



W A L K W E S T

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY IN A SHIFTING WORLD

# How to Craft a Message that Stands Out

*Lizzie Newton*



# A Changed Landscape

The world has undoubtedly changed. Recent COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter protests have not only impacted the way in which we engage with and leverage social media as a tool, but altered user behavior as a whole.

**“A study of 25,000 consumers across 30 markets showed social engagement increasing 61% over normal usage rates during COVID-19,” according to Forbes.<sup>1</sup>**

Twitter, a struggling platform pre-pandemic and protests, reported 1 million new installs on June 4, 2020 alone, achieving “the most single-day installs since at January 1, 2014, when the firm first began recording app store data.”<sup>2</sup>

These moments signify a seismic shift in the way we need to think about - and thereby approach - social media, evolving it from a marketing consideration into an imperative.

## IMPLICATIONS

Social media provides users more than the opportunity to connect with one another. As an ever-evolving, user driven tool, it opens the door for brands, influencers, and next-generation leaders to engage directly with consumers, glean insights in real-time, and identify new trends as they unfold.

## Companies seek closer connections with consumers via brand-building, because spending is down - and competition is fiercer than ever.

In a recent CMO Survey, respondents said their firms have increased social media's portion of marketing budgets from 13.3% to 23.2%, to help accomplish their top marketing objectives of brand building, customer retention, customer acquisition, brand promotions, and new products and services.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, job seekers leverage social media to connect with the companies they'd like to work with, benefitting from the power of social reach and the ability to amplify their message as they build their personal brand.

### The New Social Sphere

#### POST-PANDEMIC

U.S. searches for <b>COVID-19</b> have scaled more than 100x. <sup>6</sup>	Americans are <b>struggling</b> with job losses, money worries, and mental health issues	Consumers are using <b>all devices</b> (including computers) to access social media
Spending is sinking, as consumers <b>save for basics</b>	Brands and individuals are most focused on <b>being helpful</b>	Media consumption of <b>all forms is surging</b>

## LEVERAGING A STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

In this fast-changing, hyper-connected environment where we now reside, the business case for social media is both revenue-driven and opportunity-seeking.

**“We are entering a new world of ambient media in which consumers at home are swimming in communications and spending more time than ever before with traditional TV and digital, mobile and social.”**

*Jeff Larson, op ed contributor, MediaPost.<sup>7</sup>*

Today, agility and innovation on social media are paramount for creating a strategic advantage. For brands, social media fluency is critical to engaging with key stakeholders, sharing and living the corporate mission, ensuring business growth, proactively addressing crises, and promoting corporate and social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, among other goals. For individuals, it offers a chance to stand out in a sea of sameness. In our recent white paper, *The Business Growth Imperative: The 5 Key Pillars of Next Generation Leadership*, we posited that developing social media fluency is one of five mandatory skills emerging leaders need to possess. In this paper, we expound on this topic further.

## CREATING AN ACTIONABLE ROADMAP

While many social media white papers provide exceptional tactics: sharing who, when, and how to target specific audiences on key platforms, fewer provide guidelines that can be used to craft an overall social strategy. This white paper seeks to accomplish that goal, helping the C-suite, next-generation leaders, social media teams, and job seekers craft a strategy and message to rise above the rest.

Our thesis is simple: This altered social landscape ushers in a significant change in how you need to think about social media. Now, more than ever, is the time to think about social media differently.

Here's how...

## Social Media Pillar #1: **Be Holistic**

Social media should stand at the core of your marketing strategy, but not alone. It is a tool that works alongside your other marketing strategies and goals, thereby furthering your brand message in a holistic way.

So where do you start? Spend some time identifying what Simon Sinek calls [The Golden Circle](#), the why of what you do (which should be reflected in your mission, vision, and strategy), not just the what and how of what you do (which are your services and tactics).<sup>8</sup>

**Now that you have created your why, explore how social media will help you share this message and reinforce other marketing tactics you may use, such as content and digital marketing and search engine optimization (SEO).**

If you are a CEO or a manager running a social media team, your brand should have a well-defined integrated marketing strategy that's revisited annually and updated alongside significant market changes. If you are a next-generation leader or job seeker, you would still benefit from creating a short document that encapsulates your why, shares the social channels you will use, discusses your tactics for the year, and outlines how you will measure success.

