



How to Plan and Build a Winning Social Media Marketing Strategy

This transcript was lightly edited for clarity.

Chris: Today's guest is an expert in online business, from web development to social media, with extensive experience in the life sciences. He's been a senior manager for web marketing and communications and a senior manager for e-business at Affymetrics. He was then a web manager at Fluidigm and is now a client service partner at PureMatter where he works with clients on a host of social media, digital, and marketing service projects.

Brett Cornell, welcome to Life Science Marketing Radio.

Brett: Hey, I appreciate you guys having me. This is a great opportunity. And thanks, Chris. I'm looking forward to it.

Chris: Oh, my pleasure. So what we want to talk about today is the reality of social media for life science companies. And just to start, why don't you tell me a little bit about your background and how you got into this whole social media marketing scene.

Brett: Yeah, sure, for many, many moons ago, I was a web manager and web property manager for Affymetrics, probably over 12 years ago. And in that role, a lot of what we did was a lot of digital marketing, outreach, trying to build awareness, get a lead channel going, educate people all about the products that we sold. And part of my job there was to expand out past the website. In those days, the website was the end-all be-all. But as social media has grown up, we realized that "Look, it can't just be within the walled garden. We needed to get our content out into other channels, places where people are having conversations. And so part of our job was to research a program, put a program in place, put the tools in place, put the education in place so that we could actually reach out to people within

Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, where people were talking about science and get out in front of them.

And ever since that happened, I've been real interested in social. How do you take it from that first step of listening all the way into influence or marketing and engagement, where we are now, the cutting edge of social marketing? And over the last couple of jobs, going into Fluidigm, building a program, educating people on how to tell stories and become advocates as employees, now to over to PureMatter, I'm a client services partner, and I engage with IBM, Cisco, Pitney Bowes and work a lot on the social influence or VIP kind of marketing. So been interested in it for a long time, and I'm taking it to the next level and learning as I go.

Chris: Nice, so social media marketing is a huge topic. Now, in this conversation, these are my first podcasts on social media marketing, I want to just set a framework for companies. How should life science companies evaluate the opportunities and the level of effort required for social media to be successful?

Brett: Yeah, I think that's the question that we asked ourselves at Affy and we asked ourselves at Fluidigm and I'm sure life science companies all over are asking themselves, which is, what's the total available opportunity to me? Are scientists in these channels? Are they having conversations? Are they participating? And if so, can we reach them? And do we have a message earmarked for them? And so understanding what the total opportunity is within, say, Twitter or Facebook.

That's a big deal. And it revolves a step-through process that's pretty well-defined. And then what do we need as far as resourcing to get started? Do we need . . . I can't tell you how many times I've heard from companies, "Well, we'll just hire a guy, a full-time headcount." And really, social media isn't about one guy. It's really tough to put your arms around it and manage it at the high level. A lot of times, we see teams managing it. And so my advice for life science companies, if you're just getting started or if you're at midway point, is form a team, take some of those people within your organization that are doing it privately on their own, that are on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter and pull them together and form a team. And get them thinking about how they can turn their passion of being in social media and make it work for the company.

Chris: Nice. This has actually come up in a number of conversations recently on the podcast about how people don't separate their lives at work from their real life. In other words, I just interviewed somebody about smartphone apps. And the take home was your app needs to be as good as any other app, not just better than every other life science app, right?

Brett: Yeah

Chris: Because you're competing with that experience.

Brett: Totally.

Chris: And scientists, when I was talking to David Salmon, he was talking about the same thing. People's expectations or how they will do things online, because they can buy things instantly on Amazon, they don't think about or look for information necessarily differently when they're in the lab or at work.

Brett: Right, they don't separate.

Chris: You have a life, and you don't do things one way at home and a different way elsewhere. So I like that about grabbing the people who have a passion in your company to do something and taking advantage of that.

