

How to become a social CEO

A guide to strategy
and tactics for leaders
who communicate
on social media

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He is a former communications director, press officer and head of public affairs. He has a master's degree in communication from Roskilde University in Denmark and a diploma in public affairs from CIPR in London.

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How to become a social CEO

- a guide to strategy and tactics for leaders who communicate on social media

Why write a book about how CEOs can use social media? The idea first came to me because I simply could not understand why so few top executives around the world seemed to be using social media to create visibility for their organization and profile themselves and listen to important stakeholders.

The fact that those leaders who do embrace social media have had great success made it even harder to grasp why others weren't following their lead.

Large international companies like Amazon, Delta Airlines, General Motors, Verizon, Walmart and Nasdaq have social CEOs who regularly use Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn or Twitter to talk about their work lives. They use social media to expand their companies' communication capabilities and give their organizations a personal voice – something that is an increasingly important part of building and maintaining credibility among today's consumers and stakeholders.

In my work advising companies and organizations on the strategic use of digital and social media, it has become increasingly obvious that chief executives have a key role to play when it comes to rising above the noise and strengthening the brand, bottom line and reputation of their respective companies. This can, and should, also be done on social media.

Social media is quite simply so vital for executives who want to be modern leaders that they need to learn more about how to effectively use these channels to support their companies. This is true for all types and sizes of companies and organizations.

My mission is to inspire CEOs and other top leaders to begin using social media professionally. I hope that after reading this book, they will come to see social media as a potential game changer and an essential tool in the modern leader's toolbox.

I hope you enjoy the book.

Introduction

Social media is changing organizations and the way they operate and communicate. As such, the manner in which top executives must act and communicate in order to serve the best interests of their organizations is also changing.

Business leaders need to be visible, express their opinions and take responsibility within their communities in order to build trust in their organization and give insight into how it operates. This in turn helps to strengthen its reputation and business opportunities. The task of communicating has therefore shifted from being primarily a task for communication and marketing professionals to something that must be done effectively at the very highest level within an organization.

In the eyes of the public, many companies are now being judged on whether their leaders are accessible and able to clearly communicate. Are messages being delivered in a way that engages customers, employees, opinion makers and politicians? Are CEOs and other leaders able to build trust in their organizations and connect with customers, members, decision makers and other stakeholders?

The days in which organizations could go about their business secluded from the public eye are largely over. The same goes for those who lead these organizations. This new reality means that executives must upgrade their communication toolbox and rethink what their organizations can gain by strategically employing social media and actively use these channels to communicate their organizations' purpose and value creation.

In this book you will find inspiration for how your social media communication can strengthen your business goals and how social media can become part of a change process that creates value and brings your organization closer to its stakeholders. As a leader, your active participation in social media not only plays an absolutely critical role in that process, it also strengthens your own leadership skills.

Throughout this book, you will get specific tips on how to use social media in a way that has a positive impact on your organization's communication. You will also receive strategic and tactical advice on how to actively use your own social media platforms to strengthen your position as a leader and advance the communication goals of your organization.

By the time you've finished this book, you will be better prepared to engage with the overall strategy decisions on how social media can help your organization achieve new goals and be more competitive in this new media age. You will also be more confident when making decisions on how, why and how often you need to communicate as a leader in order to create value for your personal brand and for the organization you represent.

With the book's pointers in hand, you have a greater chance of overcoming the natural barriers to getting started on social media and will come to understand why the precious time you spend communicating on social media is time well spent.

Chapter 1: New credibility and leadership requirements

With social media use having exploded among everyday citizens, decision-makers and consumers over the past ten years, very few organizations can afford to not incorporate social media use into

their strategic communication strategy. Likewise, very few CEOs will benefit from avoiding the use of social media to help shape their companies' communications.

Social media has allowed citizens to challenge the grip on power held by state institutions, the media, politicians and large corporations. All around the world, social media is giving consumers more power. This is creating new competition for the media establishment and presenting all types of organizations with new risks and opportunities. Because social media has such an enormous potential to affect markets, directly impact the reputation of organizations and create new business opportunities, it can no longer simply be seen as a collection of independent communication channels like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Social media needs to be viewed as a paradigm that organizations must incorporate into their business strategy, with CEOs firmly positioned at the head of the table.

The CEO stands directly in the center of today's new communications reality and must serve as the beacon that will allow his or her organization to shine in the eyes of its many stakeholders – customers, decision-makers and journalists.

To be blunt, a CEO's ability to communicate with their organization's stakeholders is a crucial criterion for maintaining and strengthening their own leadership position. Communication has always been necessary for an organization to survive and serve its investors, owners, members and customers. But these days, that communication has moved to social media and that is the arena in which you as CEO need to stay up to speed if you are to continue to improve your ability to communicate, develop your organization and strengthen your own leadership.

The days in which you could let others speak on your behalf are over. If you are not visible and distinct within your branch, you are losing out on business opportunities for your company and missing out on the chance to strengthen your own personal leadership brand and advance your career.

Improve your business with social media

As CEO, it is your responsibility to set a strategy for your company and you will be measured on whether that strategy works and whether you are able to rally your organization to adopt it and get everyone on the same page. In order for your strategy to succeed, it needs to be communicated to your employees, shareholders, customers and all of the other stakeholders who play a role in the development of your company.

If your company has set a goal to become a market leader within a few years, you need to show the way to get there. If the goal is to change your company's reputation, you need to explain what is wrong with its current one. If you want to change your business model or switch to a new industry or community, you need to be able to both defend your decision and explain why you think it's necessary. You alone cannot move your organization toward new goals. You need the help of your stakeholders, and you increasingly need to communicate *with* them, not just *to* them, because they influence your strategy and your ability to achieve the goals you have set.

With social media, you have the ability to craft the narrative – the story – that can keep your business strategy and your key issues on track throughout the myriad challenges it faces. At the same time, you will be welcoming others into the important conversations that make up the very DNA of social media. You are showing that you don't want to just talk to your target groups, you also want to listen to what they have to say about your organization and learn from their feedback. In

short, you are inviting your stakeholders to step inside your organization and follow along with the things that are important to both you and your company.

This will only get more and more important. Studies¹ show that companies whose CEOs are active on social media are viewed 23 percent more positively than those whose are not. Likewise, three out of four consumers in the same study said that the online presence of a company's CEO makes that company's brand seem more credible.

Already in 2013, the consultant firm McKinsey identified a number of advantages that organizations gain when their CEOs are active on social media. Even though most international CEOs are inactive on social media, it's worth taking a look at some of the advantages McKinsey pointed out².

CEOs who are on social media:

- Are more creative and innovative
- Are better at attracting talented workers
- Have more loyal relationships with their customers and stakeholders
- Play a larger role within their industry
- Are more likely to use technology to advance their business
- Achieve competitive advantages

Sounds good, right? But it doesn't happen on its own. No CEO can just open a Twitter account or occasionally post content to LinkedIn and assume it will have an impact. Social media is not merely a collection of various platforms, it is a catalyzer for the way we all understand the world as well as the way you run your business and build relationships with your stakeholders. Deciding to become a CEO who actively communicates on social media is not just about choosing the right platform, it's about choosing what kind of leader you want to be and how your organization should be run.

Your stakeholders want you to demonstrate a high degree of accessibility, openness and personality. They want you to express your opinions and to care about things beyond your own business.

Recent years have also shown that a growing number of CEOs now view making positive contributions to solving the world's problems as more important than their own bottom lines. In short, companies and organizations are no longer expected to merely earn money and serve their own interests; they're also expected to contribute in a positive and meaningful way to their surrounding communities³.

This dramatic shift requires organizations and their leaders to have a social mindset. It calls on you to be more pro-active in your communication.

In order for that to work, you must take a critical look at the culture of your organization and evaluate your own role as leader. We'll take a deeper dive later into how to take your personality into account (and use it to your benefit) on social media, but first let's start with these questions:

- Are you interested in listening to what your stakeholders have to say?
- Do you have the courage to engage in dialogue with members, customers, decision makers and other stakeholders?

¹ Hootsuite 2017: "How to influence trust, transparency, and the bottom line".

² 'Listening, engaging and leading', The Social CEO, 2019

³ Deloitte, 2019

- Are you afraid of public criticism?
- Do you have an actual desire to get input into how to develop your business?
- Do you want to change your organization?

Most CEOs probably already believe that they are good at listening, engaging in dialogue and tolerating criticism and that they have the courage to communicate with the outside world. But are they able to display these traits in even the most difficult of situations? When they're busy or preoccupied with everyday tasks and deadlines, do they still have the perseverance, patience and resolve it takes to be present and communicative?

This is where the big difference lies between those organizations and leaders who see a legitimate value in being more open and communicative and those who would rather sit safely behind the thick walls of their company, only daring to stick their necks out to engage with the world on rare occasions.

In the new reality facing you and your company, you are required to use your voice to create a dialogue with your stakeholders and to continuously strive to expand your social mindset. This is the foundation for successfully communicating on social media and using its special characteristics and opportunities to strengthen your reputation.

In what follows, we will explore the many requirements that this new reality demands of you and your company, and we'll look at how social media can be one of the tools you utilize to strengthen your business.

Transparency and accessibility

In a modern, communicative organization, engaging with customers, members and other stakeholders who discuss and evaluate your organization every day on social media is a must. The same is true for you as CEO. You also need to use social media on your stakeholders' terms so that you can create an open and accessible organization.

While many organizations in the past, and even to some extent still today, might prefer to shut out the outside world by closing the blinds and only communicating on certain, self-selected occasions, this worldview has been challenged by social media and the ability of everyday citizens to express themselves whenever, however and about whatever they want. Companies are now constantly being discussed and critiqued on social media. This requires companies and CEOs to take a new approach and be willing to communicate with stakeholders on their own turf – which is increasingly social media platforms.

