

eBook

7 Steps To Launch a Successful Social Selling Program



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“75% of B2B buyers now use social media to research vendors!”
- IDC



*“More than 70 percent of sales professionals use social selling tools, including LinkedIn, Twitter & Facebook, making them the most widely used sales technology.”*³

- LinkedIn

Today’s Buyer Has Changed. Has Your Sales Team Adapted?

The profile of a typical B2B buyer is dramatically different from what it was only a few years back and this has altered the traditional buyer journey. Organizations are undergoing digital transformations, bring our own app (BYOA) and technology is alive and well in most organizations, and never before has there been so many channels to reach potential B2B buyers. So where are buyers increasingly turning to get research and information?

Research from IDC helps us understand that today’s digitally enabled buyers rely on social media more than ever as part of the buying process with 75% of buyers citing social media as a way to research vendors.¹ Furthermore, 90% of today’s B2B buyers never respond to cold outreach, according to Harvard Business Review.²

Buyers are clearly in control and vendors need to adapt their sales processes and outreach methods to incorporate social selling. In this whitepaper, we’ll outline the seven key steps to help you launch a successful social selling program in your organization and transform your sales and marketing team in the process. This social selling program will help sales and marketing teams meet buyers where they are in the buyer journey, help build the sales pipeline, and ultimately, help close more deals. Ready to get started?

What is Social Selling?

Let’s ensure we cover the foundational topics first. Social selling is quite simple to explain and understand. It’s the use of social media to connect with prospective buyers. Social selling involves sharing useful information to help the buyer make an informed decision. And, social selling helps to build trust, meet customers where they spend their time online, and nurture prospects.

An often overlooked area in this relatively new discipline, is “how” to roll out a social selling program at your organization. One or two digitally

inspired sales reps leveraging social media as part of the sales process won't deliver the scale or effectiveness that a company-wide social selling program could.

Every sales team strives to acquire new customers, shorten its sales cycle, and grow lifetime value. Social selling can help you achieve these goals. And it's no secret. Ninety percent of the top salespeople use social selling tools, according to a report by LinkedIn.⁴

This is why we've put together this whitepaper – to help you be successful at social selling. Below are seven steps that will help get your organization on the right track to implementing a social selling program.

STEP 1

Understand Your Goals and Objectives

As with most company-wide initiatives, you will need to first understand the goals and objectives of your social selling program. But before you do this and to achieve success further down the line, it is important to provide an honest assessment of where your company is at in terms of social selling.

Is your company in the early stages with perhaps a few members of the sales team incorporating social as part of their sales approach, or are you further along, having seen the benefits of social selling and you are trying to build a business case in your organization to incorporate social selling in a more formal way with supporting social selling technology, support from executives to scale your program, and have it be a completely integrated function across your sales and marketing organization?

Every organization's culture is different and initial receptiveness to social selling will vary, so be truthful at this stage and ensure your goals and objectives align with the stage your company is at. It may also be helpful to squash a few misconceptions at this early stage as well and point out to sales reps that they're not going to be spending all their time on social media networks. In fact, according to a survey by A Sales Guy Consulting and Social Centered, the majority of sales people reported that their time spent using social media ranged from 5 to 10%.⁵

As you're developing your goals and objectives, remember that your end goal is not just to tell your sales team to use social media and supporting tools. You're trying to help your sales team transform how your organization engages and builds relationships with prospects and customers.

STEP 2

Assess Readiness

With an understanding of your goals and objectives, next step is to get a sense of your sales team's readiness for social selling. Think about readiness according to three main themes: the organization, specific business units, and people:

Organization: How ready is your organization?

- *Executive engagement* is absolutely key to building a social selling program. We'll touch on this further in Step 3 where we discuss assigning roles, but the executives at your organization can make or break your social selling program. Do your executives use social media and do they understand the value that social media brings to the organization?

Many organizations we've worked with have found great value in implementing a reverse mentoring program – pairing some early social adopters with certain executives to help break down any barriers earlier in the process. We'll elaborate more on this later, but just know your executives will need to be engaged for your social selling program to take off.

- *Stakeholder engagement* is also an important step in this process. Key leaders from the executive, sales, and marketing team usually come to mind first. But be sure to bring your legal, compliance, and HR teams into the process early on as well.
- *Governance related* topics typically arise when speaking with stakeholders and they begin to surface concerns or risks pertaining to your social selling program. If it doesn't already exist, your organization might express a need to have a set of social media policies in place with guidelines to help your sales reps be successful on social while mitigating any risks to the company. You may also wish to develop governance policies around content creation curation, and training as well.



Don't make assumptions - talk to many members from the sales team. It is also during this process that you'll discover your early adopters of social media from the sales team who will help champion the social selling initiatives you're planning to roll out.

Business: The two teams directly impacted by your social selling program will be sales and marketing, so we'll just focus on these two business units. As part of your readiness assessment, evaluate the existing integration between the two teams and identify any barriers or gaps that exist today. For example, an effective social selling program will rely on a steady flow of content (e.g. whitepapers, ebooks, infographics) that will really resonate with prospective buyers at the bottom, middle and top of the funnel. Does this content exist today? Is it up-to-date? Does your marketing team have the resources to create new content? You will want to determine whether you can handle the writing inhouse or perhaps outsource some or all of your content development. We'll delve into this topic later on in this whitepaper.

