is another reason why it's crucial to infuse some humanity into your conversations online, so folks know that you're just a person over there, not a superhero or a robot. You need time to spend with your kid, feed the dog, spend with your spouse, read a book. Yes, you should still do those things. Being sure that folks know you're responsive in a reasonable fashion but not going to be able to handle things 'round the clock is super important.

## **8 ) Establish Routines**

If you have regular tasks and tactics to focus on, you'll want to try and carve out time for them. Some examples:

- \* Blogging
- \* Reviewing and responding to email
- \* Listening and Monitoring (unless you have a dedicated staff person for this)
- \* Reporting and Analysis
- \* Checking in on social networks – Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Forums, Community sites

If you set aside specific hours in your day, turn off other distractions. (Yes, it's okay to close your email program). Put your phone on Do Not Disturb or let it go to voicemail. Even 30 minutes of focused time on a single task, on a regular basis can ramp up your productivity. It is NOT "inauthentic" to set times to interact on your chosen social networks. It's all a matter of balancing priorities.

## **9) Unplug.**

Please. Get offline. Go outside. Take a bath. Play with your kid. Go to the movies. Or go to an in-person event or Tweetup. There is nothing that will derail your social media efforts more than never walking away from them.

You need perspective from an unplugged view so your priorities stay in focus. You need time to scribble your goals on paper, or just think. Productivity isn't always about how many balls you're juggling. Sometimes, it's about very careful editing of how you do – or don't – spend your time.



Amber Naslund is a social media and community practitioner, and the Director of Community for **Radian6**, where she's responsible for client engagement, community building, and helping companies tap the potential of online reputation management, customer engagement, and social media monitoring. She's spent the last decade or so raising funds, building brands for companies of all sizes, and messing with all things online.

She's a frequent speaker, teacher, writer, collaborator, and has worked with corporate brands - from the local to the Fortune 50, communications agencies, start-ups, and non-profits to help them all understand and build social media strategies on the foundation of solid business goals.

Amber blogs at **altitudebranding.com**, focusing on elevating brands through social media and communication, and keeps her personal blog at **Inaccurate Reality**.

This content is Amber's alone, so that means that it doesn't represent the thoughts, views, opinions or practices of her employer, friends, family, minions, pets, children, or that annoying neighbor that does the leaf blower thing at 6 a.m. on Sundays. If you'd like to reach Amber, **drop an email**.

Amber Naslund

**amber@altitudebranding.com**

**http://altitudebranding.com**

Twitter: **@AmberCadabra**

LinkedIn: **http://www.linkedin.com/in/ambernaslund**