Modern consumers who use social media to research everything from vacation destinations to book recommendations, new car purchases and society memberships demand communicative companies that are easily accessible, accommodating and transparent. They want organizations that are always reachable, not ones that only communicate when there are new financial figures to release or when a new glossy annual report has come back from the printers. They demand people, opinions and values that they can identify with.

Social media is also where enormous consumer pressure can build and where companies can find themselves in the middle of a full-blown shitstorm. The strategic, proactive use of social media and a well-prepared plan can help alleviate these threats. But that requires that you as CEO understand the challenges and advantages of building up a long-lasting credible relationship with stakeholders so that you can engage them in online communication even in the most difficult situations.

The path to creating a transparent organization that understands how to communicate with modern consumers runs through the CEO and depends on his/her ability to position him- or herself as the front figure who personifies the crucial trust between the organization and its stakeholders.

In transparent organizations, social media is a key tool for ensuring that the company communicates its values and opinions by actually explaining the company's activities – not just presenting a well-crafted, media-friendly image, but rather by offering an authentic look into the company's inner life where decisions are made, mistakes happen, action is taken and the company's purpose and mission are laid out.

This is where the CEO and other top leaders are essential pieces of the puzzle who can ensure that the company's various stakeholders feel as if the company is speaking directly to them via social media. Their online interaction helps forge bonds to the organization, its values and its products.

The new rules of the road that call on companies and organizations to constantly explain why they are doing what they're doing have imposed greater demands on personal leadership and executives' personal communication. This is in large part because consumers, opinion makers and everyone else who can influence a company's success now demand a relationship with the person behind the organization rather than just with the organization itself. In this new media reality, in which social media can both build up a company's reputation and tear it down in a split second, the CEO's communication has never been more important.

“In this new media reality, in which social media can both build up a company's reputation and tear it down in a split second, personal communication from the CEO has never been more important.”

Transparency in an organizational context is about giving stakeholders an honest look at what drives the company. Not just key figures, environmental reports, equality and other issues that consumers care about, but also where the company stands when it comes to greater societal issues. Luckily, social media can help organizations and leaders create the type of transparency that has become so essential to how customers, employees and the public build and retain trust in the organization.

How to improve transparency and accessibility in your organization:

1. If you can't explain it, you can't defend it

If you're unable to explain your actions or your choices as an organization or as CEO, it will be very difficult to defend why you've chosen to act in the way you have. Organizational transparency often starts with the courage to be open about (most) decisions so that they can be communicated in a straightforward manner.

2. Think about transparency from the outset

When you start a new project or create a new strategy, be sure to think about how you are going to communicate it from the very start and then continuously keep your relevant audiences updated on your progress – also on social media.

3. Incorporate openness and accessibility into your communication strategy

If you make it clear that accessibility and openness are key components of your communication strategy, they will become organizational values that get embedded in your workplace culture and in your employees.

Legitimacy that packs a punch

It is essential that you as CEO stand upon a platform of legitimacy in your efforts to represent your organization externally.

This is naturally easier if you are heading a tradition-rich company, an organization that has long been part of the public discourse, or one that 'owns' a variety of issues and agendas or has proven itself with a strong financial performance, large membership numbers or a leading societal position. But many companies and organizations don't have this type of core narrative from which to draw their values and visions, nor the historical foundation that lends legitimacy to its communication. In those cases, social media can provide the opportunity to build and shape this missing narrative and foundation – and here is where you as CEO must do even more heavy lifting.

With the effective use of social media, particularly from the CEO, an organization can slowly but surely move from an uncertain position as one of many players in a crowded market to a much stronger position from which it can better represent its interests and develop its business. In public affairs, it is absolutely essential that you give your stakeholders the impression that they are dealing with an organization and a CEO that will play a role in the public debate and win market shares within the market of public opinion – and it is here where social media can provide you with a valuable shortcut.

Establishing legitimacy on social media is to a large extent about creating and maintaining relationships. Relationships are essential for all companies and organizations if they are to achieve their goals, whether they be commercial, member-driven or political. And within the arena of relationship-building, social media is playing a larger and larger role.

Improve the credibility of your company

In a time when consumers have less and less confidence in politicians, the media and businesses, it's vital that your organization works determinedly to create confidence in new ways. Maintaining and developing credibility should be a strategic priority for all top executives.

Whether you're the leader of a company, an NGO, an interest organization or a public authority, your ability to communicate credibly is essential to how your stakeholders view your organization and how customers, employees and others create and maintain a relationship to it. In the eyes of many, the organization *is* the CEO. That's why the CEO's presence and behavior across all types of media is so essential to a strong and credible organization.

And you will need that credibility when it's time to sell a product, satisfy your members, raise money or influence political decision-makers. Product purchases, membership decisions and the formation of opinions are increasingly based on emotional attachments to not only organizations but the people who run those organizations.

American studies⁴ have shown that not only do employees overwhelmingly believe that the presence of top executives (CEOs, CFOs, etc.) on social media makes companies seem more honest and trustworthy, but that this is an opinion that has increased significantly in recent years. But how does one build – or expand – this kind of credibility on social media?

There are four dimensions to your social media communication that you must address if you are to strengthen your own credibility and that of your organization. You must be able to communicate with authority, demonstrate and legitimize your company’s values, convey a personal touch and create connections with your target groups and stakeholders.

THE CREDIBILITY QUADRANT

<p>1 AUTHORITY You use your position as CEO to establish authority amongst your stakeholders. You communicate with the responsibility and overview of a CEO. You have broad support within your organization, and you take ownership and responsibility for its most important messages.</p>	<p>2 ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES Your communication is built upon the very DNA of your organization and you clearly demonstrate why your organization matters. You establish the common thread between the organization’s goals and its specific actions, and you clearly voice the organization’s positions.</p>
<p>3 PERSONALITY You have your own unique style and approach. You communicate with passion and independence. You have your own authentic tone, which lends a personal touch to your company’s external communication and messages.</p>	<p>4 PRESENCE You are present in your communication. You answer questions, like social media comments and engage in dialogue with your stakeholders. Maybe you even ask questions because you want to have the input of others and better understand how they view your organization.</p>

The right mix of authority, values, personality and presence in a CEO’s personal communication channels gives an organization an added tool for showing direction, taking responsibility and personalizing messages that no newsletter, website, press release or other traditional communication channel can match.

Only ‘personal interaction’ with an organization’s top executive gives followers the opportunity to view its inner workings on their own level. This is a tactical approach that a CEO can use in a number of different situations and events, whether it’s proactively sharing positive messages or reacting to current events or negative trends that affect his/her organization or its industry.

When you build credibility on social media, you are building a base for communicating the issues that matter most to your organization. And you’re building a stronger and more loyal relationship

⁴ Brandfrog, 2018.

with your stakeholders because you're speaking with a personal voice that your target audiences understand.

Establishing yourself as a credible CEO on social media is largely about having the courage to crawl out of your hiding spot and deal with problems head-on, even in those painful situations that can seriously damage your organization or your entire industry. In that regard, social media isn't that different from normal human relationships: honesty and candor create trust and credibility.

When CEOs use social media or traditional media to communicate their opinions on current societal issues like inequality, employment or climate change, it helps their companies inspire confidence and appear more attractive to employees and potential employees. Employees want to know their boss and know his/her opinion on the topics that they care about⁵.

A central element of values-based communication on social media is that the opinions being expressed must match the person sharing them. Perhaps it should go without saying, but you shouldn't tweet about topics that don't matter to you or express opinions you don't have even if it would fit a purpose for your company.

It is important that the opinions you do express are in line with your company's values and conveyed in a way that portrays you as the public personification of those values. It's about strengthening your company's reputation and ensuring your own credibility in external communications. That, in turn, helps you represent your interests and increase your opportunities to become more visible in the media.

Take a stand

A CEO's or an organization's success on social media depends largely on the willingness to express opinions, take a stance and dare to participate in the public debate.

Knowledge goes a long way, and organizations built on knowledge have great potential on social media. But for CEOs who want to cut through the noise and participate in the great discussions of the day, the art of taking a stand is the alpha and omega.

In recent years, we've seen an increasing number of companies in the US and Europe make their way onto the public stage with clearly expressed views on major current social issues like growth or climate. Sometimes a CEO's expression of opinions is referred to as 'CEO activism', a phrase that sounds overwhelming to some and unachievable to others. But the fact is that more companies need to engage with the world around them, with their top executive as their spokesperson.

“New demands on companies’ attitudes and the way they express them are here to stay. And social media is your ticket to the ball”

Worth remembering when you take a stand on social media:

⁵ Brandfrog, 2018.

- **The positions expressed by your company must tie in with its mission and values**
It's counterproductive to invent an opinion just because you got caught up in a Twitter debate or were offered a chance to appear on television. The positions you take need to be built upon a solid foundation.
- **Your positions need to be strategically chosen and aligned with your business strategy**
Why take a stand on an issue that has nothing to do with your business or your values? There are certain topics that everyone can have an opinion on (climate, for example) and then there are topics that are more closely related to your bottom line. Be sure to keep a healthy balance between these two types of topics.
- **Choose (a few) topics that you and your organization are knowledgeable about**
As the old saying goes, "It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." The same goes for CEOs who speak out about topics that they know little to nothing about. Choose a maximum of three to four topics that are important for you and that you are able to speak about from a position of knowledge and experience.
- **Whatever you believe, there's somebody who believes the opposite**
Taking a stand as a CEO takes courage and can have consequences. Will your desire to jump into a public debate have repercussions on your organization's reputation? Will your company have to expend too many resources either doubling down on a position or walking it back? If so, perhaps your stand is not worth taking. With that said, nearly every expressed opinion can have consequences, particularly on social media where all CEOs are likely to be criticized from time to time for daring to open their mouths.

Social media makes you a more distinct leader

One of the clear advantages of being active on social media is that it makes your leadership and values more distinct and sets the tone for your employees and your company's other stakeholders.

