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# **SOCIAL MEDIA FOR CORPORATE BRANDS**

*Try not to become a man of success  
but rather try to become a man of value.*

Albert Einstein

## **Introduction**

Social media (SM) are communication channels enabling interaction between internauts by means of various communication technologies. Among basic platforms of interaction there are forums and discussion groups (e.g. GoldenLine), blogs, microblogs (e.g. Blip or Twitter), services for sharing the content (e.g. YouTube), creating groups, VOIP, P2P, virtual worlds (e.g. SecondLife) and social networking services (e.g. Facebook) [Pach09]; [Maje10]. Through them, users can share their knowledge and experiences. Social media introduced democracy into the way of sharing information. They changed readers into creators of content. They transformed the mechanism of broadcasting information into the model of “many-to-many”, through enabling mutual interaction between authors, readers and reviewers.

Social media are based on relations between various objects. These can be relations B2C, B2B, C2C, B2A, etc. [PaSr10]. The presence of consumer brands (B2C) in social media is already common. Consumers value brands in social media, especially in Facebook and Twitter, companies gather loads of fans and try to earn their liking, by the use of games, applications, competitions. The interest in corporate brands’ presence (corporate brand\* – B2B) in social media

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\* The corporate brand defines the firm that will deliver and stand behind the offering that the customer will buy and use. The brand has access to organizational as well as product associations and the flexibility to play several roles within the brand portfolio. Of most significance is its potential in some context to be a master brand with a significant driver role. In fact, in the case of Dell, UPS, Sony, Samsung, IBM, and others, it can be seen as the ultimate branded house, where the product brands consist largely of the corporate brand plus a descriptor. In these cases, the use of a corporate brand as a master brand maximizes brand portfolio goals such as generating leverage, synergy, and clarity [Aake12].

still is not as common as in case of consumer brands, however, equally important. Behind business decisions concerning buying goods and services there are people who are present in social media, and there look for information about the goods and services. They can use this knowledge in their businesses [Tomk12]. Companies present in SM can have better financial results than the ones which do not use this medium. The aim of the article is to present the possibilities offered by social media to corporate brands. The hypothesis will be verified in the next research.

### Popularity of social media

Social media are a new, direct (one-to-one), wide channel of contacting clients. The primary advantage of this channel is its size, range of activity, and the fact that its users are very active, they eagerly tell a lot about themselves, they comment on the reality, leave information about their preferences, gather into groups of certain interests and likes. Important merit of the channel is its reliability, as consumers trust informal information about products and brands much more than e.g. traditional forms of advertising. Table 1 shows comparison of traditional media with social media.

Table 1

Traditional media vs social media

Criterion	Traditional media	Social media
<b>The direction of communicating information</b>	oriented at broadcasting information (from up to down)	everybody can publish information or comments, the difference between a creator and a reader is blurred
<b>Availability of information</b>	creating and publishing the content is available for few – it requires capital, knowledge, special skills and access to right medium	easily (and usually for free) available for everyone, 24/7/365, the barriers of entry are low, i.e. everybody can create content
<b>The speed of providing information</b>	Depends on specific features of a communication medium and information distribution channel and the location of a recipient	faster than traditional media, everyone can be a journalist, it is enough to be in the right place in the right time, the variety of information sources and channels
<b>Durability of message</b>	content created by the radio, press or TV once published cannot be changed, its durability is often short (TV, radio)	ecosystem, where the content once created may be endlessly processed, edited, aggregated or cited
<b>Control</b>	usually belongs to a particular group	practically impossible to control, majority of the content is created by users who decide what will be published, read or modified

The interest in social media for the use of business has been continuously increasing since 2003. New social networking services began to appear very fast, trying to copy the ideas already implemented. Professional websites like LinkedIn, Visible Path or Xing concentrated on businesspeople, Dogster helped to meet people of the same interests, Care2 was targeted At activists, etc. [www1].

LinkedIn.com is the example of an Internet society used in business. It specialises in professional-business contacts. In recent years LinkedIn.com has become one of the biggest and commonly used portals, with over 135 mln registered users representing 150 different branches of industry [www2]. LinkedIn.com allows to find quickly previous and present co-workers, contacts useful when looking for work or new business opportunities, and business advice, thanks to availability of a lot of specialists of a given branch. Internet business societies function as on-line meetings for specialists of a branch of business and industry. Polish equivalent is GoldenLine and Profeo.pl.

GoldenLine is a social networking service that joins professionals of various interests, positions and professional aims. It is a society concentrated on developing career and professional life. It helps to meet people, come into being in an industry and monitor the job market. Members of this society can successfully manage contacts and maintain valuable relations. Thanks to innovative solutions implemented in the service, one can find here interesting job offers, and employers can quickly, easily and successfully gain good employees. Access to various resources of knowledge is possible, as users, discussing in forums, build up the base of experience and information. A special value of GoldenLine is the fact that its members are present with their actual name and surname and they care about maintaining high level of society.

