

The POST Method: A systematic approach to social strategy¹

By Josh Bernoff

What do most companies do wrong when they enter the social world? No, it's not that they're being fake, or don't "get it." It's that they don't really know their objectives. Is your company doing its social strategy backwards?

If you started by saying "we should do a blog" or "we should create a page on a social network" or "we should create a community" the answer is probably yes.

In any other business endeavor we start by figuring out what we want to accomplish. Social technologies are not magic. They accomplish things, too. It's time to stop doing social because it's cool. It's time to start doing it because it's effective.

To help clients with this fundamental idea, [we invented a little acronym called POST](#). It's been one of the most popular ideas we've ever created, even though it's so simple and commonsensical. If you were at our consumer forum in October you saw it (and many of you who were there contacted us afterwards for help with your strategies). It's at the heart of our book [Groundswell](#). Now I'm sharing it with all of you.



P is People. Don't start a social strategy until you know the capabilities of your audience. If you're targeting college students, use social networks. If you're reaching out business travelers, consider ratings and reviews. Forrester has great data to help with this, but you can make some estimates on your own. Just don't start without thinking about it.

O is objectives. Pick one. Are you starting an application to listen to your customers, or to talk with them? To support them, or to energize your best customers to evangelize others? Or are you trying to collaborate with

them? Decide on your objective **before** you decide on a technology. Then figure out how you will measure it.

S is Strategy. Strategy here means figuring out what will be different after you're done. Do you want a closer, two-way relationship with your best customers? Do you want to get people talking about your products? Do you want a permanent focus group for testing product ideas and generating new ones? Imagine you succeed. How will things be different afterwards? Imagine the endpoint and you'll know where to begin.

T is Technology. A community. A wiki. A blog or a hundred blogs. Once you know your people, objectives, and strategy, then you can decide with confidence.

This may sound simple to the sophisticated readers of this blog. But it works. Try it. Think your strategy through. Even if you're just clarifying your own strategy, this should help you explain it to your boss.

¹ Retrieved June 1, 2010 from: <http://forrester.typepad.com/groundswell/2007/12/the-post-method.html>