
/// TIP

It's Not About "Engagement": Using Social Media To Make Ideas Happen

by Sarah Rapp

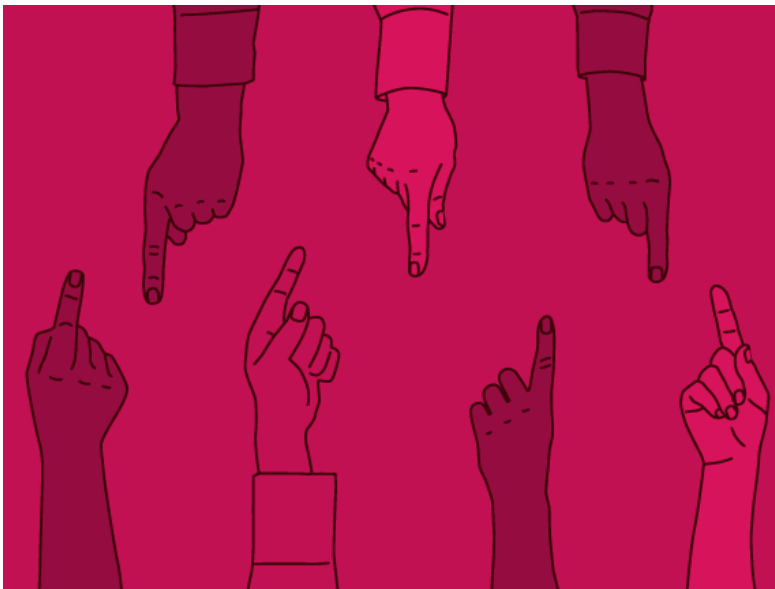
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It's all well and good to tweet about what you had for lunch, or share party pics on Facebook, but what if you want to use social media to achieve a specific goal? Perhaps to garner support for a creative project, or build awareness about a product you're launching. How then do you wade through all the social media speak and interact with people in a way that will make a difference to your mission, not just create more idle chatter?

I talked with a handful of social media mavens, community managers, and grassroots organizers to get their tips on navigating the social sphere. Here are a few pointers on rising above mere fans and followers numbers to create relationships that will really move the needle on your creative endeavor.

[Dave Brown](#) /// [Social Media Specialist, Etsy](#)

- **Being the mayor of Whole Foods on Foursquare isn't going to make**

your idea happen. Don't get caught up in followers, likes, or check-ins. If you keep doing what you love, share your creativity and inspiration - that's how you move the needle.

- **Somewhere right now there's an online conversation happening about what you're interested in - join it.** Find these conversations and get involved - keep the message short but let your passion show. Use plenty of visuals. Instagram is a great place to start documenting your ideas from start to finish.
- **Let people in on how excited you are about your idea.** The best way to get people excited about what you're doing is to let your passion show. Share the process, ideology, and execution.
- **There's nothing more rewarding than feeling like you're a part of something, so let your audience in on your project.** A great way to engage your community is to ask for their input. Share your experiences, and ask for something back from them.

“The best way to get people excited about what you're doing is to let your passion show.”

Andres Glusman /// VP - Strategy & Community, Meetup

- **If your current circle of friends and contacts were enough to help you reach your goal, you would be there already.** Finding a new community, one filled with people who are already doing what you want to be doing, will push you to accomplish it yourself. But only if you jump in.
- **To feel connected and inspired, you can't stand on the sidelines.** In community, as in any aspect of life, you get out of it what you put in. Passive lurking or anonymous posting is just not as rewarding as immersing yourself and forming relationships.
- **Face-to-face interactions help you push your thinking.** I'm at Meetup because I get more out of in-person interactions than I do with pure online discussions. For example, the people I've met in the Lean Startup Meetup that I co-organize have become some of my favorite people in NYC, and help motivate me to look at things in a new way.

Cindy Au /// Director of Community, Kickstarter

- **Think of your community as collaborators - not an audience.** The people most likely to engage with you are those who know what you're going through and appreciate the kind of work you do. Go through it together, and in the process, you'll begin building a really powerful creative community.
- **Don't overload people with enthusiasm.** Nothing comes off as more suspiciously non-human than frantically beating people with enthusiasm about your ideas and products. Find a balance, and be authentic.
- **Your audience needs to care about you before they care about what you have to say.** Build your audience just as you would in real life - by being a real person, and by devoting real time to individual relationships. Take the time to delve into what others are doing and share their work with your community - that kind of generosity and collaborative interaction goes a long way. It's a complete rejection of the "all about me" tendencies that the Internet can breed,

and it's what lays the foundation for lasting communities to support you and your work.

“Build your audience just as you would in real life - by being a real person.”

Lea Marino /// Co-Founder, Community Manager Meetup

- **The most important way to engage is with individual outreach.** If there's someone you think would be valuable to your community, find what makes them unique or what they recently wrote, and be sure to call attention to any mutual connections. Instead of writing a mass email or a broad tweet, target the message to the person.
- **Nothing replaces the deeper connection brought about by face-to-face interaction.** The Internet makes it easier to find the right people. Once they're found and you've begun to build a relationship, hop offline and grab some coffee with them. In different cities? Skype may help strengthen the connection.
- **Celebrate every person who celebrates you.** If you have something great, people will start engaging on your behalf. When this happens - be sure to acknowledge this and check out what they have going on as well.

Charlie Todd /// Founder, Improv Everywhere

- **Don't treat your community as just “fans” or “followers.”** It's important to take the trust between you and the community you lead very seriously. For example - with Improv Everywhere - thousands of people might show up at a given event, without even knowing what they'll be asked to do. I have to respect this trust they're giving me as the leader, and respond by working hard to design these experiences.
- **Don't focus on the monetary aspect of a project too early - build your brand and community because you love it, and success will find you.** I wasn't able to treat Improv Everywhere as my full-time job for the first 8 years. It was always my passion that I focused on every chance I could outside of a day job - if I had worried about a business model when I began, I never would have found success. It was always about the ideas - bringing the ideas to life is what got me excited. It was only later on that I found ways to make it my living, but that was never the point.
- **Find real-world ways of getting together and working, celebrating, and creating.** Improv Everywhere specializes in real-world engagement, but we use social media and email lists to organize this offline participation. Actually getting together on a regular basis to try out new ideas gives community a feeling of much closer connection.

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What's Your Take?

How do you build strong relationships online? Any tips?

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— Thomas Edison

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