Report "Social Media Benchmarking Study", prepared by Business.com portal, describes an influence of social networking services on building positive image and on making business decisions in B2B sector. The findings show that 62% of respondents\*, when asked about the sources of information necessary at work, answered that they visit company profiles at social networking services, and 54,5% search for necessary information about certain companies, services or goods through social media [www3] (Figure 1).

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\* The study was conducted on the group of 2393 persons from B2B branch, making business decisions.

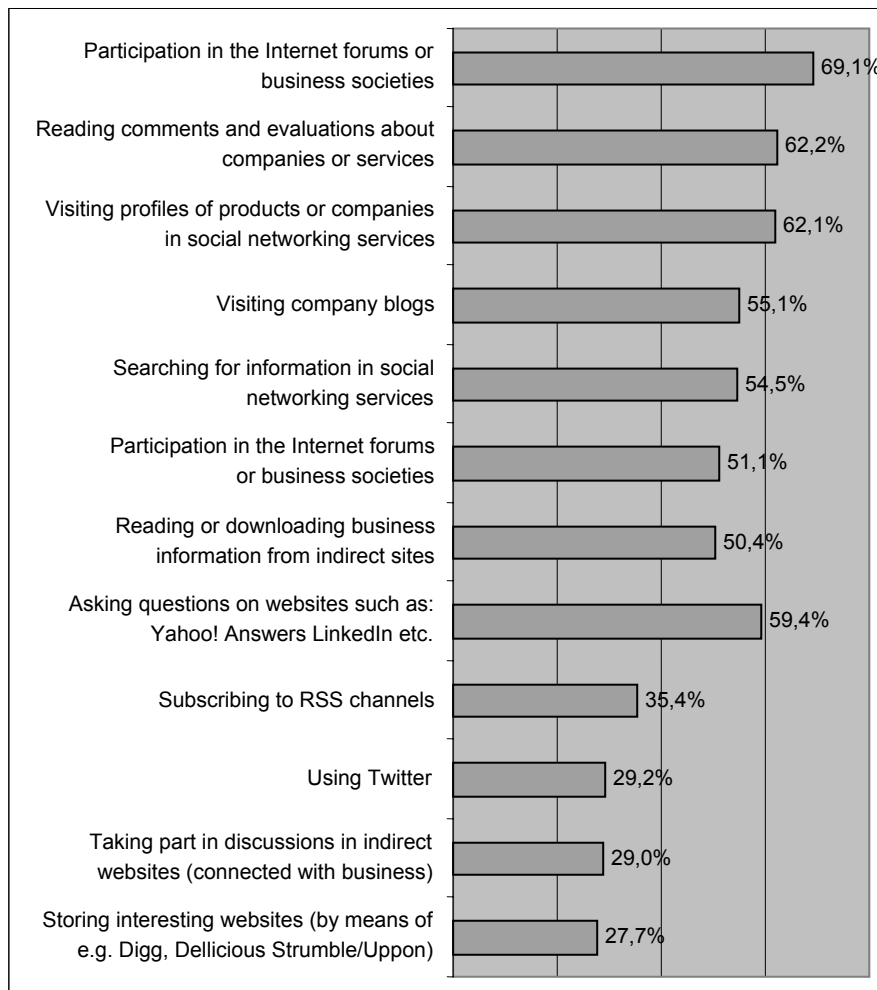


Fig. 1. Sources of obtaining business information

Source: Based on: [Dyre11].

## Benefits coming from the use of social media in B2B sector

The information in social networking services spreads fast and can reach more a wider target audience. At the same time the media allow for reducing the costs connected with streaming information about a company's brand. A company's presence in social networking services can bring a lot of significant benefits. The key task of managers is, therefore, to understand the role of this communication channel in the whole process of integrated marketing communication of an organisation.

The benefits of social media potential in B2B sector are the following [Dyre11]:

1. Generating leads\*. These can be, for example, inquiries about products or services of a company, built on the basis of “Call to Action” (CTA). Facebook makes it possible to create applications encouraging potential clients/business partners to interact with a given company. It can be for example a window of a newsletter subscription, a form to contact a consultant or sending an inquiry.
2. Another place to find a company in the Internet. Thanks to running a website in e.g. Facebook, people who look for information about particular products, receive in the search results a place to acquire updated data about a company and its offer.
3. Gathering interested people in one place. A site in Facebook lets the users aggregate the content they are actually interested in. In B2B sector it is important to target the users, as the number of fans does not always equal the quality of measurable effects.
4. Building a company’s image. What influences positively the image of a company is publishing information about its HR policy, social campaigns, won competitions, recent realisations, active participation in discussions between fans, encouraging them to speak, dealing with questions and doubts.
5. Press room. A company’s fan page is a convenient place for publishing information about current events in the company. The company’s photos or videos can be uploaded here, as well as links to the company’s website. It allows for building networks and creates an easy access to information for journalists, the effects of which are publications in electronic press.
6. Focus group. Fan page in Facebook can be used in order to conduct some small research about a company’s brand. Tools like opinion polls or discussions make it possible to easily obtain information from consumers.