We recommend creating SMART goals for your social strategy: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely goals. Document them and review them often to make sure you are on-track with achieving these goals and that they will provide value to your brand or personal messaging platform.

Finally, create content. Borrow a page from content marketers who map content types to audience needs and version it across content types and platforms. Often, long-format content can be breakable, offering 10-12 snackable content pieces from the original copy. For example, to publicize our recent next-generation leadership white paper, we will be repurposing the paper into blogs, X, and Y; cross-promoting it across [Walk West](#) and our sister company [The Diversity Movement](#); and leveraging social channels such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram to build an audience for the message. Social channels can – and should cross-pollinate – reaching new users, adding more to the conversation, and increasing overall engagement.



**INSTAGRAM**

### **PROS**

- Married to Facebook; shares robust targeting and retargeting aspects
- Engaging photography, behind-the-scenes content, and competitive micro-content with Stories

### **CONS**

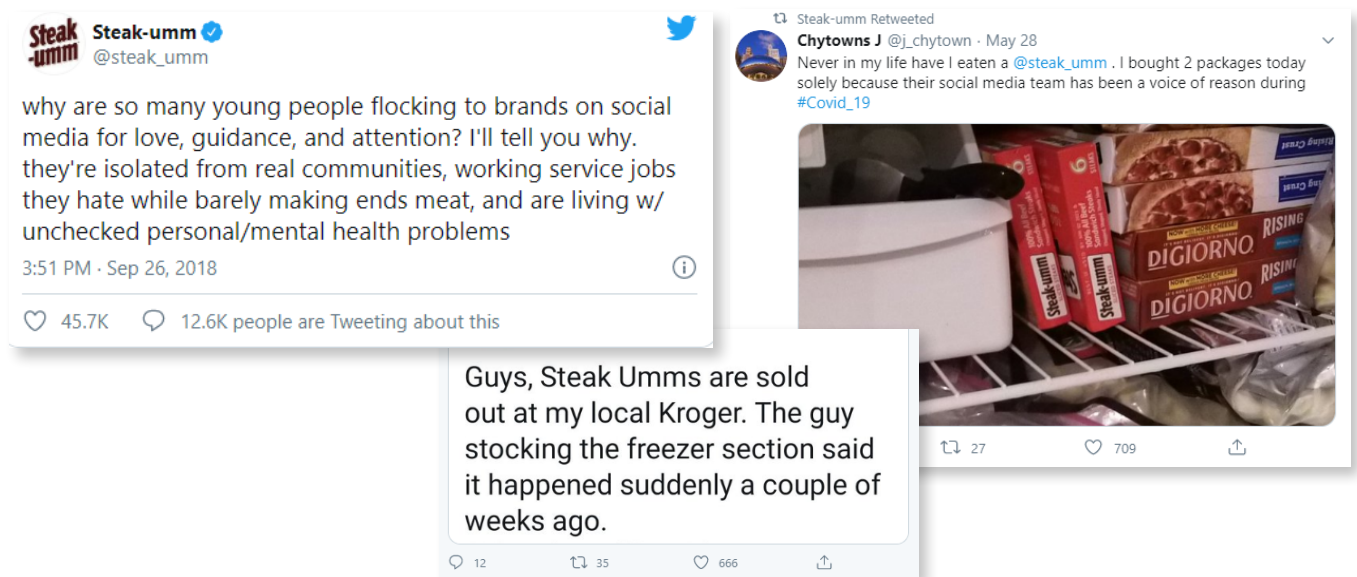
- Production expectation (either in time or look/feel)
- Pay to play
- Lower discoverability

## Social Media Pillar #2: **Be Human**

It's a well-known fact that humans engage with other humans. That's why corporate social media accounts typically have fewer followers and less engagement than senior leaders. However, senior leaders can create a social halo that extends to their brands, and social media managers can use a human voice for the brand to engage with followers.