Another area to review is measurement and reporting. How are your sales and marketing teams measuring social media today and how will your new social selling strategy align with this?

People: Perhaps most important in your readiness assessment is the people aspect. This area will help you understand the level of training required for your team and will help set the expectation for the rate of adoption of your social selling program. For instance, does every member of your sales team understand the value that content and social media can bring to each of them individually and to the company? Even if they know that it's important, do they know how to best leverage content and social media as part of the sales process.

Program Management

Underpinning all of the above is the program management piece. All social selling programs require this layer to be effective. Think of this as the engine that keeps everything running smoothly.

This includes:

- Having the right resources in place
- Effective planning
- Ongoing training and adoption
- Capturing and sharing success stories
- Measurement, insights and reporting
- Stakeholder communications
- Ongoing review and program optimization

STEP 3

Assign Roles

Now, it's team building time! A social selling program has six key roles that should be filled in order for you to be successful. Assigning roles ensures that sales teams have the right ownership and accountability around the outcomes that you will need. Before you launch your social selling program and implement the supporting social selling technology, make sure you assign the following roles:

Executive Sponsor

We touched on this earlier but the Executive Sponsor will be your vocal champion of the social selling program. This is the person who legitimizes the program's goals, stays up-to-date on major program activities, and provides feedback on the project. The exact title of this business leader will vary, but it could be your VP of Sales, COO, or even your CEO. It really has more to do with this person's skills set, leadership capabilities, authority level, ability to coach, mentor, support, and pretty much remove any major organizational roadblocks or obstacles.

Program Manager

Think of the program manager as the engine of your entire social selling program. It's a key role. This person most likely resides in the sales and marketing team, and the exact title really does vary company to company. Assign this role to someone who has a solid understanding of sales and sales processes at your organization and who has credibility within the sales team. These sales skills though are balanced with firm knowledge of marketing and social media. This person is a communicator, a change agent, a relationship builder, and has a clear passion for social selling and for instilling excitement among team members and in building momentum of the program as its being rolled out.



Marketing

Marketing also serves an important role and will be involved with building out the program's content strategy, creating, and curating the right content for the sales team. The marketing role will also provide insights into industry and buyer journey expertise, as well as social networks and which ones the company should leverage.

Sales Leadership

Depending on who you choose for your Executive Sponsor, it is important to have representation from sales leadership. While some social selling programs are led by marketing, sales leadership still needs to be at the table to not only provide insights but also to legitimize the program to give the sales team the assurance they need to participate fully in this program and its benefits.

Sales Enablement

While relatively new to the sales and marketing organization, Sales Enablement's role here is to provide sales with the right content (for all stages of the sales funnel) and the right technology for the social selling program. Depending on your organization, Sales Enablement could also be involved with training and education.

Training and Support

Lastly, the training and support role can exist on its own or as part of any of the above roles (most likely Sales Enablement). Whether its training for new social selling technology or the new program or technical support, the Training and Support role will help ensure there is a go-to resource for the sales team in place for continued success of the program.

STEP 4

Develop Your Buyer-Focused Content Strategy

Product data sheets are not what we're talking about here! Educational blogs, white papers, infographics, ebooks, guides, and videos can be great content that will help place your sales team in a position to build trust with buyers.

The Right Content at the Right Time

What's the Right Content Mix?

Use the 4-1-1 Rule

Championed by Joe Pulizzi, founder of the Content Marketing Institute, the 4-1-1 rule suggests posting four pieces of content written by others for every one soft promotion (e.g. a link to a webinar, an e-book download, etc.) and for every one hard promotion (e.g. a demo request).

"5X More Likely to Engage

In a survey of over 1500 decision makers and influencers conducted by LinkedIn and IDC, B2B buyers are 5x more likely to engage with a sales professional who provides new insights about their business."

- IDC & LinkedIn

Buyers are looking for experts or advisors to help educate them or help solve a need within their organization. The right content you share with them over social media will help them do this. The right mix of content will vary but a popular method is to use the 4-1-1 rule (See call out box in the section). You will also want to ensure that your content aligns with where they are in the buyer journey (e.g. awareness stage, consideration stage, or decision stage). This can be summarized in a formal buyer journey worksheet and it will help you map out the questions and objections that a prospective buy may have at every stage of their journey. If done successfully, prospective buyers can receive the right content at the right time.

Developing Your Buyer Personas

Your content strategy should also encompass buyer personas. This is really the best way to get a very clear understanding of who it is that you're selling to. If you can answer these questions about your prospects, you're well on your way to developing your buyer personas:

- Who are you trying to engage with?
- What's their role in the organization?
- What's top of mind for them?
- What problems can you solve for your buyer?
- What are their obstacles to buying?
- How do they decide to buy?
- What is the buyer's key responsibilities?
- What are the goals of your target buyer?
- What are their pain points?
- How do they measure success?

