

RT ≠ Engagement

Assessing your social media strategy



August 2020

Social media is one of the best ways to connect with a wide audience, understand and track the issues you care about, and build a platform for your issue. With billions of users worldwide, your efforts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn can be far-reaching. Each platform has a host of tools you can use to elevate your message and engage with your audience.

But social media is also a time commitment, so you want to make sure you're using it strategically by choosing the best platforms, connecting with the right audiences, and delivering content that resonates with them. How do you know if you're doing that already, or if changes are needed? A social media assessment can help.

What is a digital assessment, and why should I do one?

A digital assessment is a comprehensive assessment of your channels to understand who you're connecting with, what your engagement is, and if you're achieving your objectives. This deep dive could include all the methods you use to communicate online — websites, blogs, podcasts, newsletters, and others — but here we'll focus just on social media. The concepts discussed here can be applied to these and other digital communications.

Similar to a [media scan](#), a digital assessment can help you understand:

- Which strategies are currently working.
- Where there may be gaps to address.
- Whether you're reaching the right people to achieve your goals.

Before conducting a digital assessment, it's important to know your organization's social media objectives. What does your organization hope to accomplish through social media communication? Your objectives may vary from platform to platform, especially if you target different audiences through each one.

If you're investing time and resources into a social media strategy and aren't sure whether or not your efforts are paying off, a digital assessment will give you insight and help you adjust if necessary.

Tips for conducting a digital assessment

Below is a recommended approach for completing your digital assessment. This can be as in depth or as limited as you have the time for, but making sure to touch on all the steps will help you come out with a well-rounded assessment.



1. Plan.

What are your goals for the assessment? Think about what you want to learn, and consider what information will be most helpful in achieving your organizational objectives. For example, if one of your objectives is to educate your audience about a particular issue, it would be helpful to know how many posts you dedicated to that issue and whether or not they were effective. Or if you use social media to recruit volunteers, it would be good to know which posts, if any, resulted in applications or registrations.

Then, think about what questions you want to focus on answering. These may include:

- Who is following us? Do our followers align with our priority audiences?
- What sort of engagement do we want? For example, do we want shares, email sign-ups, petition signatures, volunteer applications, donations, or something else?
- Who is engaging with our content? Are they members of our priority audiences?
- What content is getting the most and the least engagement? What messages and visuals are being used in those posts? Are there other commonalities — time of day, profiles tagged, hashtags used — among posts getting the most engagement?
- On what platforms are we getting the best reach and engagement?
- How much time is our staff investing, and is that the right investment based on our objectives?

2. Find out who follows you.

A good place to start is to see who follows you to learn if the audiences you're trying to reach are following you. To do this, create a short list of priority audience members. This list might include general categories, such as seafood restaurants or health reporters, or it might name specific entities, such as a particular restaurant in your region and a health reporter for a national or regional outlet.

Once you have your list, scan each of your platform's followings to see if they're following you, and if so, on which platforms. Remember that all the platforms don't attract the same audiences — for example, Twitter is usually the platform of choice for reporters while LinkedIn is a great platform for reaching businesses. For a general analysis of social media audiences across platforms, check out this Pew Research Center [Social Media Fact Sheet](#).

3. Review your analytics, if you have them.

If you've been tracking analytics over time, take a look at that data. (If you haven't, it's time to start.) Pick a defined window — for example, a month — to review content on all your channels. While it's best to start with a window that represents regular posting, it can also be useful to look at periods where you had a focused social media push such as launching a new campaign, publishing new research, or doing year-end fundraising.

Helpful metrics include dates and times of posts, content type (e.g., photo, video, slideshow, article link, event flyer), engagement rate (e.g., likes, shares, comments, retweets, and click-throughs), and tags (i.e. hashtags or other accounts). It's also helpful to know whether or not posts were part of a larger campaign, such as a campaign launch, or if they were targeted toward a segment of your audience.

Most platforms offer insights about audience, reach, engagement, and other details, so sifting through those could provide additional information for your assessment.

4. Analyze the content that's getting good engagement.

As noted, engagement is a combination of the likes, shares, comments, retweets, and click-throughs that your posts receive. Depending on your objectives, other forms of engagement could include email sign-ups, petition signatures, volunteer applications, and donations. You can calculate the engagement rate for a post by dividing the number of actions taken on the post (total amount of likes, comments, shares, and click-throughs) by the post's reach (total number of people who saw the post). A good benchmark for high engagement is anything above two percent, but the most useful way to use engagement rate is based on what average engagement looks like for your content.

Review your posts to note which ones had high engagement, and note any trends. For example:

- Was it original content?
- Did it have an image, video, animated GIF, or link?
- Did it use a hashtag?
- Did it ask a question or incorporate a call to action?
- Did you tag another account?
- What type of the content were you sharing (e.g., policy advocacy, consumer education, event promotion, fundraising)?
- How frequently are you posting on each channel?

After you look at posts with high engagement, do the same for posts with low engagement.

5. Consider your time investment.

An important component of completing a digital assessment is assessing your effort against your capacity. Ask staff how much time they spend each day or week per platform and what that time is spent doing. Decide how much time your organization can and should budget for social media, and compare that budget to the investment currently being made. This will help you determine if you need to make changes.

For example, if 75 percent of staff's social media efforts are spent creating graphics, it may be worthwhile to hire a graphic designer or purchase a stock photo membership. This would free

up some capacity for other tasks, like planning content, scheduling posts, and engaging with your audience.

Using your findings to inform next steps

Once you've done your research, reflect back on your goals and questions you set out to answer. How are your social media efforts contributing to your success? Are you meeting, exceeding, or falling short of your objectives?

The assessment will likely highlight things you're doing well, and draw attention to some gaps. For example, if your objective is to generate new business leads through Facebook, but none of your posts converted, there's a gap in people taking action.

Make decisions about what you want to continue doing, start doing, or change based on the assessment. Perhaps you need to narrow your focus from three platforms to one or adjust the frequency of posts to accommodate different time zones. You may find that certain content performs extremely well and decide to create more of it. On the flip side, you may discover that some content performs poorly and decide to eliminate it from your strategy.

Need a hand?

If your organization could use help with a digital assessment, [let us know](#).