When you read in management books or hear at leadership seminars that you need to be a distinctive leader, it's not just about making clear decisions and communicating them internally. Distinctive leadership is also increasingly about using social media to show your leadership within the public space and inspire your employees and others who influence your organization.

Even though you already have an intranet, group emails or maybe even a company magazine as ways to communicate directly to your employees, social media lends an extra dimension to your leadership because your ideas and visions are allowed to spread their wings publicly and display your leadership to more than just your stakeholders. This is particularly important when the winds of change are forcing you to set a new course for your organization, either by choice or by circumstances outside of your control.

"Social media doesn't replace the need to communicate internally but because your employees are likely to follow you on social media, internal and external communication are now more intertwined than ever before."

How social media helps strengthen you as a leader:

1. Communicate your organization's most important issues and challenges
2. Use examples to show the direction you want to take your organization
3. Clearly express what you view as right and wrong within your industry
4. Involve the efforts of your employees in your social media content

Build relationships and strengthen your interests

One of the most important ways that CEOs of all stripes should use social media is to represent their interests and the framework conditions that are important to their individual company or organization. Through the effective use of social media, an organization's PR function is given a whole new dimension because it is here where CEOs can use their personal presence to be much more involved in policy developments, setting the agenda and engaging in dialogue with key decision-makers.

But in order to get there, you need a strong network that you maintain both in the real world, via physical meetings and networking events, and expand on social media. This is possible because so many influential people, whether politicians or members of the media, can be found on social media platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn.

Just like in real life, though, relationships do not just magically form on social media. You need to build a foundation of legitimacy that makes your organization appealing to other organizations and other leaders. You also need to constantly create value, both online and off, so that your good relationships are kept intact and you increase your social capital.

The business world is filled with good examples of organizations using clear and credible communication on Twitter and LinkedIn to create value and build new relationships that can prove beneficial in the future.

As a communications consultant, I've helped organizations create relationships with prominent politicians through personal use of social media in order to establish long-term cooperation. This happened exclusively on Twitter, rather than having to try to invite myself to personal meetings. On social media, a prolonged and continual exchange of value allows you to maintain your most important professional relationships to the benefit of your organization. Because so many decision-makers, politicians and journalists can be found on Twitter, your most crucial network is right at your fingertips.

Listen and be heard

Most companies want to take ownership of issues, opinion and product categories – to stand out and get attention. But how do they do that in today's crowded and heavily competitive media environment?

First and foremost, it requires paying attention to the world around you and listening to the conversations that matter to your company. Achieving success as an actively communicating CEO requires extending your mental antennae and closely following what is said about your organization. Only then are you able to affect what is said about you.

A colleague of mine who also advises organizations on the use of social media has created a model for how organizations can gain influence through social media. It's a model that you as CEO can use as a guide in your professional communications on Twitter and LinkedIn.

When you *observe* what is happening on social media, you extend your antennae and listen to your stakeholders. That allows you to *enrich* conversations with your knowledge and opinions as you engage in the debate. If the discussion doesn't go your way, you can *redirect* it and correct misperceptions and anything else that negatively affects your organization. If you manage to observe, enrich and redirect, you will also have the ability to *own* a topic so that you are the one contacted when the media, politicians or other decision-makers need an expert opinion.⁶

'Owning' a topic is what you want to achieve with your external communication. You want to be associated with your key issues so that you're the first person that journalists and opinion leaders think of when they need a reputable source. This in turn gives you the exposure that helps you and your company stand out from the competition and appeal to customers.

Chapter 2: Personality enhances understanding

In order to understand what's needed to achieve success as a social CEO and ensure that your executive communication truly adds value to your organization, we need to look at how you can use your own personality in your communication, what barriers you should set and which purposes it serves. In other words, in order to optimize your communication, you need to take stock of who you are.

This also helps narrow in on which goals, target groups and communication channels best fit your personality and your specific organization. We also need to look at how social media challenges conventional wisdom and why it can be so difficult to get started on social media. Not least, this chapter calls on you to look within yourself and identify your own approach.

As you read earlier in this book, having an impact on social media requires that you give your communication a personal touch. At the same time, your personal voice must also naturally coincide with the work, values and bottom line of your business and you must be able let yourself loose in your external communication. Sometimes that requires letting go more than you might want to and getting out of the safety zone. That also helps you to be relevant on social media.

Just as not all CEOs perform well on TV or from a lectern, not everyone instinctively has the professional and personal skills to feel at ease when communicating on social media. Therefore, these skills need to be learned, practiced and maintained – and you need to be aware of your own weaknesses. Communicating on social media requires perseverance and can be difficult at first because everything is different than what you are used to

Yes, it's hard to get started

Most CEOs are more likely to have an educational background in economics, law or political science than in communications. And at the risk of offending someone, I can probably safely say that the degree programs pursued by the majority of decision-makers in business and society don't put much focus on teaching graduates how to communicate.

⁶ Benjamin Elberth, 2017

That's one of the reasons so many CEOs and other top executives use communication advisors and why so many business leaders see a lot of downsides to communicating personally on social media. Many fear saying the wrong thing, ending up in the media spotlight or angering their customers and view these as reasons to not risk their personal integrity on social media.

And let's get this out of the way: everything is difficult at the beginning, and that also applies to becoming a successful social CEO who manages to communicate in the right way to the right groups on the right channels. But the good news is that all of this can be learned and that you, in your position as a CEO, have every opportunity to create the best possible foundation for success.

The biggest barriers to CEOs becoming active on social media:

- Fear of losing control of your communication
- The risk of exposing yourself and your organization to criticism
- Discomfort with exposing more of your personal life
- Uncertainty about how to navigate the various channels
- Fear of not being taken seriously
- Fear of wasting your time
- Fear of being perceived as too self-promoting

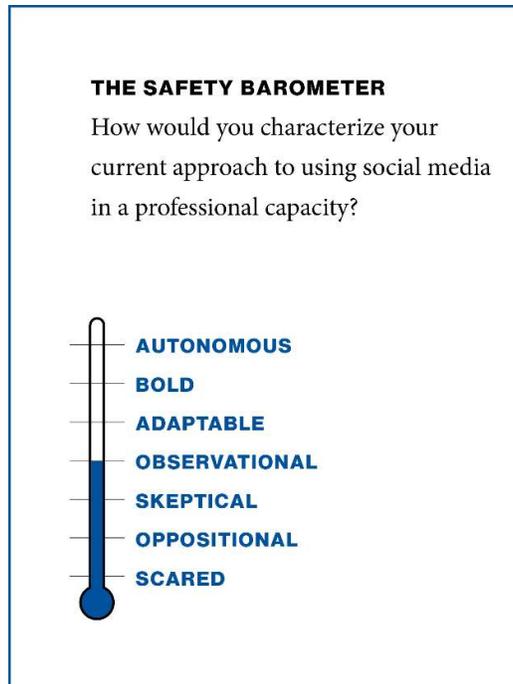
As with so many other things, it helps to be familiar with the common barriers and to understand that they are completely natural. But they shouldn't stop you from achieving your goal of becoming a social CEO – because it is important.

For most CEOs, the biggest issue is identifying their objectives and target groups and then thinking about what types of personal content could help create value for their organizations. But the important thing is to get started because no one can learn how to actively use social media without being active themselves. The only way to learn is to tweet, post, update, comment and practice how to use the different channels. Sure, there are natural talents and quick learners who immediately find the right angles and a voice that rises above the noise. But for most executives, it's about getting started, winning over their fears and then learning from their successes and failures.

Are you scared, bold or cautious?

One of the most important things in the approach to learning how to become a social CEO is knowing yourself and the strengths and limitations of your personal communication style.

That's why I've introduced 'The Safety Barometer', a tool you can use to identify your starting point and your path to becoming a social CEO. It's also important to note your progress as you become more comfortable on social media.



As you read this book, you can plot your placement on the barometer and see where you think you are now. No matter your starting point, you want to move your way up the scale and use the barometer as a natural progression in the development of your personal communication on social media.

Where you start depends on who you are as a person, what type of organization you represent and the type of traditions you and your organization have for communicating. For CEOs of listed companies, there will be a natural reticence to communicate more informally than you are used to. At the other end of the spectrum, the leaders of NGOs and interest organizations likely already consider it part of their job description to be outspoken and publicly express their organization's viewpoints.

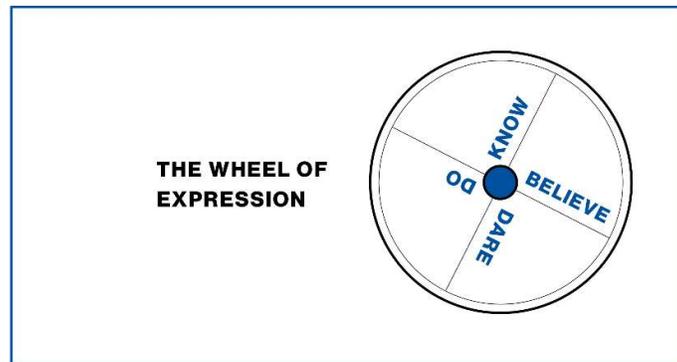
Your placement on the Safety Barometer will also impact which social media channel(s) you start with, if you haven't started yet, as well as how active you are and what types of content you share.

Four paths to impact

Wherever you are on the Safety Barometer and whether you choose to use Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or Instagram, you need to be able to communicate with personality and authenticity. Unless you or your company are already well-known, your posts on social media will only really break through if you manage to create content of actual value to your followers and convey it a shrewd way.

CEOs who want to break through on social media need to take a hard look at themselves and their motivation to communicate and then match that to their own personality.

Are you opinionated? Are you an introvert? Are you most comfortable hiding behind your organization's thick walls? Are you a news junkie who loves discussing current events? The type of personality you have can help you make a decision about what type of leader you want to be on social media and what you have to offer. That's where the Wheel of Expression comes in.