Brett: Yeah, they're already switched on. They're doing it already personally. They're the biggest brand champions you have. The knowledge within your organization is infectious. They're passionate about the brand and about the company. They want to talk about it. They just need guidance. They need a few little road signs here and there to help point them in the right direction that would allow them to share out. And that way, you start to harness the numbers. Again, it's not one guy that's going to be writing 50 tweets a day for 375 days. It's going to be a leveraged team that has multiple inputs. And again, you're building community. You're building consensus. You're building engagement with multiple people having conversation. And so I do firmly believe, yeah, put people where their passions are and point them in the right direction.

Chris: Right. So lots of possible goals for social media. And before we get to that, I guess let's talk about how somebody gets started. So we don't just start talking about our products, right?

Brett: Yeah, I think that the key question you asked that's very helpful is about, how do you evaluate the opportunity? And the first step in the whole program around social is listening. Getting a listening tool like Hootsuite or Spider IQ[SP] or any of these others, like Buffer, getting some of these freeware tools or mid-range tools and turning them on to listen for keywords, listen for influencers within your space, DMcArthur, girlscientist on Twitter, great people. Switch it on. Start focusing on those topics.

If you're doing gene expression, if you're doing genotyping, start understanding, what are those keywords What are those conversations? And set those tools to do the automation of listening, alerting you, or pulling forward the signal to the noise, right, those conversations within the Twitter sphere and Facebook, LinkedIn community that are talking about your science.

And then you start to understand, well, what are people saying in these channels? And what is the conversation like? And that will help take you to step two, which is to understand what your message is and your market and how you want to slice that up and where you want to present.

So, yeah, absolutely, evaluate the opportunity. Listen into the channel. Understand which channel makes the most sense for you as a business. What are the conversations? And I think that's a first step.

Chris: Nice. So going back to the goals, lots of different possible goals for social media, do you have a priority list to move through as companies get into social?

Brett: Yeah, for new companies that are starting out, there's definitely an acceleration program they're going to want to set up. So first step, get listening. Second step, put your profile up. If you don't have one, get one, build one, have an agency do it, whatever it takes to establish a destination within these channels. And then once you're listening and having conversation, the first inclination for life science, great, we want to talk about products. We want to talk about call rates. And we want to talk about how many samples we can process and how great our sequencer is. Back off that a little bit and listen first. Understand what's being talked about. All that other stuff will come in good time, but initially, social media is all about conversation, listening, engagement.

So the metrics we look for, starting out, is "Hey, if I have a channel, and there's no followers, and no one's talking about me, what do I do?" And a lot of the time it's, a, listen, b, do a follow and unfollow and refollow to start to build your channel. And then likewise, share stories and start to share about the company at a level that's maybe not product marketing, but is more of a marcom message.

Again, we talked earlier, or I've talked in other companies, about maybe you come in at a genetic counseling angle, or maybe you have an angle around GMOs or sustainability of crops or cancer research. You know life science is all about philanthropic ends. There's angles there that you can talk about that aren't immediately selling. And that's how you start to build your base of people that are interested enough in what you have to say.

So we do engagement. We do conversation. We do, obviously, your retweets and things where amplification is important. So when it's in social, it's not our old, traditional page views, clicks, hits, impressions, any of that stuff. It's more around the lines of "Great! Am I building relationships?" What's the relationship like? Can I leverage this person later to comment or participate in a show? Maybe I'm doing ASCR, and this person wants to come out and speak. Great! We have a relationship with X because we've nurtured them through social media. We've talked to them. We have a relationship. So it's a relationship tool, for sure.

Chris: I like that. And I like what you said about that high level conversation to get started with, which is, as we talked about a little bit before this recording, that high-level conversation, it's often a gap in companies, printed or any other content that they have.

Brett: That's right?

Chris: They have a lot of "bottom of the funnel" content.

Brett: Right.

Chris: But maybe not so much telling a story about the things that their customers are working on, really care about, things that are going on in the industry.

Brett: Exactly.

Exactly, chances are the deck is stacked to be a lead channel. You're going to have a lot of "bottom of funnel" content. You're going to have a lot of product marketing content. And it's all about content mix because, to your point, you got to come in a little higher level so that you have all levels. Some content gets stripped based on where you are in the buyer cycle. And some is just content that, to your point, is storytelling.