Any other supporting demographic data you can gather will also help you build out your buyer persona. By asking these questions you can better understand your buyer to ideally build a foundation for your content strategy.

And good content should not only educate prospective buyers, but the sales team as well, and should lead to better conversations and exchanges and insights over social as well.

STEP 5

Plan Your Program Launch

You've established your goals, chosen your team, and thought through your content strategy. Now, you need to build your launch timeline and make sure that you have defined all your milestones. Communication with your team is key. Use the checklist below to help ensure that everyone feels comfortable with your timeline and that you have the support of key stakeholders.

Program Launch Checklist

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Stakeholders & Governance: Have you identified all stakeholders and have you developed all governance related documents like policy and guidelines around your new social selling program?
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Content Strategy: Have you developed your content strategy including and a plan for creating and curating content that resonates with your buyer personas and aligns with all stages of the buyer journey? This will be an ongoing initiative, but you need a good base of content to start with.
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Communications Plan: Do you have a plan to communication the launch of your social selling program, as well as ongoing communication to sales, marketing, and all other stakeholders?
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Roll out in Phases: Consider a phased approach to the roll out of your social selling program. Then share your launch process and phases with your team. Are you launching a pilot first? Are you going to test LinkedIn first before expanding to Twitter?).
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Training & Adoption: Have you lined up training resources to help bring the sales and marketing team up to speed with the new program? What about the provisioning of ongoing support and training? Have you identified your early social selling adopters who can act as change agents and evangelize the benefits of the program? We'll elaborate more on training in Step 6.

STEP 6

Train Your Team

If you want your social selling program to take off, you need to provide training. Without training, there won't be adoption, and without adoption, you won't see results. As for training, it's helpful to think of training across 4 main timeframes according to Sales for Life.

Month
3

In the first 60 days, focus on training staff on program governance and set-up. With regards to program governance you will want to formally deploy audits and assessments for sales, marketing, leadership, and sales enablement operations to determine the current state of readiness. Part of this involves implementing both a success metrics framework and a reporting framework, and a weekly leadership feedback loop for program reinforcements. Also within the first 60 days, you will want to work with Sales Enablement & Operations to integrate social selling strategies into the overall sales process. Leadership training will be essential as will be a formal onboarding process for the rest of the team.

Month
12

Within the first 3 months of your social selling program rollout will be direct certification training of your leadership, sales, and marketing teams. And from month 3 to month 12, you should be conducting a program certification and formal business review to really assess how well the program has taken off. At this point, once you've seen success, you will want to move on to training additional teams (if applicable). Beyond this timeframe, you will want to continually reinforce the sales curriculum and ensure optimal support from marketing. At the end of the day, you want to ensure sales professionals and their leaders have the right mindset, skills, and tool set to succeed as digital and social sellers.

STEP 7

Evaluate Your Performance (Measuring)

Launching your program is a great accomplishment, but there's a few more considerations. You will want to continue to foster innovation and drive results. Be sure to measure every aspect of your social selling program. Listed below are a few areas to consider. Some aspects are easier to measure earlier in the role out of your program, while others are best measured beyond a 12-18 month timeframe.

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Satisfaction: It is worthwhile measuring the satisfaction of your sales team as it pertains to the new social selling program. This can be accomplished through a simple survey.
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Learning: How well did knowledge transfer occur among your sales team. Consider implementing some online self-study testing (perhaps tied to a certification program) to get an understanding of this area. Online tests, quizzes, or course videos can help you measure knowledge transfer to the sales team. Consider including a grading component and not just a pass or fail mark. It doesn't matter what age you are, it always feels great to get an "A"!
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Impact: Consider ways to measure if the sales team behavior has changed as a result of the training. Impact could be measured through growth in the sales teams' network (e.g. number of new twitter followers or LinkedIn connections).
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Results: The proof is in the pudding, so the saying goes. So be sure that your social selling program technology is integrated with your organization's CRM system to better measure your results. More specifically, be sure to track things like opportunities attributable to social in your CRM, and opportunities being influenced by social in your CRM. This will help you tie resulting sales to social selling activity.
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ROI: This is an area that is best measured after the 12 month mark, especially since the sales cycle can vary greatly from organizations to organization. While most organizations begin to see value within months of implementing a social selling program, the ROI picture comes into focus once you can tie back specific sales opportunities and closed deals that were won due to social selling influence.

Next Steps

You can launch a successful social selling program. Your preparation and launch will be organized and strategic. But don't forget! Once you have implemented your social selling platform and your team has started being active on social media, test new ideas and continuously measure the performance of your team. That way, you can continue to grow as a company. If you still have questions or would like to speak with one of our consultants about how to implement a social selling program at your organization, get in touch with us today!

Email sales@scribblelive.com for a free interactive demo.

About ScribbleLive

ScribbleLive is an award-winning content performance company that provides global brands with the insights and solutions they need to better attract, convert, and retain their audiences. Companies such as Red Bull, FedEx, Dell, Reuters, Yahoo, American Express and the Boston Globe leverage the ScribbleLive Content Cloud to create scalable, premium content, interactive experiences, and real-time audience engagement.

Learn more at <http://www.scribblelive.com/>

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