The four elements of the Wheel of Expression are the four ways to break through on social media.

CEOs who **know** something specific and use their organization's specific knowledge to assert themselves will have a greater chance of rising above the noise in both traditional and social media, using their position as a thought leader to position their organization at the top of the hierarchy.

CEOs who **believe** something about current affairs or political debates, or who have clear opinions within their industry, have always had an easier time getting media attention than CEOs who keep their opinions to themselves. Believing in something and expressing it is becoming more and more necessary as the public has come to expect more social responsibility from organizations and companies.

What always works is when CEOs **do** something on social media, such as taking part in the organization's visible work and moving the organization forward by launching new initiatives and projects. When a CEO communicates about these things, it shows drive, willpower and optimism, all of which are positive leadership traits in general and work particularly well as social media content.

Leaders who **dare** to step out of their comfort zone are also rewarded on social media. When CEOs speak out by tweeting about relevant issues, they put their values on the front line and display the type of personal courage that helps create impact on social media and improves the standing of both themselves and their organization.

Some top executives – usually the most outspoken and charismatic – can utilize all parts of the Wheel of Expression from the very start, but the majority should pick one area as their starting point.

A good piece of advice is to start with the core of your competencies. When you know a lot about your company and your industry, it should be your knowledge that you first use to express yourself and demonstrate that you have what it takes to enrich the debate and create value for your followers – and perhaps also enrich current societal discussions.

As you become more familiar with the content, you can either share even more knowledge or start building up the courage to express more opinions than you are used to and then really make your own personal values part of your communication – it helps engagement in social media.

As you progress up the Safety Barometer, the distance between consideration and action gets shorter. You even start daring to make posts that have a bit of an edge to them, giving your social media content a tinge of personal courage that will shine through and increase your personal impact.

Find your personal style

With the social media success of CEOs so highly dependent upon personality and the ability to put yourself out there, how do you go about creating your own personal social media style that will create the credibility you crave and make your stakeholders truly want to engage with what you share?

The short answer is that there is no manual for finding your style, just as you most likely didn't become a top executive by reading management books.

Maybe we can put it this way: on social media you need to be the most candid version of yourself. You need to leverage your social capital to grow your network while also being willing to show vulnerability and admit that you don't have the answer to everything. You must use your knowledge to create value for your target groups and use your values to make a difference in your organization's communication. And you need to infuse all of it with a personal touch that conveys that you are the one behind the messages.

Five tips for developing your personal style on social media:

1. Trust your gut

Leadership is about knowing that you are making the right decisions and navigating your own path to becoming an effective leader. On social media, you need to use that same gut feeling to find the style that best suits you.

2. Be yourself

You can't be someone you're not and the kind of authenticity that your target groups crave can rarely be forced.

3. Put yourself out there a bit more than you're used to

Even though you need to be yourself, you also must force yourself to be more vulnerable than you're used to. As a CEO, you will be a bit out of your comfort zone on social media but that spurs courage and credibility.

4. Leave the corporate communication behind

Try to create your own content rather than using the professionally-crafted messages from your organization. It is often the personal messages from you as CEO that will be more interesting to your target groups.

5. Practice makes personality

You're not going to develop a unique personal voice on social media overnight. You'll only get there by practicing the art of formulating yourself differently than you're used to and experiencing how other people receive your message and interact with it.

How private should you be on social media?

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to establish that your personality is essential to improving your leadership communication on social media. And it is hard to give more of yourself than you are used to and to push yourself out in front of the masses far more often than you usually do. This draws more attention to you as a person in ways both good and bad and makes you more vulnerable to criticism when your organization runs into tough times.

As a CEO, you may already be in the media spotlight to some extent and thus already subject to exposure. So how is being active on social media any different?

The simple explanation is that what works in traditional media does not work in social media. In newspaper quotes and short soundbites on the radio or television, you're simply asked to provide relevant commentary, something that you can be trained to do or even recite directly from your company's press releases or from the advice you've been given by your communications advisor. These short comments help gain exposure for your organization without requiring you to get personal. In fact, it would often be inappropriate to do so.

But on social media you have to consider where the line is between being personal and being private. You'll have to evaluate whether you want to use personal matters to get yourself and your company exposure in soft media, or whether you'd rather stick to the business outlets or other industry media that you are used to dealing with.

Where you fit along the spectrum of being very personal and being private on social media is naturally something that only you can determine and the best way to test your own limits is to try different strategies with your content.

The question, then, is: Can a CEO share glimpses of his/her private life in some media and be strictly business in others?

The answer is... maybe, but probably not. It all depends on how you think your various target groups should see you. There will always be a risk that amongst your stakeholders there may be some people who see your professional posts on LinkedIn and your holiday photos on Facebook, and that's where things get a bit messy. Therefore, most top executives need to make a decision on whether to completely forego sharing private posts about vacations or grandchildren or whether those types of posts should only be shared in private groups or through private, locked accounts.

Drop posts on sports scores, kids and pets

Just like everything else on social media, the balance between being personal and being private depends on the individual and how interested you are in giving the outside world an inside look – not only at your company, but maybe your home, your exercise routines or informal family events.

As CEO, you've probably heard that you should express yourself as "a well-rounded person" and be willing to be seen not just in your business suit but also in your running gear or with your family in matching Christmas sweaters. But even if you're prepared to go all the way, there is still a limit to what you should offer your followers on social media. Because certain things can also cross a line and cause people to unfollow you. Here is what you should not share on social media:

- **Your political preferences**

It probably goes without saying that for most CEOs, expressing your political beliefs is a no-go. You need to be able to run your business and advance your interests under any administration and serve your organization's interests under any political constellation. But asserting yourself on certain political key issues on behalf of your organization is another thing.

- **Live updates from sport events and concerts**

Okay, a single tweet now and again about your favorite sports team can help people view you as more than just a boss obsessed with business strategy. But for the most part it's best to keep sports events, concerts and the like out of your social media feeds. That's not why people are following you, and you risk getting carried away and tweeting something about the referee or taking selfies wearing a football jersey. Neither of these are appropriate for a CEO.

- **Pictures of food, drinks and restaurant visits**

Before you post the menu of your business dinner at a fancy restaurant to Facebook, ask yourself one thing: Why? Does that contribute to your goal of communicating at eye level with your stakeholders, or will it give an impression of you that you'd rather avoid?

- **Pictures of your pets**

Even though pictures of cats, pandas and baby animals often go viral on formats like Facebook and Instagram, that doesn't mean you should use your own pets to rack up 'likes'. What does your cat have to do with your job, and what do you stand to gain other than maybe making people think that you're good with animals? This rule of course doesn't apply to the heads of animal welfare organizations...

- **Pictures of your kids – with some exceptions**

This one is difficult because everyone is proud of their children and occasionally feels the urge to brag about them or to show that they are a caring parent raising their young ones with good values. But unless your children and spouse have agreed to support you in becoming a more personal leader on social media, you should keep your kids out of your posts. They didn't ask for the attention.

Chapter 3: Objectives, target groups and great content

Once you have fully understood how social media can help you and your company, you need to turn your attention to your personal strategy and develop a tactical approach to your social media channels. You also need to know what types of content to share on the channels you choose to use. The starting point for this is determining which objectives you and your company have on social

media – particularly how your personal communication on social media fits into your overall communication strategy.

Your goals and objectives naturally depend on what type of organization you lead. There are obvious differences between the goals of a B2B company CEO and that of a leader of a large interest organization. But focusing on your objectives is important regardless of what type of company you lead.

You are undoubtedly already thoroughly aware that everything you do needs to have a clear goal and that you don't want to waste your time on something that will have no effect. This is already true in your daily working life, where everything you do needs to make an impact internally or externally in your organization. This is the same mindset you need to employ when defining your objectives in being active on social media. The best CEOs on social media are those who are clearly purpose-driven and who constantly have their own goals in mind when posting content on one of their social channels.

Choosing your objectives carefully and basing them on your organization's communications strategy, business strategy and visions provides a clear framework for your communication. It gives you confidence to know that your efforts serve a clear purpose, and it gives you a structure on which to base your personal communication. It also allows you to monitor your own efforts and see what works from month to month.

Some of the most common objectives CEOs have for their use of social media are:

- Becoming more visible in the media
- Influencing politicians and opinion makers
- Strengthening business networks and relationships
- Connecting with customers and suppliers
- Employee communications
- Member communications
- Recruitment
- General profiling

Most CEOs have very clear-cut reasons for being on social media and often the individual reasons listed above overlap with others. Being more visible in the media also strengthens your business relationships, just as affecting politicians can also help your recruitment and so on.

Find your purpose

Some CEOs are skilled enough to take on all of the listed objectives, but they are the exceptions. In developing your strategy for what you really need to do on social media, I challenge you to create a hierarchy of just three objectives to clarify what are the MOST IMPORTANT things you want to achieve with your tweets on Twitter and your posts on Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn.

As a starting point, use your company's mission statement. Since you are at the top of the pyramid, you are also the right person to lead the way on the most important communication goals.

If you are the top manager of an interest organization, your goals will often be:

1. Influencing politicians and opinion makers
2. Becoming more visible in the media

3. Member communications

If you are the CEO of a private company, your priorities may be different. For example:

1. Strengthening business networks and relationships
2. Connecting with customers and suppliers
3. Employee communications.

What is your priority? Choose the three most important communication objectives and keep them in mind as you read on.

There can be just as many different objectives as there are companies, but if you're not clear about *why* you're communicating on social media you will never figure out *how* to do it or which channels to choose.

In the process of identifying your goals, it makes a lot of sense to get the help of your company's communications and marketing teams, leadership colleagues or external consultants because it is such an important part of your strategy. At the same time, those goals that you do not prioritize should still be supported and complemented by other communications activities within the organization that you are not personally involved in.

