



Unit 12 Writing for Social Media

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Build a social media style guide
- ✓ Understand the 10 most important rules of quality social media content
- ✓ Create and publish engaging content to attract new fans and followers

Unit 12

Writing for Social Media

Every social platform has its own unique indexation algorithm, which works in a similar way to a major search engine. As would be the case with a more general SEO initiative, boosting your exposure on social media means taking a strategic approach to your content publishing practices.

Images, video clips, info graphics, sound bites and all other types of media can enhance and improve your social media profiles. They can also generate engagement over and above basic textual content. Nevertheless, it's ultimately the way you pen and publish your written posts that will make all the difference.

This is where you have an opportunity to differentiate yourself from your competitors. It's also where you're able to establish and promote your brand's unique voice and personality. Nevertheless, many businesses struggle to make an impact on social media audiences, having entirely missed the mark on what 'engagement' is all about.

In this chapter, we'll take a look at some of the most important tips and guidelines you'll need to know, in order to attract, engage and ultimately influence your target audience with your written content.

An Essential Part of your Social Media Marketing Plan

Producing and posting written content should form a major part of your wider social media marketing strategy. It should also be aligned with your goals and objectives, which will have been established at the earliest stage of your campaign's conceptualisation.

With hundreds of millions of posts being shared by *billions* of users every hour of every day, all businesses have their work cut out when it comes to making their voices heard. As touched upon in several previous sections, simply regurgitating what's already out there is not the way to go.

Instead, writing for social media should be embraced as an opportunity to bring something completely unique and engaging to your social profiles. Not to mention, the perfect platform to provide new and existing customers with a steady stream of relevant, useful and interesting information.

Building a Social Media Style Guide

Before publishing a single post as a new social media user, it's worth considering the importance of consistency. Ensuring everything you write and publish on social media is both consistent and a true reflection of your brand can be tricky, which is where a simple style guide can help.

Over the course of one or two pages, make a note of the following:

- **Your organization's mission statement.** What is it your company does, why do you do what you do and what are your reasons for being on social media?
- **Your perfect customer persona.** Exactly who is it you are targeting with your posts and what kind of person would you expect to be interested in your content?
- **Your brand's voice and personality.** What kind of voice would you like your customers to hear (authoritative, friendly, professional, humorous) when they read your posts?
- **Your objective for posting.** Are you posting to attract new followers, close more sales, drive traffic to your website, boost your brand image etc?

Having an established social media style guide in place makes it much easier to remain consistent when penning and publishing content. It also ensures that all contributors are on the same page, if you plan on allowing multiple persons from your business to write content for your pages.

The 10 Golden Rules of Quality Social Media Content

Of course, the nature of the content you publish (and the personality of your posts) will be determined by the type of business you run and the audience you're targeting. Nevertheless, there are several 'golden rules' for quality written content that should be adhered to at all times.

Irrespective of what you intend to say and who you're reaching out to, these are the 10 most important rules to follow when writing for social media:

1. Use Your Casual Voice

First and foremost, it's essential to remember that your social media presence should never be a carbon copy of your primary website. This means that even if you normally take things extremely seriously and publish jargon-heavy content in a formal fashion, you'll need to soften things up for social media.

The overwhelming majority of social media users head to their preferred platforms to essentially chat and 'hang out' with friends. They don't go there to be lectured or bombarded with stuffy corporate formalities. It's not a case of stepping completely away from the voice and personality of your brand, but instead putting a more casual spin on everything you say.

2. Keep Your Content Concise

Likewise, most social media users have a tendency to 'flick through' dozens or even hundreds of posts during a single visit. Short and simple content is preferred to such an extent that anything longer than a few lines will often be ignored entirely.

Think of it this way – you get a limit of 400 characters per Facebook Post, but research has shown that posts of 40 characters or less generate maximum engagement. Incredibly, just 11 words accompanied by an image or video clip has been found to work best of all. With

social media, you should always aim to get your point across as quickly and concisely as possible.

Always check your written posts before publishing, and if there's anything you can get away with removing, do so.

3. Use CTAs Strategically

CTAs provide you with the opportunity to up the marketing ante of your social media posts, without coming across as excessively promotional. You're simply providing your readers with a quick and easy way to read one of your blog posts, watch one of your videos, read one of your articles or check out one of your pages.

Though not always the case, one of the best ways of maximising the impact of a CTA is to use a Q&A format. You could use the snippet "Can you really trust the advice of the World Health Organization?" followed by a CTA "Read our eye-opening expose at (Website Name)". Or, a simpler CTA to follow the same snippet could be "Learn More" or "Find Out Here".