**Being human can be tricky. It forces brands to engage directly with consumers, take a position, and own up to mistakes. But when it is done well, it can elevate even niche brands and interject them into the public consciousness.**

Consider Steak-Umm, the processed meat brand. Nathan Allebach, the 28-year-old social media manager for the brand, marries his perspective with the brand's working class ethos to do social commentary on Twitter that's liked and retweeted by thousands.<sup>10</sup> What could be a boring, little-seen channel for a niche brand is inspiring 10 consumers, covered by mass media, and driving sales.



**TWITTER**

### **PROS**

- Firehose of content
- Most real-time expectation for customer service/news
- Hashtag adoption for relevant content discovery

### **CONS**

- Competing noise
- Pressure for real-time relevancy
- Most polarizing channel

So, what are some guidelines for being human? In the campaigns we've designed and those that we've admired, we've noticed the following best practices:

**Know your audience:** Self-aware brands, next-generation leaders, and job seekers understand their goals, their audience, their voice, and the value they provide the market. This enables them to take risks within their sphere of influence. For Nike in 2018, this meant extending its #JustDolt brand message by hiring former 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who famously took a knee to protect police brutality and racial inequality and went unsigned after his departure. Nike released a Tweet stating "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything," and the "Dream Crazy" ad with Kaepernick's image, which coincided with the 2018-2019 NFL season and the 30th anniversary of its #JustDolt message.

**"It doesn't matter how many people hate your brand as long as enough people love it. And as long as you have that attitude, you can't be afraid of offending people. You can't try and go down the middle of the road. You have to take a stand on something, which is ultimately I think why the Kaepernick ad worked."**

*Phil Knight, Nike founder*

The campaign reinforced Nike's position as a purpose-driven company that wasn't afraid to take risks, making the company relevant to a new generation of consumers. With both negative and positive engagement raging, the company claimed \$163M in earned media, a \$6B brand value increase, and a 31% boost in sales.<sup>11</sup>

**Be direct:** Part of being human is speaking directly to your audience, with a keen understanding of their hopes, dreams, and fears. Some brands will opt to speak to a mass audience, while others aren't afraid to self-select niche audiences who are raving brand fans.

Warby Parker is an online eyeglass company that has built a thriving social presence with more than half a million followers in part, by being cheeky and letting its users shine. When the social team recognized that "Warby Barker" was a common misspelling of the brand's name, the company launched a tongue-in-cheek campaign for April Fool's Day featuring sunglasses for dogs. (Sample message: Get at me, dawg.) Recognizing that consumers trust content from users more than brands, Warby Parker also features user-generated content with its products on its blog and social channels.

"We find that engagement fosters virality and builds loyalty. Our customers are telling their friends about us and it's driving our growth. Over 50% of our sales are driven by word of mouth," says Neil Blumenthal, Warby Parker Co-Founder.<sup>12</sup>

**Be vulnerable:** In the earlier days of social media, brands, influencers, and individuals all sought to provide an image of control and airbrushed perfection. Images were highly stylized and colorized with filters, and brands saturated consumers' social media feeds with paid ads. While the goal was to present aspirational lifestyles, content often fell flat because it was so disconnected from users' real lives, while the ads were interruptive to users' online experience. Dove Beauty was one of the first to show real consumers in all their diversity – different ethnicities, skin tones, and body shapes. The advertising and social media campaign worked so well because it was purpose-driven, seeking to elevate women's self-esteem, one reason it was named the best U.S. campaign of the past 20 years.<sup>13</sup>

**The trend to realness is unstoppable, because it provides greater intimacy and relatability. That's why influencers appear on social channels without makeup and styling, speak up about personal challenges and setbacks, and advocate for causes they believe in.**

For example, Tim Ferris, author of *The Four-Hour Work Week* and *Tools of Titans* and founder of a popular podcast, suffers from bipolar disorder and has championed microdosing for mental health and other benefits.<sup>14</sup>

Vulnerability is even more important for leadership. Author and researcher Dr. Brene Brown has been a proponent of vulnerable leaders.