Who are you communicating to?

When you communicate on social media, you are in principle communicating with the entire world, including all of your organization's stakeholders. That's naturally not the way it works in practice, however. Because social media channels are open networks and not direct letters to customers or physical meetings with politicians, you need to always remember that your messages on social media might reach target groups that they were not intended to reach. That requires that you prioritize your target groups and choose the right content on the right channels.

But first, the target groups: Who do you want to communicate with?

On your private Facebook account, the answer may be easy. You know everyone personally, whether they are your friends, family members or old schoolmates, and you can be sure to receive likes and nice comments when you upload pictures from your summer vacation or a selfie from your bike ride. You know your target groups and what works.

You need to think about your professional communication channels on social media in a similar way. As you gain experience sharing posts, tweets and so on in a professional context, you will also learn how your professional target groups react to your content.

And when it comes to target groups, you need to create a bit of a system. It can be advantageous to create your own schema or audience hierarchy to ensure that you communicate to the most important people – and that you remember all of your target groups. This is naturally closely tied to the objectives you ranked in the section above.

If your primary objective of being on social media is to create visibility within the traditional media, then one of your target groups would naturally be journalists. If your goal is to communicate directly with the members of your organization, it might be a good idea to segment them so that all different groups feel like they are being recognized, etc.

It's important to think about the many target groups you have as CEO, but it should never be so rigid that it puts limits you and costs you the straightforwardness and spontaneity that should also be part of your social media mindset.

Roughly speaking, you can divide your target groups on social media into 10-12 groups:

- Employees
- Members
- Media
- Competitors
- Board of directors and shareholders
- Politicians and other decision-makers
- Opinion leaders
- Industry network
- Customers and suppliers
- Other professional networks
- General public

When you look at the above list of potential target groups, it should be obvious that you'll need to do some basic thinking over who it is you really want to reach with your personal communications – otherwise you'll end up missing the mark and having a limited effect.

Choose your target groups

If your organization conducts stakeholder surveys, target audience analyzes or reputation surveys, these can naturally help you decide which audiences would be most interested in your social media communications. Your target groups may also already be defined in your organization's communication strategy or perhaps you just know them instinctively.

When you have an overview of all of your organization's target groups, you'll need to look at where your efforts are best spent in relation to existing communication strategies and where your personal communications can function as a cog in the overall machine. Maybe you already instinctively know where you can make the biggest difference.

The important point is that a CEO cannot reach all audiences, nor should they try. Choices should be made so that your communications create as much value as possible and you as CEO can see that your efforts bear fruit. If you try to target everyone on social media, you won't hit anyone.

Therefore, select three to four audiences from the list above (or find your own) and rank them based on who is most important to communicate with on social media. And remember, this does not mean that you and your organization should not communicate with the remaining audiences – it may just have to be done on other channels that are better designed for the purpose than social media.

Create the right content

The most important thing on social media is and always will be that you share the right content. Content that positions you and your organization in line with the skills, values, attitudes and business goals you have. Without strong content, you will find no success on your personal social media channels.

Many CEOs view content creation on social media as a huge and overwhelming task. The barriers keeping you from sharing your personal content are important to recognize and confront in order to truly begin creating value for your organization and your own personal brand.

The most common barriers faced by CEOs, knowledge workers, researchers and other professionals for whom social media should be an obvious communication channel, are insecurity, a lack of knowledge of what works on social media, and a lack of prioritization. Then there is what some have called ‘the curse of knowledge⁷,’ which is that your insight into, and deep knowledge of, your organization and its work prevents you from seeing the forest for the trees. Therefore, you may not view your experience, opinions or a job that you’ve done as something worth sharing on social media simply because you do not think it will interest anyone but yourself and maybe a few employees. Similarly, you may have a fear of simplifying complex topics rather than telling the whole story.

When I work with CEOs and knowledge workers on social media – or just try to convince them to be more communicative in general - I often hear phrases like: "Well, there is nothing new in that," "That’s just how we work" and "Who cares what I did yesterday?"

For CEOs, this is the biggest mistake you can make about what content to share on social media. Because as the leader of your organization, you’re the one who everyone is looking at, from both inside and outside the organization, so what you do at the office, in meetings or at conferences is the best way to gain insight into your organization.

“It is the individual bits of content and your actions on social media that ultimately affect the credibility and transparency that is so important to you and your organization”.

You are the chief waving the blanket to make smoke signals and you are the captain who sets the course. Therefore, you must have an inner belief that what you want to communicate on social media will have a strong relevance to your communication target groups.

As a CEO, you are used to strategizing and working tactically to achieve your business goals and satisfy members, customers and politicians, and you are used to believing that what you do and put into motion at your organization is right. You need to take that same belief in what you do to your personal social media channels. You need to apply your leadership skills and your ability to see the big picture to how you can best use yourself to strengthen your business or organization – identify where you need to lead and what you can leave to others.

Five types of content that work

No matter which social media channels you use in your position as a CEO, it’s important (as we saw in chapter 1) that you always remember that your communication must create credibility and transparency and always have your primary objectives in mind.

⁷ For example, Michelle Carvill in the book ‘Get Social’, 2018.

This impacts how you choose your content and how you construct your posts over time.

For example, it's not particularly credible if everything you share on LinkedIn is about how happy your employees are and how you treat them to cake every Wednesday. It's also not credible to use all of your social media posts to talk about your business goals and how your company has once again delivered on all of its KPIs. Likewise, you won't paint a credible picture of yourself if the only thing your stakeholders see is the fun side of your work.

“Being a CEO is hard, challenging, fun and complex. That needs to be reflected in the content you choose to share on social media”.

Roughly speaking, you can break down the social media content of a CEO into five types:

- Societal news
- Organizational news
- Industry challenges
- The inner workings of the organization
- The CEO out of the box

In the category 'societal news', you weigh in on current events that you or your organization have particular knowledge of or opinions on. You express your opinions and your knowledge in your own messaging, and you enrich the current discussion with your contributions. Remember that you are communicating to and with your followers and creating value for your network and your external stakeholders. That also means that you need to elaborate on your points and answer questions. This creates a vital personal voice.

'Societal news' can often also get you in the media – especially if you use Twitter. As a CEO of an organization that has a significant legitimacy to a current issue, your personal voice, your point of view and your knowledge are all tasty treats for the journalists covering that particular topic.

It's with this type of content that your stakeholder audience becomes a bit more complicated because you are communicating beyond the context of your organization. It also means this is the type of content that can lead to the most criticism because you are taking an active position on an issue that may be divisive.

'Organizational news' is perhaps the category where you feel most at home. This is where you as CEO have your base and know everything about what is going on. This is where you can tell about your company's latest achievements, new employees, collaborations or the positive things your company does for your community.

But this is also the category where you really need to be careful because to not come off as too superficial or too corporate, or you'll be seen as merely using your personal social media channels precisely how your organization uses its official channels.

“The point of being present on social media as a CEO is not to paint a pretty picture of your organization as place where everything is rainbows and butterflies.”

This will not create the trust you need or make you appear more credible and your followers aren't going to be interested – at least not in the long run – in engaging with your content if it comes off as too corporate or your tie is so tight it doesn't give an impression of you as someone who every once in a while has challenges like the rest of us.

'Industry challenges' is the category in which you can both create the crucial accessibility we discussed in chapter 1, and where you can establish or strengthen your position as a social CEO. When you communicate about what is happening in your industry – the good and the bad – you are also taking ownership and responsibility within your own world, and that gives you a surplus of credibility.

Naturally, you should not be criticizing competitors who make missteps, nor should you unnecessarily make a big deal out of a minor industry issue (even though insight works well on social media). But it will strengthen your personal brand if you dare to address some of the problems or challenges associated with being a CEO in an industry like yours, particularly if you can also offer up some solutions.

In inner workings of the organization, you can kill two birds with one stone. You can create some of the transparency that is so important to your organization while also improving employee satisfaction and loyalty. When you use a receptionist's 25th work anniversary as an occasion to write on LinkedIn about how important it is to have hard-working and loyal employees in all levels of your organization, it's not just something that will be valued by the employee singled out for attention. It will also signal to your other employees and the outside world that you are a person of flesh and blood that values your colleagues and the personal relationships you make on the job.

This category also helps give your followers a peak under the hood. As long as it doesn't contain any information you wouldn't want to get out there, you can show your followers your whiteboard with scribbles on how you're working on new projects, or you can post photos of employees who have been given a special assignment or have completed an important task. All of this helps to bring you down to eye level with your employees while also showing your external followers how you are involved in the life of your organization and aren't spending all of your time hosting board members in your corner office.

You can – whether literally or figuratively – take advantage of the "safety vest and hard hat trick", a social media classic in which politicians looking to win votes or CEOs wanting to connect with their employees are seen in warehouses or construction sites wearing photo-friendly gear like hard hats and yellow safety vests. This is quite effective on social media and you shouldn't dismiss taking a visual approach to showing that you're interested in your workers on the floor and in what happens in your organization. Remember: show it, don't tell it.

The last category I'm calling "The CEO out of the box" is the junk drawer that holds all of the content that doesn't quite fit into the other categories. This is where you can allow yourself to get even more personal and maybe even share glimpses into your private life. This could be by sharing that you're training for a marathon, talking about meeting your business connections or other collaborators over a glass of white wine at a reception, or recommending a recent book or TV show that you loved. This type of content allows your followers to see the person behind the suit and get the impression of not just a talented executive but a real person who they can trust and whose energy positively influences their company brand.

Content that helps tell your personal narrative also creates a sense of accessibility and makes you seem like the type of interesting person that others would want to get to know, drink a cup of coffee with or invite to informal networking events. This can really pay off for your company.