In any case, simple split testing will help you learn which CTAs and formats work best for your social pages. Experiment with different positions, fonts, sizes and phrasings, keeping a close eye on how they perform.

4. Write as a Person

The most engaging social media posts are those that have clearly been written by a real human being. People don't use social media to hear from brands – they use social media to hear from the people *behind* the brand.

Keeping things personal means emphasizing the use of pronouns like "we" "I," "me," and "you". Your goal being to make the reader feel the as if you are speaking directly to them on a 1-to-1 basis. "We" can be effective when writing on behalf of a team, but it's far better to use "I" and "me" to create a feeling of a truly personal post where appropriate.

This counts double when it comes to commenting and replying to comments, which should be kept as personal as possible.

5. Use Numbers and Statistics

When you quote interesting facts and share insights in your social media posts, you expect your audience to take them at face value. Some will, but others are more likely to take what you have to say with a pinch of salt. Interestingly, engagement rates can be elevated significantly by including actual numbers and statistics in your posts.

For example, "most women agreed on XXXX" won't have nearly the same impact as "in fact, 87% of women said XXXXX when polled". Without providing any actual evidence of the poll that took place, the whole thing comes across as more convincing and impactful with the insertion of data.

This can also be useful when talking about your company's products and services –sales to date, number of satisfied customers, percentage of people who recommend your brand and so on.

6. Don't Obsess Over Grammar

Writing conversational content inherently makes it difficult to follow *every* rule of good grammar. As does attempting to cram everything you need to say into the shortest possible sentence. The good news being that with social media, you can get away with breaking a fair few of the usual rules.

That said, this doesn't mean you can take things to extremes with comprehensively poor grammar or bad spelling. Missing out punctuation and using abbreviations to keep things concise is fine – completely ignoring *all* rules of good grammar isn't.

Carefully read and re-read your content out loud before you publish it, in order to get a good idea of how it will be interpreted.

7. Reply Consistently and Carefully

Make no mistake about it – the replies you publish on social media can be just as impactful as the rest of your content. If not, significantly more so. When someone writes to you publicly or comments on one of your posts, you have an invaluable opportunity to show the world exactly what you're made of.

If they're asking you a question, you should make every effort to answer it clearly, concisely and in your brand's designated tone of voice. If it's a complaint or criticism, it should be replied to quickly, professionally and with a 'the customer is always right' approach. If the person in question needs to be referred to a different department or point of contact, make sure you do so in a polite and professional way.

Lastly, don't make the mistake of automating too many replies or using copied and pasted responses – they're far too easy to detect and never send a positive message about your business.

8. Third-Party Proofreading

Before publishing any written content on social media, you should always make the effort to have it checked by at least other person (though ideally more than one). Rather than studying the intricacies of the post, these third-party proof-readers should examine it exactly as they would any other social media post.

This means a quick skim of the text to make sure the message is concise, clear and easy to understand. If they pick up on any ambiguities or issues with the meaning or context of the post, they should be addressed. You'll (hopefully) have removed any typos from the text long before now, but a final check just to be sure is never a bad thing.

9. Stay Upbeat and Energetic

At all times, it's important to bear in mind the fact that most people use social media for entertainment purposes. Even if they are on the lookout for interesting information or brand-specific insights, they still expect the content they come across to be engaging and upbeat.

Unless you're writing about something particularly sensitive, it's important to remain upbeat and energetic when writing for social media. This isn't always easy if you're feeling like garbage and aren't in a particularly good mood, but is nonetheless essential. It can also be tricky if you're discussing a subject you have strong feelings about, which can make it difficult keep your feelings and emotions in check.

This is again where third-party proof-reading can prove beneficial, helping keep things as consistent and upbeat possible.

10. Don't Write Simply for the Sake of it

Last in the list of 10 golden rules is the importance of only posting on social media when you have something worth saying. Posting regularly and consistently is important, but not nearly as vital as ensuring the consistent value, relevance and quality of your posts.

This isn't always easy when going through a dry spell, during which you may have little to no inspiration for your posts. The temptation to post random bits and pieces to keep your feed active is always there, but should be avoided at all costs.

The same also applies to writing about things you have no interest in and/or knowledge of, which won't do your feed or your followers any favours.

Additional Guidelines for Penning Premier Posts

Of course, creating and publishing quality posts doesn't begin and end with these 10 golden rules alone. If you're serious about building a loyal and engaged audience on any social network, you need to be willing to put in the necessary time and effort.