"When we build cultures at work where there is zero tolerance for vulnerability," Dr. Brown says, "where perfectionism and armor are rewarded and necessary, you can't have [difficult] conversations. They're not productive."<sup>15</sup>

Leaders who are willing to share shortcomings, such as strategy decisions that fall flat or sub-optimal communication skills, can build greater loyalty with teams and align them around difficult decisions, improving performance.<sup>16</sup>

For job seekers, it can be more challenging to be vulnerable. On LinkedIn, we have observed job seekers freely acknowledge that they have been laid off, what they learned at their past company, and what they hope for in their next role. This upends the common wisdom to keep layoffs quiet and message them one-to-one to recruiters and interviews. However, sharing these challenges and aspirations socially often results in these messages getting shared well beyond the job seeker's initial network, creating greater exposure for their search.



#### PROS

- Strong B2B strategy
- Ability to create a blog with LinkedIn Pulse articles
- Less noise to penetrate

#### CONS

- Less frequently used (longer algorithm cycle)
- High threshold for ad spending



## Social Media Pillar #3: **Be Agile**

Forget social media “set it and forget it” campaigns. This approach is lazy marketing that will lead to low engagement – or even worse, tone-deaf posts.

### The point of social media is to listen, learn, engage, and help individuals.

While it may be acceptable to pre-schedule simple brand messages, product releases, and more, a brand’s social channels should be carefully monitored by social media teams to capitalize on new platforms, reach new audiences, and optimize content. So, what should you know?

**Platforms change:** Social media platforms popularity is incredibly fluid, so it’s important to be attuned to new opportunities as new channels emerge and user behavior changes. Tiktok, the social channel for short-form user-generated dance, lip-sync, comedy and talent videos, is having a monster year, as home-bound American families create and share their own content. By the end of Q2 2020, the app had achieved two billion cumulative downloads.<sup>17</sup>

Now consider Twitter and SnapChat, two channels that were previously written off as dead. Twitter app downloads outpaced Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, and Snapchat in Apple’s App Store at the end of May 2020 as millions of users adopted “doomscrolling,” spending significant amounts of time scrolling their feed to take in grim news during the pandemic.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Snapchat gained 11M new users during the first quarter of 2020.<sup>19</sup>

Social teams on brands have taken note of these and other channel shifts and adjusted their strategy in real-time to go where the audiences are. As another example, brands are using fewer mega influencers (e.g., the Kardashians) and more macro, micro, and nano influencers to reach consumers.



**SNAPCHAT**

#### **PROS**

- Geo-filter engagement for real-time touchpoint
- Great storytelling opportunities/exclusives
- Interactive ad opportunities

#### **CONS**

- Paid investment high
- Niche audience
- Micro-network usage

**Audiences evolve:** Use behavior has become incredibly fluid. With the pandemic, users are engaging with more social channels for more hours each day and exhibiting behavior that marketers couldn't have predicted. They're using laptops and PCs to engage with social channels, rather than mobile devices; are updated on current events up to the minute; and are not afraid to call out brands and individuals for hypocrisy and being tone-deaf.



## YOUTUBE

### PROS

- Great for search (SEO)
- Library of long-form content
- Can be embedded on websites

### CONS

- Investment in keywords
- Younger demographics uses more frequently



## TIK TOK

### PROS

- Fun, micro-content creation
- New, open platform (less restrictions)
- High content consumption

### CONS

- Lower brand interaction
- Young(ish) demographic
- Mystery algorithm

**Capture the moment:** Individuals' values and perspectives can change, sometimes in a moment. Political activists have used social media to galvanize movements from Arab Spring to #blacklivesmatter, as well as build support for political candidates. After George Floyd, a black Minneapolis resident, was killed by police officers who held him in a chokehold for nearly nine minutes despite his pleas, the #blacklivesmatter movement began sweeping the world, with protests in major and smaller cities. The hashtag was used 47.8M times on Twitter following Floyd's death, making it the most-used hashtag in the world.<sup>2</sup>

**While seemingly spontaneous, the movement was able to catch fire as the result of careful groundwork laid by black activists, who had spent years building their network and organization after Trayvon Martin's murder.**

"There are hundreds of thousands of black visionaries around the world that are doing the work that people keep saying, 'Oh, that's never going to happen. ... Not in this lifetime,'" said Patrisse Cullors, one of three black women who founded the Black Lives Matter Global Network.