But you want to be careful here as well. Far too many CEOs don't seem to understand that some content can be either so personal or so trivial that sharing it on professional media channels can actually damage their brand. The wrong balance can hurt your strategic use of social media by creating so much noise that the irrelevant and frivolous posts overshadow the important messages you are sharing on the same channels.

Three principles for your social media content

Achieving success with your social media content requires constantly keeping in mind what social media can and cannot do and how that fits in with your motivation to be more active online.

To help you decide what types of content you should post, it's helpful to keep these three dogmas in mind:

- It should never be too much about you
- It should be about people
- It should only rarely be about products

Principle 1: It should never be too much about you

The first dogma may sound simple, but it can be quite difficult to stick to, particularly when as a CEO you are used to hearing yourself talk and being in control. But if all of your content is about you and your organization, you'll be making the same mistake that a self-absorbed dinner party guest makes when they only talk about themselves and don't ask about others. It may hold your followers' attention for a while, but engagement will quickly taper off and you will end up getting the cold shoulder.

It's called social media in part because the idea is to hear from others and because each individual act of communication brings with it the possibility of a dialogue that may not always play out on your terms. One of the biggest misperceptions among CEOs on social media is that their communication should only be about themselves and their companies. In reality, it needs to be inclusive in order to engage your followers.

Principle 2: It should be about people

Social media creates relationships, and what matters to us most when we engage with content on social media is that it is about real people – particularly on LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram. Therefore, you should view personal stories, photos of real people and humanity in general as what makes your motor run on social media.

Your employees, collaboration partners, customers and the other people who matter to your business should play leading roles in the micronarratives you create through your social media posts.

Principle 3: It should only rarely be about products

This one is difficult, particularly for CEOs who lead sales-driven companies and bottom-line focused organizations. You may even have a sales background yourself or at the least view it as your responsibility to create positive accounting figures, so the idea of advertising your products and services seems like a natural way to boost revenue and generate profits.

But that's just not how CEOs should use social media. You need to trust your sales team and marketing department to take care of that while you use a different type of communication to strengthen the forward-looking foundation that supports the sale of your products or services as part of your organization's social selling. Once again, we come back around to how a CEO's trustworthy communication strengthens loyalty among your customers and other stakeholders.

Rather than focusing on products, your content should be about actions and attitudes. Not something that can be bought and sold but something that creates change on the micro or macro level. Sure, that may sound a bit grandiose but social media to a large extent is about activating emotions.

Connect on an emotional level

One of the hard things about creating valuable content on social media as a CEO is that the posts you share to platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook need to spark human emotions. And that's something you have incorporate into your communication – if you dare.

As a top executive, you are used to communicating about rational decisions, strategies and the other choices you make. You have to communicate about accounts and annual reports that have been scrutinized down to the very last commas and decimal points and which have gone through several rounds of approval. These are the traditional reputation predictors for your organization but while timely, meticulous and formal content may be what your organization needs, it's not what creates value on social media.

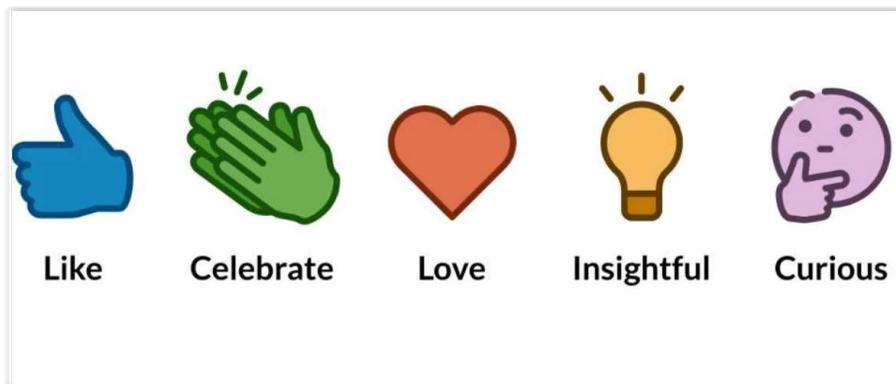
On social media, you need to make an emotional connection with your followers. You need to make them feel hope, joy, anger, indignation, goodwill, solidarity and all the other emotions that we as human beings encounter as we interact with other people and hear what they have in their hearts. When something affects us, we react – both offline and online. Content that packs an emotional punch creates ties to the organization or the CEO sharing it and spurs the engagement that is so crucial to making the social networks' algorithms deliver your messages to a wide audience.

When Facebook rolled out several reaction emojis in early 2016, it was a clear sign of how much feelings matter on social media. From the old 'like' button that dates back to 2009, the range of reactions was expanded to include Love, Haha, Yay, Wow, Sad and Angry in order to accommodate the wide spectrum of feelings we experience when we read and share content on the platform.

The new reaction emojis were an important addition to Facebook's business model because they helped create more interaction on the platform and gave the social media network more information about the interests of each individual user. For companies, the media, politicians – and CEOs – it's important to make use of this new range of reactions because each emoji click helps create a wider organic reach – i.e. distribution without having to pay for it.



LinkedIn in 2019 also gave users more options than merely giving a post a like (or a share or comment). We can now react with emojis that signify Celebrate, Love, Insightful and Curious. According to LinkedIn, this gives us users a better understanding of why our followers engage in the content we share while giving followers a more nuanced pallet for reacting⁸.



As a CEO, these new ways in which your followers can engage with your content matter. Because as described above, you need to be able to spark emotion among your internal and external stakeholders, but you also need to be able to target specific emotions if you want your followers to react in a way that matches your communication goals.

If you put thought into the type of content you create, you will also help ‘guide’ users to how they should react to it by making the content speak directly to the emoji reaction that you want to elicit.

Find your tone – and speak nicely

A slightly underestimated factor in a CEO’s communication on social media is the personal language he/she uses to communicate. In organizational communication, there is a lot of talk about tone of voice, i.e. the way the organization maintains consistency in how it communicates with stakeholders. An organization’s tone of voice and commitment to a special way of speaking in its communications help create recognition across various channels and serves as a linguistic brand position⁹. Often, the tone of voice is rooted in the overall communication strategy.

⁸ <https://blog.linkedin.com/2019/april-/11/introducing-linkedin-reactions-more-ways-to-express-yourself>

⁹ The way in which a company or product finds its position within the consciousness of its stakeholders and which differs from others in, for example, the same industry.

As a CEO, you must also attempt to find a tone of voice that matches the type of person you are and the organization and industry you are in. Your voice must come from within.

And that can be easier said than done. Some top execs naturally have a personal tone that comes through clearly when they speak or write. It could be a certain mood, irony, specific ways of formulating themselves or consistent messaging.

The great thing about finding your own tone is that it lends a personal touch to your communication and thus increases the chances that your stakeholders will engage with your messages and see the man or woman behind the organization. The personal tone – all the way down to individual word choices – quite simply allows your personal channels to achieve a level of credibility that your company’s official channels cannot. Thus, you also have a greater chance of standing out from the crowd.

And then there’s the essential point that the way you say things becomes an active part of your message.

Working on your tone of voice is not rocket science (and neither is your organization’s overall communication strategy, by the way). But remember that tone of voice is not the same thing as an organizational language policy that dictates things like how employees sign off on their emails.

“Tone of voice is about incorporating your values and those of your company into the language you use and letting it permeate your content and create recognition among your target groups”.

Exercise: Find your tone of voice

1. Write down five key words that you think should define the way you communicate on social media. Feel free to involve your communications team or other colleagues. These could be words like engaging, consistent, funny, businesslike, outspoken, relaxed, etc.
2. Write a short text – for example your own take on the latest news from your organization or a recent press release. Formulate your personal text so that the keywords you chose shine through.
3. Listen to yourself. Your social media channels are your own and you should be the one to define them. Don’t be someone you’re not.

You’ve now been given insight into how to establish a recognizable personal tone that can help improve your reputation on social media. But your reputation can also take a hit if you are too harsh in your communication.

It pretty much goes without saying and is perhaps completely unnecessary in a book aimed at CEOs who are used to carefully weighing their words, but one still sees executives and companies taking their engagement too far – also when it comes to the language they use. Therefore, it cannot be said enough that it is particularly important for CEOs to be civil on social media.

Part of the nature of social media is that it can quickly cause your blood pressure to rise. When that happens, it’s important that you remember – before you take to the keyboard – that social media

should be a tool for building up your organization's reputation, not damaging it. Count to ten (or 100 if you have to) and reconsider whether what you are about to say will further your cause and whether you have used the right tone.

Block, ignore, acknowledge or discuss

One of the things all of the CEOs I meet ask about is how much they should engage in dialogue with their audience on social media, and to what extent they need to respond to questions and comments on the content they share. I usually say they should respond to as much as possible.

But the idea of a CEO with a busy work life filled with important decisions spending time responding to comments and questions on social media is likely very off-putting to most top executives – and perhaps presents a major barrier to getting on social media in the first place. So, I should probably elaborate on what I think you should engage with as a social CEO.

What you choose to do depends primarily on two factors: What kind of comment or question you receive and who it comes from.

There are four main options for how to respond to a comment on your tweet, your LinkedIn post or on Facebook: block, ignore, acknowledge or discuss. Which you choose may to some extent be tied to how cautious you are (recall the Safety Barometer from Chapter 2).

Block

Blocking is the most extreme solution, in which you exclude people from being able to see your posts or participate in the conversation. This approach is often used by politicians and top executives who do not want their communication contaminated, in cases where the language used and the comments made cross the line or have absolutely no relevance to the topic at hand. Blocking other social media users can create bad will and should be used sparingly. In most cases it's better to hide comments, an option that you have on Facebook.

Ignore

This is self-evident. You do nothing and let the comments or questions of others remain under your post. This can be dangerous though, because to your followers it may look as if you can't be bothered to engage in dialogue (which might indeed be the case) or that you don't check your social media channels. When you ignore questions and comments you also risk that other users pile on and increase the pressure on you to respond. All of a sudden, you'll be playing catch-up and this can quickly put you in an unpleasant situation.

