

CHAMBER TEXEXECUTIVE MONTHLY

Five Keys to Effective Use of Social Media for Chambers

By Mike Rollins, CCE, Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce

What is the Chamber's social media strategy?

That's a question we often hear from our 2,800 members, 87 percent of which are businesses in Central Texas with under 100 employees. To understand the importance of social media, one only has to look at how it has changed political communications today. In fact, *The New York Times* just announced it will begin printing popular online tweets from reporters at the front of the newspaper.

What's the best way to engage with social media? In our experience, five keys guide our effective use of social media:

1. Social Media is a tool

It's important to recognize that social media is simply another tool in the communication and marketing tool box. Before it can be effective, a Chamber's value proposition, key messages and primary stakeholders need to be clearly identified. You can then aim the most appropriate social media channel toward your stakeholders and set specific goals and metrics to measure your messaging effectiveness.

2. You don't need it all

Prioritize the social media channels that best meet your organizational needs. You don't have to be on every social media channel. Pick the ones that best reach your audience, staff them appropriately and be consistent in posting content.

If you need some guidance on where to devote your time, ask your members. We've included questions about the use of social media in some of our surveys to help gauge where we can best reach them. More than half of our members use Facebook very often, about 45 percent use LinkedIn very often, and about a third use Twitter sometimes or very often. That can change depending on the audience which could be general or members who focus on a particular segment such as technology, startups or education.

3. Have a content plan

Ensure you leverage content across your Chamber through social media by developing and regularly updating a content calendar. Communicate frequently and with regularity, including responding and having social media conversations when appropriate. Ask members to follow or like you on your

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social media; you can share their content in return. Educate your internal staff to ensure they both provide you with content to share and promote the use of your social media channels. Cross-channel promotion can be very helpful to ensure you get the most life out of your content. Post an awesome photo on Instagram? Use the sharing feature to also post it on your Facebook page. And, by all means, check out similar Chamber social media channels to see what is resonating.

4. Stand out

Use of video content on social media is a rapidly growing trend. Our video views on YouTube have grown by 200 percent over the past two years as we ramped up content for this channel and leveraged it through social media, electronic newsletters and blogs on our website. This doesn't mean to stop using photos in posts. We've found that posts with a visual aspect almost always outperform those without.

5. Track improvement

Use the available analytic tools to manage your social media efforts. Most social channels have their own analytics specific to their site. Twitter Analytics can give you a wealth of information on the engagement of your tweets and audiences. You can create goal specific ad campaigns and most channels will provide real-time information on how your campaigns are performing.

If you want to take your social network a step further, look into a Social Media Management System such as Hootsuite. Dozens of free tools can be found online to help streamline your social media efforts.

Mike Rollins (CCE) is President of the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber today serves about 2,800 members throughout Central Texas. This includes providing leadership that facilitates the creation of a prosperous regional economy and effective advocacy for its partners. For more information, please visit AustinChamber.com. The Austin Chamber was ranked #3 on the list of Top 100 Social Media Friendly Chambers of Commerce.