At Fluidigm, part of our experience was having a great service team that went out and worked literally hand in hand with some of the scientists doing the research. We would help them to build the experiment. We would help them to run the data. That high level, high touch, that's a killer story. And it's not specific to one company. It's really specific to, what are our customers doing? How are they changing the game? What research are they publishing on that is game-changing? And for us, it became a story about our ability to serve, our ability to work hand in hand with a customer. And so it's a great story. It's just not at the feature level of an instrument.

And so to your point, how do you go and take that card and slide it into the deck? Is it the top, middle, or bottom of the deck? How do you come up with your content matrix and marketing messaging? That's important in social. And so a lot of what we do in social is content that's storytelling, engaging, and is almost like a movie or any other kind of book. It's content that really is about stories and about people and about humans, because at the end of the day, we're all human to human. And we sympathize with each other and the stories that we have to tell, less so about marketing speak and product feature.

Chris: Fantastic, yeah, I love that.

All right, so a company gets into this. They're listening. They get the conversation going. And this might be difficult but I'm going to put you on the spot.

Brett: No problem.

Chris: What are the reasonable results that companies can expect, and after how long? Because I'm sure everybody's asked you, "How long is this going to take? When can I tell my boss we're doing a good job?"

Brett: Oh, goodness, that's a good . . . It is on the spot, for sure. You got to be in it to win it, so to speak. It's not something that . . . I've seen countless . . . "What are we going to roll up to the CEO? What kind of report from social media? What's our KPI? What's the measurement that he's going to look at to know that we're either moving the needle or not?" That's a traditional lead funnel, sales force measurement type of attitude around social. What we say in social specifically is "Great, we'll report out the conversations that are happening. We'll report out the people that are 'brand champions.'" But really, what we want to do is we want to nurture these people, build up the community so that we have a social influence community that we're building that's all around our brand.

And then within the channels, those conversations will happen. That will attract our key customers. Other people like those champions that we are interested in selling too. And so how do we start to aggregate a community where conversations happening are gaining attention? And those are more anecdotal stories that you're able to share with success. And it is a long term battle.

For those new people getting started, small to medium business, you're definitely going to do . . . Hey, if a tree falls in the forest, will anybody hear it? So the first thing you want to do is get that channel built and get some people on it. The word on the streets from Twitter and Facebook is if you don't have at least 5,000 followers on your channel, you're not that relevant. So it's important to start nurturing that channel, getting that critical number, whatever that is so that you start to build credibility and expertise. Again, the most credible people in social seem to be those that are experts in their field and that people will follow because they're talking about great stories and that they're knowledgeable experts. And so building up your expertise is critical.

So early on, it's probably followers, amplification, and engagement metrics. Down the line, it's definitely going to be "Great, who from our network can we pull forward to talk for us at ASCO? Or who can we get that would be a panelist on a Google Hangout for us that would lead somebody from R&D in a discussion as part of the content creation that's necessary within social.

Chris: Nice, I like that. You just triggered some thoughts for me about creating content and, actually, the idea of creating content from events, not just for events, and I know that companies do that.

Brett: Totally.

Chris: But we don't necessarily think of having an event for the purpose of creating content, which might be a perfectly legitimate way to do it.

Brett: And IBM is the expert in this, man. I'm actually getting educated from them, even as we speak. A lot of the stuff I work on now, they're great. Part of what they do is they understand that your brand isn't what you say it is. It's what your community says it is.

Chris: Right.

Brett: And so they understand leveraging the community and allowing the community to participate in the content creation process. Back in my days, we used to, to your point, create content just to go to a trade show specifically around, "Hey, we're having a panelist speak about their latest discovery and their paper that they just published in Science." That's creating content for an event. And that's specific, right? That's for putting people in seats and educating.

Chris: Yes.

Brett: What IBM does really well is they say, "Great, I want to create an event or a social, say, a tweet chat." And in it, I want influencers that are talking about gene regulation, whatever it is, to participate. We'll have a moderator ask questions of the community, and the community people will post their response under a hashtag." Now, it's a conversation that happens in the public. Other people see it if they're in these channels. And it starts to build a groundswell of interest in this activity. And so they're doing it really well, which is allow the crowd that's already talking about you to crowd-source your content. It's cutting edge, so it's good. Life science probably has a way to go but . . .