Information about companies, present in social media, is increasingly used by providers of business information, because they check the companies that other companies could cooperate with. Societies are becoming places worth belonging to. It does not always mean active presence. It is also worth noticing the passive presence, visible in the results of social media monitoring. Tools like Brand24 or Sotrender Analytics let companies find out how they are perceived in social media.

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\* The term refers to creating future interactions from the part of clients.

## Strategy for B2B in social media

Social networking services contribute to creating new quality of business. Nowadays, partners in business demand clearer, honest, direct and involved approach from companies they do business with. Social media best promote the companies which have some arranged strategy for the brand, and have given a lot of thought to why it is worth being in these media and who they want to encourage to cooperation [Debs10].

In order to fully use the potential of social media in creating B2B relations, companies should concentrate their activities on the following directions [Debs10]:

1. From the “wish to sell” to “creating friendship”. In order to change the relation into “creating friendship” companies should use various ways to reach a customer, including the presence in Facebook sites, microblogs, e.g. Twitter or blip. There they should write less about offered products or services, but more about things that help to know the “personality” of the company. It will let the clients feel more comfortable while deciding to cooperate with such companies.
2. From “big campaigns” to “little actions”. Instead of spending a lot of money on traditional big campaigns, it can turn out more profitable to act with “little steps”. In social networking services, an opinion about a product spreads very fast, and Facebook or Twitter friends can share the information about what has just happened.
3. From “supervising a company image” to “being yourself”. Companies that use social media increasingly give their employees the possibility to “be themselves”. They try to provide them with means necessary to feel good, to speak positively about a company and thus show it in favourable light.
4. From a company that is “difficult to reach” to “available everywhere”. In order to build relation with clients/business partners it is no longer enough to give an email address and a phone number on the website. What is important today is interaction through various channels of communication available through social media. Dell company, for example, makes use of a lot of such channels. In their website they inform how to contact the company – Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, forums, blogs, mails, etc., giving consumers the choice to reach the company in the most convenient way (Figure 2).



Fig. 2. Methods of contacting Dell company

Source: [Dębs09].

While creating a communication strategy in social media, the kind of users should be taken into consideration. For an entertainment service the strategy will be slightly different than for a specialistic forum that usually gathers professionals of a given branch.

While planning activities for a corporate brand in the area of social media, the following key issues should be considered [Tomk10]:

1. Why – why to act? – what is the aim of activities in social media, is it more important for a company to develop brand recognisability or to support sales campaigns, etc.
2. Who – who to direct the actions to? – it is essential to determine preliminary profile of a user the company intends to have a relation with.
3. What – what could be achieved? – establishing what effects will be satisfactory, how a brand will benefit from being present in social media.
4. How – how to do it? – determining the method of achieving assumed goals, whether a company will focus on the brand profile or e.g. its CRS actions (Corporate Social Responsibility).
5. When – when to act? – every branch functions by its own rules. For a tourist sector brand, the pre-holiday season will be the most important, for a clothing brand – an autumn season. Involvement of different profiles of users will vary in different periods.

An important rule in creating strategies in social media is care about their coherence. While deciding to increase its transparency, a company must make sure that the information published in various services is not incoherent, let alone contradictory. While having an online dialogue, one cannot allow for negative emotions. Excessive emotional involvement can lead to decrease in a company records. Constant supervision of conducted activities is also important. There are tools available that allow for monitoring the effects of these activities. The best measuring instrument, however, are internauts themselves and their reaction to the company's activities.

