

## 10 Key Ingredients to Help Make a Successful Social Media Dessert

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Fall is approaching, kids are going back to school, Labor Day has come and gone and it's time to get your partners and associates motivated to find a recipe for success that will bring value to the fourth quarter numbers. Have you taken the time this summer to do your due diligence and find a social media recipe for success?

We all love a fresh blueberry or apple pie when the fruit is in season. But as you know, there is a lot of planning, cultivating, directing, watching and listening to pulling off Auntie Faye's famous family pie that's enjoyed by everyone who ever gets the chance to get a forkful taste. A successful social media plan is very similar from the basic components.

Let's start with key ingredient #1 – strategy. It takes a lot of planning and a lot of understanding to embark on a social media presence that will produce the return on your investment just as it takes years of pruning and feeding a peach tree to its prime fruit producing yield. Social media strategy means defining a common goal. One plan that will carry over into recruiting, training, public relations, education, branding, client and business development, etc. Remember that part of the planning is budgeting, creating a timeline for success, strategizing your HR, IT and administration departments. And defining and engaging your partners, associates and staff – your internal community.

After you define your strategy, how about protecting what you are about to invest in. Create a social media policy as ingredient #2. You cannot create a fruit pie if you don't have any fruit to go into it. But more importantly, the fruit has to be perfectly ripe and without worms. By creating a policy for the firm and its employees, you are protecting your efforts, defining what is the standard behavior and protecting the brand from any "bad worm eaten apples" that may unexpectedly try to ruin the reputation that took so long to cultivate.

The next ingredient is one you never want to miss. What's a policy without education? It's easy to have someone sign a piece of paper and even much easier to distribute it via email to make your life much easier. But not educating the person on the policy guidelines to the extent that he or she understands what the policies mean, then it's really not effective is it? It's kind of like adding the amount of sugar to your pie mixture - Somewhere you were educated that sour cherries require a little more sugar than black cherries. Plan on spending enough time for each component of your social media guidelines until each and every one of your employees understand the meaning why it was developed. And remind them that the policies created are not only designed to protect the firm, but the employee as well.

Ingredients #5 and #6 is the combo factor. Just as you want all the ingredients in a pie - the salt, the flour, the lemon juice, the fruit, the sugar and even the cinnamon to combine and communicate their flavors to one another before placing them in your pie shell, you want to figure out based on your audience all the proper places, the appropriate venues and the amount of communication that is necessary to occur to satisfy your goal.

Ingredient #7 is all about your internal and external audience. Who is going to choose your content, your messages and who will listen and have the ability to answer on behalf of the firm? You need to define your people's involvement with the social media venues and protocol. Just like you set the appropriate temperature and set the appropriate time for your pie to be completed, you need to have the communication table mapped appropriately based on your social media goals.

We need to test the pie before taking it out of the oven – no likes a half baked pie – do they? Well no one likes a half baked social media plan. Ingredient #8 is expectation. Once you choose the frequency, the amount of content or maybe even leading a weekly education forum using social media, be consistent. You are your own driver for your audience's expectations.

Ingredient #9 is about giving your efforts some time. Social media efforts need to be cultivated, they need to be nurtured and they definitely need time -- time for relationships to develop and time for the person communicating to be recognized as the thought leader – the expert.

So now enjoy and evaluate with ingredient #10. Use all your senses. Smell, taste and rate the texture of your pie. For social media and especially for all of efforts, it only makes sense to monitor and evaluate your overall efforts.

This recipe for a successful social media dessert is shared, cultivated and fully tested as a savory piece of advice for our family as well as our most valued community members. It goes well with a tall glass of milk!