Chris: Yeah.

Brett: A lot of companies are really great. [inaudible] is great. There's other companies that are doing it right.

Chris: We're catching up in life science.

Brett: A little bit.

Chris: I think it's an exciting time.

Brett: Yeah, it's a great time, absolutely.

Chris: I think we already talked about different recommendations for startups versus large companies.

Brett: Yeah, startups, so it's listening, getting the tools, building up your channel, understanding your content matrix and what kind of content you need to produce for social. Probably understanding is, is it a guy, or is it a team? And then working with your legal department to come up with the social media dos and don'ts because we got to have them.

And then building up advocacy within employees to say like, "Hey, marcom or product marketing has these messages. We'd really love for you to share them. We're going to push them out to you using something like Dynamic Signal, where "Look, we're not going to just entrust you. Just go on these channels and talk willy-nilly, but we're going to recommend things that we'd prefer that you share as a push marketing type situation.

And that takes the burden off the person in service or sales engineer or bench scientist. Suddenly, they're empowered to talk about these things, and they're given the green light to say, "Talk about what you know. And if you don't know, refer it back to somebody within the organization that's your touch point. And then here's some content for you to share that will help build up your profile, make you an expert, and is approved messaging, so to speak. And I think that's the best way to handle advocacy, especially within life science because everything we do has FDA or has regulations. And you just got to be careful.

Chris: Yeah, I like that. And I just like the idea in general of making it easier for people to publish or create content. So giving them a framework . . . Because if you went to somebody in R&D and said, "Hey, write us a bunch of tweets." Well, some of them would. And some of them who might not like. And others would sit there and sweat over it forever and go "This is no fun."

Brent: Yeah, you got your marketing people sweating about what R&D is writing on their Twitter feed too, which is never a fun thing. So, yeah, part of the pro [audio skips] and definition for sure.

Chris: Yeah, so just making thing easier and getting everybody . . .

Brent: Yeah, the number one problem I always had, Chris, was "Great, what is the messaging from marketing? And what are the typical messages we want to distribute?" Well, just like I have cones on the highway when people are working, outline where I can drive and where the cones are and allow me to do what I do best, which is to chat in channels. And that's part of the program definition.

Chris: I like that. All right, quick thoughts on different platform choices, just real quick, Twitter, what do you . . . ?

Brent: Surpassed LinkedIn as the number one sales channel, believe it or not. The report is out, came out three and half months ago. I would always think LinkedIn, great, it's great for networking. But obviously, people getting their news from Twitter. I cannot tell you how many journalists pick up their stories from Twitter. Back in my day, it was PR, right? Not anymore, they go to Twitter.

So Twitter, definitely, you got to be doing it. If you're not, something's not right. Facebook for B2C, for HR teams, great, recruitment, awesome. Showing how great Genentech is or what you do for employees, phenomenal. Never had a whole lot of pick up in life science on Facebook but doesn't mean that . . . Depending on who you are and what you're selling, it isn't a great channel. Obviously, genetic counseling I would think would be something that would be there.

Chris: Yeah.

Brent: Especially for patient advocacy or patient awareness or even philanthropic things that you're doing as a company for . . . Stand Up To Cancer.

Chris: Nice.

Brent: LinkedIn, turn your sales guys into champions. If in life science, you're not building up their LinkedIn profile for them or they're not doing it, you should think about that, because that's exactly where you're going to network into your labs and organizations. You may be selling in the one lab, but it's a good way for you to network into who else is in what other lab and what kind of research they're doing.

Chris: Right.

Brent: And Pinterest, the undiscovered country, primarily female, building an e-commerce functionality into it. New advertising went online, maybe a month ago for it. It's a visual medium. And honestly, I think Instagram is missing from your list because I can't tell you how many people are telling stories with just images. Social media is an image driven world. Invest heavily in images. It's what gets your attention.

Chris: Yeah.

Brent: It's what tells your story without you writing.

Chris: Yep.