The strategy of social media consists in [Kowa12]:

1. **Setting the goals in social media.** Selecting appropriate goals in social media is a strategic decision and depends on business goals of an organization/brand. Setting the goals of activities in social networking services should be done basing on SMART rule (Simple, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely). In case of social media, the SMART rule has one more meaning: Socialize, Monitor, Analyse, Report, Target, indicating a cycle that should be repeated. After defining strategical goals, operational goals should be determined, also according to SMART rule. KPI value (Key Performance Indicator) should be assigned to each operational goal. Some set key effectiveness indexes will allow for determining the direction and level of realising the strategy.
2. **Conducting analysis.** The analysis should allow for:
  - Determining the target group and the social media a company uses. Defining social media channels where the target group is present will enable to choose social networking services in which an organisation/brand will carry out the communication. For example, a lot of companies in the American market use at least four or five social networking services: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google+ or LinkedIn. Polish companies are usually present in such social media as: Facebook (86%), YouTube (38%), LinkedIn (30%), GoldenLine (20%).
  - Recognizing how the competition acts, i.e. how the competitors use particular social networking services, what media they use and with what frequency, how they constructs announcements, what methods are used to support a brand's presence in social media. In order to study the opinion about a brand or a competitor, companies can use professional tools that allow for effective monitoring of the Internet and social media, e.g. Sentione, Brand24, Guarda, Mobuzzer, Centymetr, etc.



3. **Selecting the tools in social media.** After setting the goals of a company's /brand's existence in social media and after the analysis, suitable tools and other necessary resources (also human) should be chosen. Tools used in realizing strategies in social media can be divided into:

- supporting the automation of log adding,
- applications used with various activities within sales promotion, e.g. contests, etc.,
- analytics in social media,
- monitoring of a brand in social media.

The key element of realizing the strategy is appointing people responsible for realizing the strategy of marketing communication in social networking services.

4. **Evaluation and optimization of a brand's existence in social media.** Each process connected with implementing and realizing a strategy ends with recurring summary, based on figures that are key performance indicators – KPI. Companies should apply both quality indicators of effects (e.g. clients' satisfaction, brand awareness) and quantity indicators (e.g. ROI, profits attributed to the existence in social media, data about activity of users). Strategy realization in SM should be optimized basing on experiences and research, and the best practices of the competition in national and foreign market.

## Summary

Social media are an excellent tool to communicate with clients, gather information and opinion about a given brand, services or products, gaining new customers and business partners and conducting advertising campaigns. They are nowadays the source of massive, free knowledge, built on its own. The knowledge that after analyzing allows a company for development and optimisation of business. The potential lying in social networks can be skillfully used by companies in order to gain favour and involvement of clients. The companies, however, can also easily make their image worse, become exposed to anger and loss of clients/business partners. The dynamics, big interactivity and innovativeness of social media requires creativity – new ideas, not used so far. In order to achieve real business value, a strategy of activity in social media must be appropriately planned.

The strategy should involve three basic steps:

- listen to what internauts talk about in terms of a product or a brand, and what the activity of competitors is like, what will succeed and what will not (it is better and cheaper to learn from someone else's mistakes),

- it is good to have a plan for a longer period of time than for one campaign – a brand's existence in social media should be associated with the brand, not with the campaign,
- measures of effectiveness – to determine what will be measured in the campaign and how these measures will be evaluated (the number of fans is not always the most important), what is expected from the fans, followers or readers of a blog?

In social media there is a huge potential of building relation with a brand. However, in order to use it fully, companies have to:

- be honest in presenting their identity,
- communicate it clearly when they give their own opinions,
- be respectful and humble in the communication process,
- use common sense while selecting information for public presentation,
- remember that what is said/written in the net, will stay there forever,
- make use of the tools that are understandable for the organisation, which match the goals and which are used by potential business partners.

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## **MEDIA SPOŁECZNOŚCIOWE DLA ROZWOJU MAREK KORPORACYJNYCH**

### **Streszczenie**

Media społecznościowe (SM) to kanały komunikacyjne umożliwiające interakcję między internautami za pomocą różnych technologii komunikacyjnych. Media te opierają się na relacjach między różnymi podmiotami. Mogą to być relacje typu B2C, B2B, C2C, B2A itd. Obecność marek konsumenckich (B2C) w mediach społecznych jest już powszechna. Konsumenci cenią marki w SM, szczególnie na Facebooku i Twitterze, zaś firmy zbierają rzesze fanów i starają się pozyskać ich sympatię, wykorzystując gry, aplikacje czy konkursy. Zainteresowanie obecnością marek biznesowych (corporate Brand – B2B) w mediach społecznościowych nie jest jeszcze tak popularne, jak w przypadku marek konsumenckich, lecz równie ważne. Za decyzjami biznesowymi o zakupie produktów i usług stoją przecież ludzie, którzy są obecni w SM i poszukują tam informacji dotyczących produktów i usług. Wiedzę tę następnie mogą wykorzystywać jako przedsiębiorcy. Firmy obecne w SM mogą osiągać lepsze wyniki finansowe niż te, które nie korzystają z tego medium. Aby osiągnąć realną wartość biznesową, firmy muszą jednak zaplanować odpowiednią strategię działania w SM. W artykule przedstawiono możliwości, jakie oferują media społecznościowe markom biznesowym.