Acknowledge

Thankfully, there is a better way. You can acknowledge that you've seen a comment by giving it a heart, star or thumbs up, depending on which platform you are on. Note, however, that there is a danger of appearing as if you agree with a ridiculous comment simply because you acknowledged it.

Discuss

The solution that is most in line with the spirit of social media is to respond to comments and questions. Social media is called 'social' because we use it to talk to and interact with one another. You wouldn't turn your back on someone who approaches you at a reception – although you might

try to shorten the conversation so it doesn't end in a long-drawn-out exchange that goes nowhere. Your time is too precious for that. The same basic concept applies to social media.

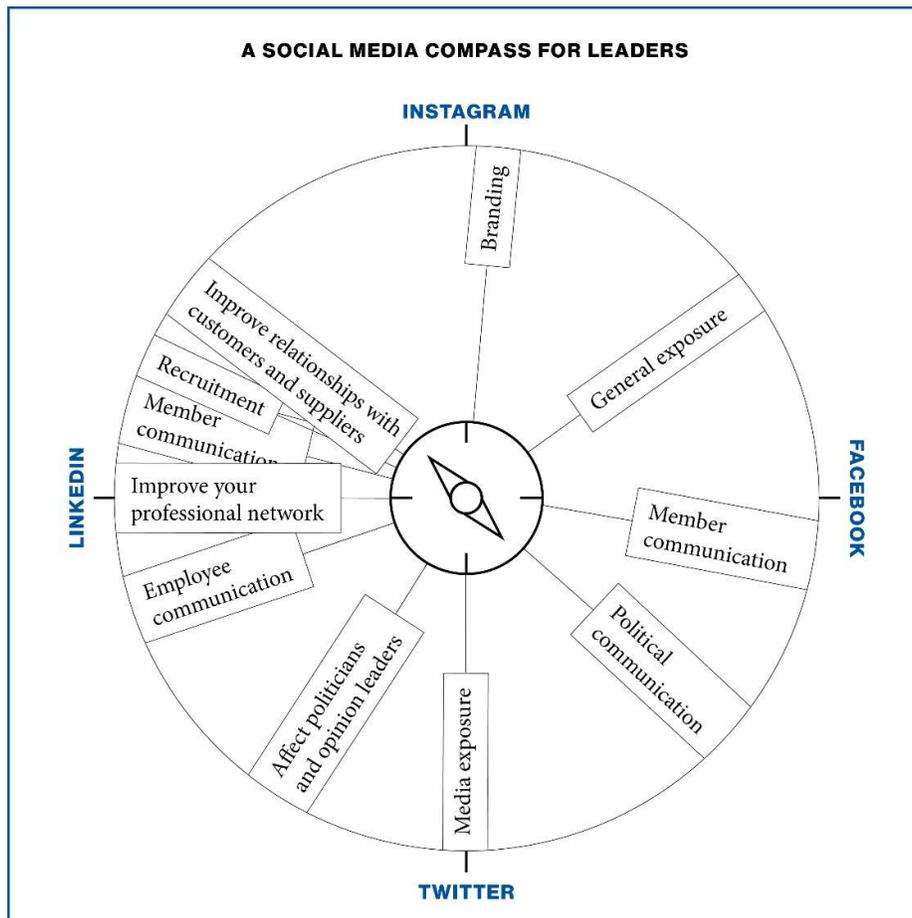
When it comes to responding to comments, you have to pay attention to who made them. If it is an important or potentially important stakeholder, then you should naturally respond. This is important both for your current communication and for the development of a business network and strong relationships.

On the whole, your interaction with most groups is an important part of improving your credibility and accessibility and that of your organization.

A social media compass for CEOs

I will now attempt to guide you to which channel(s) you should choose for your executive communication so that your time is best spent based on your objectives.

If you're not yet active on social media or debating whether to add a new platform to your repertoire, you can use my 'social media compass for CEOs' to help you decide which channel or channels to use. I'm going to stick my neck out and give you concrete reasons for choosing which platform is best for you. This exercise should tie in with the considerations of your objectives that we looked at earlier in this chapter.



This compass should help you choose between the four social media networks most common to leaders in companies and organizations. Each 'direction' in the compass is represented by one of the four platforms and within the compass are different communication objectives. The more closely placed an objective is to one of the platforms, the more relevant that platform is for achieving that specific goal.

You can also use the schematic below as a guide.

<p>LinkedIn</p> <p>Choose LinkedIn if your primary objective is to assert yourself in the eyes of your employees, potential employees, customers and industry stakeholders. You also choose LinkedIn if your strategy is to own certain agendas, make yourself accessible to your stakeholders and strengthen your position within your industry.</p>	<p>Twitter</p> <p>Choose Twitter if it is important to your organization that you assert yourself publicly and influence politicians and other decision makers. You use Twitter if you want to make your voice heard in public debates and get more attention from the media.</p>
<p>Facebook</p> <p>You use Facebook if you need to “talk to the people”, communicate to your members, mobilize, auto-communicate or strongly communicate your attitudes, visions and opinions.</p>	<p>Instagram</p> <p>You use Instagram if your goal is to brand your organization and/or yourself and to communicate to groups that you don't otherwise normally reach.</p>

As we've seen elsewhere in this book, the platform you choose may very well depend on the type of organization you lead. Often, the heads of NGOs have completely different goals and frameworks for communicating than the leaders of public institutions or CEOs of private companies. There will therefore naturally always be exceptions, but you can view the schematic below as another tool that can help you choose between channels and ensure that you are using your time wisely depending on what type of organization you lead.

RECOMMENDED USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR BUSINESS LEADERS				
<i>(Parenthesis indicates lower priority)</i>				
	<i>LINKEDIN</i>	<i>TWITTER</i>	<i>FACEBOOK</i>	<i>INSTAGRAM</i>
CEOs of large private companies	Yes	Yes	No	No
CEOs of small and medium-sized private companies	Yes	No	No	No
Chairpersons or managers of industry associations or interest groups	Yes	Yes	No	No
Chairpersons or managers of membership organizations	Yes	Yes	Yes	(Yes)
Chairpersons or general secretaries of NGOs	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	(Yes)
CEOs of public institutions	Yes	(Yes)	No	No
Elected officials (mayors, council members, etc.)	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	(Yes)

There may obviously be CEOs of small companies who have an agenda and style that fit perfectly on Twitter – if that’s the case, go for it! Same with elected officials who see Instagram as more important than Facebook. All in all, it’s important to remember to make a personal decision about your platform choice.

Chapter 4: Measure your success

You’re the chief executive and you are judged by your results. You’re focused on your bottom line, impact and tough KPIs and thus you are naturally also the type who wants to be able to measure the effects of your personal social media channels and monitor the effects of your organization’s overall communication on social media and your employees’ communication on behalf of the company. It’s clearly important to measure what works and what doesn’t – and to take a cold, hard look at the cost-benefit analysis of what you get out of being on social media.

Let’s get this out of the way right now: There is no answer key that can show you precisely how to evaluate your communication on social media to determine whether it has been successful or not. There are likewise no scientific models that can show you the precise effects that your social media activity has on such things as your reputation and credibility. But we do know that it works.

Nevertheless, there are good reasons to look at what works, what doesn't and the derivative effects of your efforts.

“Social media impact can be measured by landing more business meetings, getting more media exposure and seeing improved relationships with your stakeholders”.

For some organizations, it might also make sense to try to convert clicks and exposure into potential ad value in the same way you can with traditional PR in TV, radio and newspapers – always keeping in mind the various sources of error that come with it.

No matter how you measure impact on social media, it gives you important input and a significant leadership tool that can be used to better understand your stakeholders and gain valuable business insights.

As CEO, it will be relevant for you to monitor these goals for your social media efforts:

- An increased number of followers on your chosen platform(s)
- More engagement with your posts and tweets (likes, shares and comments)
- Increased visits to your website or social media profiles
- More media inquiries or media citations (if journalists are part of your target audience)
- More invitations to informal meetings, social events and the like from your stakeholders
- More formal invitations to industry events, conferences, meetings with politicians, etc.

These – some would call them soft – performance metrics are important for you to watch and monitor, even though the impact of one particular element of your overall efforts can be hard to separate from the others. But visibility on social media often leads to visibility elsewhere and in the end results in more influence, more awareness of you and your organization and a better reputation.

Other more concrete KPIs that both you and your organization can work with to measure your impact on social media are:

- Increased awareness of your organization (brand awareness)
- Employee satisfaction and turnover
- More job applicants
- Better rankings on executive power and reputation lists
- More media citations
- Increased scores in image and reputation surveys
- Increased sales and more customers

If you are the leader of a large organization, it is generally a good idea to make these kinds of measurements occasionally. For example, remember to ask your employees for their perceptions of the company's and leadership's use of social media in workplace assessments and employee satisfaction surveys. Remember also to ask about social media visibility when your company conducts stakeholder surveys, membership satisfaction surveys or customer satisfaction analyses. In that way you will slowly but surely put a greater focus on social media and their effects, and you'll be able to benchmark your efforts from year to year.

But if you don't want to involve the entire organization and hire expensive analytics agencies, there are other ways to easily and quickly gauge the impact of your efforts. All it takes is familiarizing yourself with the analytics tools offered by the various social media platforms.

See for yourself what works

As CEO, you should naturally not spend unnecessary time tinkering under the hood in an attempt to see how your posts and tweets are performing – beyond the obvious and immediate feedback you get in the form of likes, shares and comments. But should you have the urge, you can – perhaps with the help of your social media team – take a deeper dive into your social media statistics. These metrics could even bring out your competitive nature and provide additional motivation to improve your communication on social media.

All of the social media platforms we've discussed in this book provide statistics that can give you a basis for keeping track of the impact your posts and tweets are having, and in the following section you will get a brief overview of how to look at the numbers and understand which metrics are particularly relevant on the different platforms: Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter.