Brent: Back in my day, we used to write a lot for SEO and websites. It's absolutely the opposite. It's an image-driven kind of medium. And at Fluidigm site, it's primarily all images. [inaudible] stories and, again, about what are the researchers doing in stem cell science? Are they doing pluripotent stem cells? How is single cell analysis different? Who

are the champions from what research institutions that are making the biggest in the world. So it's telling you a really remarkable story.

Chris: Nice. Thank you for all of those. That's, yeah, fantastic.

Brent: Yeah. If I may have missed one, don't be afraid to try it either. Float it out there, give it a shot. It doesn't hurt. And typical marketing fashion, try it, measure it, refine it, and then decide if you want to keep investing.

Chris: Yeah, I like that. Okay, so tell me about the three most common mistakes you've observed when companies are just getting into social media.

Brent: Yeah, there's definitely probably a laundry list of them, right? Sometimes you roll it out, and you don't get it right, and you got to roll it out again. But I'd say probably number one is going to be around education. Got a lot of folks in life science that look at social media as just – it's kind of bleeding edge for them. And we're playing catch-up, as you said before. So education. What is social? How does it work? I've had a lot of folks tell me, "Look, it's just for driving traffic to my website, right?" It's not. It's so much more than that. And it's at a level that maybe a lot of people in life science don't get.

Likewise, I'll hear, "Hey, scientists aren't participating in this channel. They're not having conversations here and, b, I'm not going to sell a life science instrument through Twitter."

Chris: Yeah.

Brent: And maybe that's true. But I have seen \$120,000 life science instruments sold through social. Not as frequently, but yes, it does happen. And really, the channel is all about community and relationship- building. It's the new way of PR. You're interfacing with writers on Twitter. You're interfacing with people like Dee McArthur who are tweeting about his research. You're setting up to be influencers for maybe an ASCO talk that you're going to be giving.

So number one, education. What is social? What's it good for? How does it benefit me? What is our program? How are we going to do this?

Number two is it's not a guy thing or a girl thing. It's not I'm going to throw headcount or a person at it. It's just too big to maintain so frequently. It's a content beast. And once you make that choice, that's a good choice to make, for sure, but it's where you need to leverage multiple people to cover it all. So that's probably number two is take your team. If they're passionate, then put them to work and not worry about, well, it's one guy, and we're just going to throw a headcount. It's something you got to do to diversify, because obviously your HR teams are going to want to do recruiting, which is very different than your product

marketing team, which is very different from other parts of the organization, so definitely not a one-size- fits-all.

And then the third thing, probably, is around getting your measurement in place, your pipeline, and your programs set up. And we talked a little bit about what are those steps? What are those seven things I need to do to build my channel out and get really successful? And then what are my advanced topics for people like Illumina and others that are already doing this, employee advocacy or social influence marketing.

So those are the first two and then three is just program definition, working with your legal team, understanding FDA regulations, understanding what you can and can't talk about, understanding your content mix, working with legal, we talked about cones earlier, putting the rules and regulations in place so people know where they need to drive and what they're free to talk about, where they go to get messaging from marketing that they are able to share so that all the definition's in place and people are able to work within the framework to be successful and chat out via Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.

Chris: Fantastic. All of this information has been hugely helpful, I'm sure that everyone listening to this podcast is going to learn something and probably quite a bit of something. So I want to thank you very much, Brett Cornell, for taking the time today to enlighten all of us on social media for the life sciences.

Brett: Absolutely, I was happy to do it. And again, it's a learning process. Put it out there, measure it, refine it. See if it works. Don't be afraid to fail. Try different tactics. See what picks up with your audience, what doesn't. It's the old adage of using Google Analytics to measure. There's tools that you can use to do that, and understanding what you need to report up and what success looks like for you. That's the key.

Chris: Nice. All right, well, thank you very much, Brett Cornell.

Brett: Absolutely, Chris. It was great talking to you. And I'm looking forward to the podcast, and much success on your channel here. And I like what you're doing. Life science has needed something like this for a long time. And I appreciate you putting people together and putting the stories out there. Thanks for doing it.

Chris: Yeah, my pleasure.

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