Let's take a look at a few additional guidelines for consistently creating quality content for your readers:

- **Do plenty of research**

If there's a subject you plan on talking about regularly or at an in-depth level, it needs to be a subject you know inside and out. Rather than relying on your existing knowledge and industry insights, it's important to conduct regular research to further your knowledge and expertise.

In theory, this shouldn't be a particularly painful task – assuming you're discussing topics you both understand and have a genuine interest in. Don't forget that there will always be other brands and businesses posting on similar topics, so you'll need to think carefully about what you can do to make your posts better than theirs.

- **Study your readers**

Doing your homework also extends to developing a detailed knowledge of your target audience. A good way of coming up with relevant content of genuine value is to first think about a common challenge, question or issue of priority to your typical reader. After which, it's simply a case of creating and publishing content that solves their problems.

You'll also want to use analytical tools to keep track of what's working, what could stand to be improved and which aspects of your content are having the *opposite* of the desired effect. Audience trends and behaviours are continually shifting – it's your job to do whatever it takes to keep up with them.

- **Speak the language of your reader**

Pay close attention to the language used by your target audience and make every effort to keep things on a similar level. Don't attempt to start using slang terminology and colloquialisms in a forced or artificial way, but instead work on maintaining a tone and voice that resonates with theirs.

This also means considering the differences in appropriate language between different social platforms. For example, an entertaining post on Facebook for teenagers will need a very different tone to an informative post about your business on LinkedIn. Always think about exactly who is reading your posts and use the appropriate language.

- **Use a mixture of media**

By far and wide, video content and imagery generate the highest levels of engagement across most social networks. Visual posts like these are also exponentially more likely to be shared, liked, recommended and so on. Hence, accompanying your written posts with a variety of other types of media is the way to go.

We've long since reached a point where blocks of unbroken text are ignored by most social media users. By contrast, break up the same block of text with a couple of relevant images and it's an entirely different story. Just be sure that the visual content you use is relevant and of value to your target audience.

- **Encourage comments and replies**

Every social media user knows that they have the option of commenting or replying, if they wish to do so. However, studies have shown that by *asking* people to comment or reply, they're significantly more likely to do so. It's a simple yet effective way of reminding people that you're all part of a community, where two-way communication is encouraged.

As mentioned previously, it's also important to ensure that you respond to every comment and reply you receive in an appropriate way.

- **Embrace user generated content**

We've touched upon this in previous sections, but it's a point that worth repeating. Any content you can publish that was written by a member of your target audience is far more likely to be taken seriously and heeded than anything you could write yourself.

User-generated content is one of the most powerful and influential forms of social proof you can lay your hands on. As an added bonus, it's also 100% free of charge – simply ask your customers to share their thoughts and you'll be surprised how many are willing to do so.

- **Share relevant posts from elsewhere**

Sharing relevant posts from other sources can be beneficial in two ways. First of all, it's a good way of bringing a degree of diversity to your profile, which can be great for keeping your audience engaged. Secondly, when you share other people's content with your audience, there's every chance they'll do the same for you in return.

Of course, it's essential to reach out to the original publisher beforehand, just to ensure they're on-board with your idea. In doing so, you could gradually build a network of useful contacts within your niche, enabling you to reach a much broader audience of potential customers.

- **Take your time and be patient**

Lastly, building a meaningful and authoritative presence on social media is something that takes time and effort. If you're chasing overnight fame and fortune, you can forget about it. Competition is too ferocious, meaning you first need to *prove* yourself before you can expect to be taken seriously.

The good news being that with enough patience and tenacity, the investment will eventually pay off. If you don't have the time and patience needed to run an effective social media campaign for your business, consider outsourcing to a capable service provider.

In Summary...

Writing for social media comes easier to some than others. At all times, the most important thing to bear in mind is the 'social' aspect of the experience. Rarely do people log onto social media hoping to be bombarded with advertising slogans, promotional offers and general marketing materials.

Instead, they're simply looking to be entertained and informed, while engaging with likeminded individuals.

As a business, your job is to entertain and inform them, while showing them you're a part of the community like anyone else. Everything you do should constitute an effort to break the usual business-customer barriers, which often begins and ends with the written content you publish.

Further Reading:

- ✓ **Writing for Social Media by Carrie Marshall, Nov 12, 2018**
- ✓ **Writing and Editing for Digital Media by Brian Carroll, Dec 19, 2019**
- ✓ **Redish, Janice. Letting Go of the Words (2nd Edition). Elsevier, 2012.**
- ✓ **Yahoo. The Yahoo! Style Guide: The Ultimate Sourcebook for Writing, Editing, and Creating Content for the Digital World. Edited by Chris Barr. St. Martin's Griffin, 2010.**