

It's 4 P.M. on a Friday, and you're already day-dreaming about grabbing Thai food. Your boss comes into your office and interrupts your culinary fantasies to give you a new assignment. Specifically, he's asked for a social media strategy for a new product launch. Disappointed and overwhelmed, you don't even know where to begin. Fortunately, it's not as complicated as it may seem. While you won't be able to get all the intricate details in place if you know the right steps you can successfully outline a strategy and still make it out in time for curry.

I. Identify Tangible Goals:

Whether it's a social media strategy, a business plan, or even a Tinder profile you have to ask: **"Why am I online?"** Possible answers could include: to sell the product, to create conversation, to get feedback, to start a movement, or in the case of the latter, find a scruffy man in tweed to take you out for Thai.

Along with the first question, the second is: **"What am I trying to say?"** You should be able to summarize this in one sentence. The statement should be simple and pragmatic: "Colgate whitens 4x as much as Crest" but not too direct: "Crest is awful, you should buy Colgate" or "looking for a husband, three kids, and a dog."

The third and final step is to answer the two-fold question: **"What do I want to achieve and how am I going to measure it?"** Specific to social media this could include user engagement data like some clicks, followers, likes, or retweets. You could also incorporate broader financial data such as social related product sales or if your date decides to stay for dessert.

II. Content is King:

Your objective after setting goals is to create content. Quality content that adds value is a critical part of any comprehensive marketing strategy. In this phase your job is to **give people content they can't help but share**. In the case of events, it should be something tangible. To use the toothpaste example: you could give out goofy fake teeth to encourage customers to take funny selfies and post them online. These onsite campaigns are a great way to maintain engagement. They also have the benefit of simultaneously increasing your brand visibility on social channels throughout the press conference, promotional event, or seminar.

In the case of online content creation, visual content is critical. According to molecular biologist Dr. John Medina, when people hear information, they're likely to remember only 10% of it three days later. However, a relevant image paired with the same information resulted in a 65% retention rate over the same time frame.

Medina's research demonstrates why 'before' and 'after' images are so popular; they stick with people. The obvious example with toothpaste would be a visual comparison of "Colgate teeth" juxtaposed with "Crest's teeth." If you want to take things to the next level, leverage the power of emotional messaging; it's twice as efficient as purely promotional ones. The aforementioned is also why you should have at least one photo holding an adorable baby/puppy/kitten on your online dating profile.

III. Engage the Conversation:

Once you've created the content, you need to know how to engage the conversation. South by Southwest (SXSW) in Austin is excellent at this. They get people involved before, during, and after the event by soliciting feedback and crowdsourcing conference programming through Twitter. This strategy allows people to suggest content, vote for their favorites and enable them to understand better which content their attendees/customers are resonating with the most.

Instead of asking people to utilize social media, focus on asking questions and creating content with which they can engage. Millennials especially have a radar for authenticity and asking for tweets at an event or pushing a hashtag too hard in a commercial isn't authentic or valid. Don't ask for tweets; do, say, or create something 'tweetable' instead. Specific to conversation engagement, instead of stating, "Go buy Colgate" ask, "What do you love about your smile?"

And, if you want a response from your match, don't just say you "love Harry Potter too" ask them "So, are you a Slytherin?" In online dating and the marketing world, questions are twice

as likely to garner a response or engagement than a simple statement.

Any good marketing strategy should result in others doing your marketing for you. When you start with goals in mind, create content people can't help but share, and continually engage the conversation, others will end up doing your advertising for you! People want connection, not just information. Online or in the real world, focus on creating an environment for your customers to foster better relationships amongst themselves, and with you and your brand. As a result, they will not only feel as if they are a part of something; you'll soon find yourself with an army of fans who will gladly sell your products and grow your brand for you. Apply the same strategy to your dating life, and you may find true love and free pad thai for life.