**“And look what happened. Something gets unlocked, and because we’ve already laid the seeds, we’ve already had the conversations, the people doing the work get to bear the fruit.”<sup>21</sup>**

Now that the public has been galvanized by the death of Floyd and others, Black Lives Matter has a greater opportunity to push for change, such as police reform and cultural change. Brands have taken note, with CEOs issuing statements and social channels pushing out messages about the importance of speaking up for civil rights, promoting diversity within companies, hiring diverse leaders, and ensuring pay equity, among other issues.

In sum, both brands and individuals should constantly study their social channel data and engagement to adapt to market, political, social and user behavior changes. Doing so will keep their social outreach fresh and relevant.

#### **HOW MARKETERS DEFINE ENGAGEMENT WHEN MEASURING SOCIAL SUCCESS**

Source: Sprout Social,<sup>22</sup>

**72%**

Likes and/or  
comments

**62%**

Shares and/  
or Retweets

**60%**

Interaction with  
consumers

**34%**

Revenue  
attribution

**32%**

Inspiring consumers  
to take action

**29%**

Inspiring an  
emotional response

## Social Media Pillar #4: **Be Innovative**

Social media strategies must be constantly reinvented to continue delivering results. Social media teams and power users such as next-generation leaders need to be aware of what's coming down the pike so they can prepare to capitalize on new trends. Here are some of the changes we've noticed.

**Functionality changes:** Social media platforms are constantly pushing into new areas; adding rich functionality for brands, influencers, and individuals to capitalize on; and changing core functionality. As an example, social channels like Facebook have added stories, live video, and interactivity, such as questions and polls which can help brands and users capture eyeballs and deepen engagement and their understanding of the audience. Instagram and Facebook Stories have a higher serve rate and optimize against the algorithm differently than organic social content.

**Selling is changing:** Personalized ads on Facebook and Instagram enable users to shop directly from their feed, providing highly relevant offers and removing process friction from shopping. They've created an important new way for B2C brands (even small ones) to reach consumers and sell to them.

**Community is changing:** Many users are now members of private groups, such as Facebook Groups, which allow like-minded individuals to coalesce around a membership affinity, issue, or interest. Brands can build groups to market to them or even better, tap a trusted group leader to share and sell products in a user-created group. As an example, the ChooseFI (Choose Financial Independence) movement has a passionate membership of less than 70K users, but one that is receptive to financial products such as life insurance, asset-tracking platforms, and more.



### FACEBOOK

#### PROS

- Most universally adopted
- Most robust targeting and retargeting of all social channels
- Customized to leverage several business outcomes

#### CONS

- More clutter to cut through
- Pay to play
- Algorithm changes



### WHATSAPP

#### PROS

- Customer service and communication benefits
- SMS-style messaging opportunities

#### CONS

- Niche audience
- Younger demographic
- Micro-network usage

## Social Media Pillar #5: **Be Inclusive**

The U.S. is experiencing seismic demographic shifts. Remember the ads of the 1950s, with the white family, consisting of a pin-thin stay-at-home mom cooking in the kitchen, two preteen children, and a besuited dad returning after an eight-hour day of work? There's a good reason those ads look foreign to us.

**Hispanics will be the largest voting block in 2020, Millennials are the largest adult population, and nearly half of Generation Z is racially or ethnically diverse.<sup>23</sup>**

**Nearly half of all adults are single,<sup>24</sup> and nearly one in three children lives with an unmarried parent.<sup>25</sup> And work is increasingly performed at home, in pajamas.**

Brands have taken note. That's why the Dove Real Beauty and #AerieREAL advertising and social media campaigns have been so successful, because they celebrated diverse models and body positivity, reflecting real women in all shapes and sizes. Similarly, Fenty and Fenty Beauty, the brands started by Rihanna, have featured women with myriad skin tones, shapes, and abilities, and the LGBTQ community in shows, ads and social media, reflecting the general public. As an example, when superstar Rihanna launched Fenty Beauty, she created 40 shades of foundation (now 50) and launched the brand at the same time around the world to make sure everyone felt included.