Facebook and Instagram

On Facebook, there is a big difference between using a personal profile and using a business page. If you use a personal profile, you can only measure your impact by seeing how many people use the reaction emojis we discussed earlier or how many people shared or commented on your post. You won't be able to see who actually clicked on your content, visited your website or read your post without engaging with it. You are only able to see the same metrics that are visible to everyone else who visits your Facebook page. This naturally gives you only limited insight, but in many cases it will be sufficient.

But if you and your organization are putting a more concerted focus into your Facebook profile playing a significant part of a defined effort, specific campaign or something similar, there is good reason to take a deeper dive into how your posts are performing and who they are reaching. There can also be a financial incentive in knowing what works and what doesn't if you are allocating some of your advertising budget to boost your Facebook posts.

Using a business page rather than a personal Facebook profile gives you the opportunity to use Facebook Ads Manager to directly target different audience segments that are relevant to you and your company. The leaders of member organizations, for example, can use Facebook's own advertising tools to reach various member groups with targeted sponsored posts and then measure the effects on the individual groups.

Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, has many of the same tools for gaining insight into post performance and target groups. Instagram also allows you to advertise just as you can on Facebook. In fact, through Facebook Ads Manager you can have your promoted Facebook posts appear on Instagram as well.

That said, very few CEOs will want or need to advertise on Instagram – primarily because advertising from your personal profile risks undermining the authenticity and credibility you are trying to create with your social media communication.

On Facebook, it makes sense to measure:

- Reach – how many people are you reaching organically and through boosted posts
- Click-through rate (CTR) – a ratio that tells you how many times people clicked on your link compared to how many saw it in their feeds
- Video engagement – how many saw your videos and how long they watched them
- Which target groups are engaging with your content

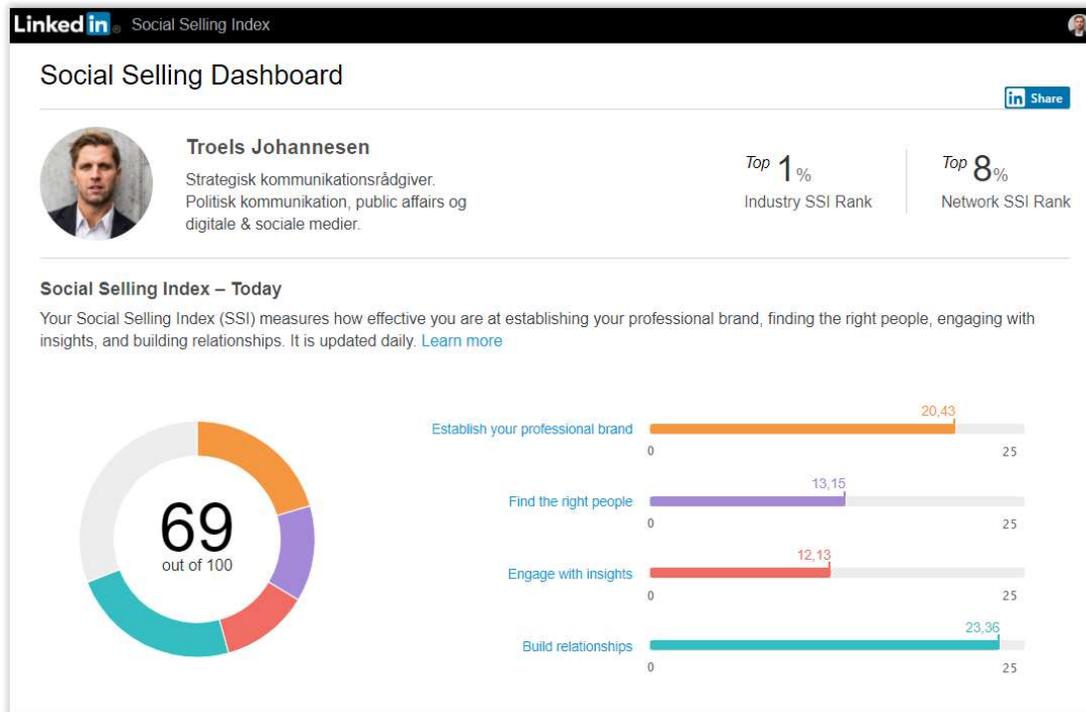
LinkedIn

When you post on LinkedIn, you'll be able to quickly see who liked, shared and commented on your post, as well as who visited your profile and sent you a connection request. LinkedIn will also let you see how many total users saw your post, although it won't tell you who they were. This gives you insight into which companies' employees are viewing your content, the types of job titles they have and where they live. This information can help you determine whether your post hit the mark when it comes to the target groups you had in mind when you shared it.

If your content includes a link to your company's website, the visits it generates provide a very good yardstick of whether you're succeeding in making people more interested in the things you're communicating about. One thing you can't see in LinkedIn's statistics module, however, is how many clicks you are generating through your personal profile.

If that is something that is important to you, you'll have to get together with your communications team and create links for your content so that you can use Google Analytics to see precisely how many website visits your post generated. If you work professionally in sales or interest representation, there are also various online services that can track which companies' employees are visiting your website through your links. I use these types of services myself to gauge whether I'm reaching the right kinds of organizations with my blog posts, but for most CEOs this extra information is more detailed than is probably necessary.

Another way to measure yourself and your progress as a communicative leader on LinkedIn is to periodically check your placement on LinkedIn's Social Selling Index. This tool is used to measure yourself against other professionals in your industry and it can give you an impression of how well you're performing with your profile, your networking and your content. Some might say that the index is merely LinkedIn's way to get competitive people to use the platform more, but nevertheless it's a fun thing to check every once in a while. Use it to compete with yourself – can you reach the top one percent of your industry?



This is how LinkedIn's Social Selling Index looks for me. You can see your score at linkedin.com/sales/ssi.

On LinkedIn, it makes sense to measure:

- Likes, comments and shares
- New followers and connection requests
- Impressions – how far your content is reaching within your network. Remember, however, that just because people saw your content, that doesn't mean they actually read it
- Video views
- Website visits

Twitter

To be successful on Twitter, it is absolutely essential to be active and tweet regularly – otherwise you will get nowhere. Just like the other platforms, Twitter also gives you the ability to learn more about the performance of your tweets than merely the likes, comments and retweets they generate.

With Twitter's internal analytics tools, you can dive into the performance of each individual tweet and see its total number of engagements, how many people clicked on the link and/or photo that accompanied it and how many clicked on your profile. The more engagements, the better. This is an indication that the content you tweeted created value for other users. You can get an overview of your best tweets each month at [Analytics.twitter.com](https://analytics.twitter.com).

On Twitter, it makes sense to measure:

- The number of likes and especially retweets that spread your content

- Your engagement rate – are people tempted to engage with your content?
- New followers – especially when significant stakeholders start following you
- URL and media clicks

Measure performance over the long haul

We've now covered how you can take a deeper dive into how your content is being received on social media. While some of the metrics provide feedback that is *nice to know*, rather than something you as a CEO *need to know*, all of it adds up to help you become more strategic and tactical with your content.

“Focusing on your impact and monitoring the performance of your content helps to professionalize your personal communication and that of your company”.

With that said, it's important to think long term when measuring the impact of your social media communications. In fact, when a CEO makes the decision to start being active on social media, most of his or her efforts will take between one and two years before they start having a measurable impact on parameters like reputation, credibility and image. Be sure to stick with it even though you may have to wait for the major payoffs.

Conclusion: The future belongs to social CEOs

Leadership roles are being changed by social media and more and more top executives have come to understand that social media provides them with crucial communications and leadership tools.

There is no doubt that the increasing demands placed on the communications of companies and organizations is also accelerating the need for CEOs to take on a larger communication role. Where once communication could be regulated to a staff function that only required sporadic involvement from top executives, social media has now brought communication into the CEO's corner office. Personal communication through personal channels will play an even larger role amongst the disciplines that fall under the scope of top executives.

Over time, social media changes both organizations and leadership roles. When the CEO steps down from his or her pedestal to communicate at eye level with employees and customers, it lays the groundwork for a more accessible and more open leadership style. With customers and the media now demanding insight into an organization's work, attitudes and values, it requires leaders who truly want to increase transparency and view it as a competitive resource rather than an impediment.

Social media teaches executives to listen. Not just to their closest employees and superiors, but to their entire spectrum of stakeholders. And listening makes for a better CEO. You will be better at creating the change and innovation that impacts companies, industries and maybe even society as a whole. In that way, social media can be a shortcut to modern and effective leadership and help bring an organization closer to its most important stakeholders.

Because social media is a network of people connected to each other and is all about human interaction, it places greater personal demands on the CEO. These new forms of communication are changing the personal requirements placed on the CEO because there will from here on out be an even greater need for outgoing and sociable personalities at the head of companies and organizations that want to break through the noise and win the competition for attention.

The organizations that will fare best in the future will be those that are able to communicate with and involve their stakeholders and that dare to express their values and opinions and show what they offer to their communities.

Whether it is the media, politicians, employees or customers that play a crucial role in a company's success, these new relationships between individuals and organizations require a greater focus on value creation and a communication infused with personality in order to ensure trust and fruitful relationships.

And it all starts with you as CEO.

You are the key to changing your organization, and with social media you can use your communication to a greater extent to create the change you want to see. With your personal voice and your company's attitudes and values as tools, you will create a platform that allows your company to be more than just a company. You can make it a communicative organization that plays an active societal role, maintains its relevancy and creates value at a higher level.

If you have not already embarked on your transformation into a social CEO, the time is now.

You can book Troels Johannesen as a keynote on social media communication for CEOs or as an advisor in how to create social media strategies for leaders and organizations. Please email to tj@troelsjohannesen.dk or call +45 31319065

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