**“There was no precedent to our radical approach to inclusivity. We had to break and disrupt all the traditional marketing rules and carve a new path.”**

*Sandy Saputo, Chief Marketing Officer  
Kendo Brands, owner of Fenty Beauty*

“The consumer and market reactions were phenomenal. We received photos of lines forming outside of our retailers’ stores around the world. Hundreds of people started posting selfies of themselves wearing Fenty Beauty on social media; our first repost was of a beautiful woman wearing a hijab. And direct sales surpassed all of our estimations, crashing our website.”<sup>26</sup>

When users can see themselves in a brand, the results can be powerful. Brands have learned from Rihanna about the power of fostering diversity and inclusion to create community and drive revenues, so much so that it is now called “The Fenty Effect.”<sup>27</sup>

## WHERE YOU CAN START

Walk West also has designed a Social Media Strategy & Management Course to help teams and individuals alike build their social media fluency faster. Taught by Walk West Senior Digital Consultant Ann Marie Taepke, the course features multiple expert practitioner interviews and innovative social media success stories, including 20th Century Fox Entertainment, AstraZeneca, NC State, the NC State Fair, and Velcro.

The social media course is designed to rapidly evolve your social media skills and learn how to develop your own campaigns. Whether used as an onboarding tool for your Marketing team or a continuing education course to sharpen your individual skills, the course will teach you how to:

- Navigate and understand social media platforms
- Develop a social calendar and write compelling copy
- Create a social strategy through data-driven insights
- Build a cross-platform crisis and communication plan
- Amplify your social message by developing an omnichannel strategy
- Measure, calculate, and report ROI for social media platforms
- Implement, track, and report on paid social media campaigns
- Develop unique advocacy campaigns through user-generated content and influencers

## Conclusion

In conclusion, you can be successful with social media, if you develop a strategy, voice, and messages that are holistic, human, agile, innovative, and inclusive. Your social journey will grow and evolve and involve radical learning, but don't be afraid to start before you've attained topic mastery. Your audience will help teach you what you need to know.

We hope that we have inspired you with how you can harness the power and potential of social media to build your brand, communicate with key stakeholders, lead and learn, and be a positive influence for change. Each and every one of us has a unique voice and message to share. Social media has democratized access for brands and individuals: removing the gatekeepers, providing immediate connections, and enabling all the opportunity to share and amplify their message.

If you'd like help increasing your own social media fluency or empowering your teams to develop skills, consider taking the Walk West Social Media Strategy & Management course. Learn more at [social.walkwest.com](https://social.walkwest.com)

## About the Author



### LIZZIE NEWTON

[DIRECTOR, BRAND STRATEGY](#) | [LINKEDIN](#)

Lizzie Newton is a storyteller with an MBA impact. With over 12 years in the social space, Lizzie has led social strategy, brand strategy, and influencer campaigns for brands such as AstraZeneca, Wasabi, and Vidant Health. Her social strategies are designed with holistic marketing applications in mind - from user engagements to experiential activations. Lizzie holds a BA in English and Art History from The College of Wooster, and an MBA from The University of Manchester.

*Interested in seeing how Walk West innovates within a new social landscape? Learn more below!*

# A Changed Landscape

The world has undoubtedly changed. Recent COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter protests have not only impacted the way in which we engage with and leverage social media as a tool, but altered user behavior as a whole.

**“A study of 25,000 consumers across 30 markets showed social engagement increasing 61% over normal usage rates during COVID-19,” according to Forbes.<sup>1</sup>**

Twitter, a struggling platform pre-pandemic and protests, reported 1 million new installs on June 4, 2020 alone, achieving “the most single-day installs since at January 1, 2014, when the firm first began recording app store data.”<sup>2</sup>

These moments signify a seismic shift in the way we need to think about - and thereby approach - social media, evolving it from a marketing consideration into an imperative.

