PART 8:
MEASURE YOUR SUCCESS ONLINE

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SMALL BUSINESS

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OVERVIEW

In previous guides, we have shared several ideas for using social media to achieve business results. Some of these ideas are low-cost, while others require a more substantial investment of time and money. In any case, it's important to understand how a social media program is performing against specific business objectives in order to maximize the impact and justify further investment.

The beauty of social media is that it is highly measurable. In this section, we will share tools, techniques and best practices for tracking online performance.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Measuring the impact of a social media program doesn't require much time or money. It just takes a little planning and diligence. The benefits to small businesses, however, are significant. By tracking online performance, businesses can make more informed decisions about their marketing initiatives and ensure that your time and every dollar spent are delivering the best possible ROI.

GETTING STARTED

When implementing a social media campaign, measurement should not be an afterthought; it should be considered in the initial strategy. Here are some tips for getting started:

- **Establish measurable objectives for your company's social media initiative.** For example, an objective might be to increase positive brand mentions online by 25 percent, to drive a 10 percent increase in traffic to the company Web site in a given timeframe or to get people to share their e-mail addresses.

- **Utilize an analytics program to measure on-site activity.** With a free program such as Google Analytics, for example, you can track the following information on an easy-to-read measurement "dashboard":

  - o Number of Web site visits

  - o Number of pageviews

  - o Length of time on the Web site

  - o Top traffic sources

  - o Top performing keywords

  - o Top performing content

  - o Conversions, or specific on-site actions that you specify as "goals." For example, a conversion might be a customer completing an online form to receive more information from your company.

- **Measure engagement with your company blog**. You can measure the average number of comments left on each blog post. At Dell, we call this the "conversation index." If you use Wordpress or Blogger publishing software, you will find this number on the administrative dashboard.

- **Track off-site activity as well**. Your Web site is only one part of the digital ecosystem, and there is a lot more that you can measure, including:

    o   Number of mentions about your company online. You can find this using Technorati or Google Blog Search.

    o   Tonality of mentions about your company online. The free moni toring tools do not indicate tonality of mentions (i.e., positive, negative or neutral). You can measure this through the manual process of review ing and scoring each post, or you can utilize a subscription-based tool such as Visible Technologies' TruCast.

    o   Placement of your content (e.g., videos, photos, etc.) on other Web sites. Tracking photos and videos is not always easy – especially if you don't know to where to look for them. Some paid analytics solutions, such as those provided by Omniture, are starting to do this well.

    o   Ranking of your Web site in search engines for commonly searched keywords. Search Engine Optimization is a science in and of itself. For more on SEO strategies for small businesses, visit http://www.searchengineguide.com. Mack Collier is one of the most in fluential small business bloggers and shares valuable insights on both SEO and social media.

    o   Ranking of your blog by Technorati.com. Technorati is a leading authority on social media influence, so it's a good idea to track how your blog moves up or down in its ranking.

BEST PRACTICES

Based on our experience at Dell and conversations with small- and medium-size business owners, we've identified several best practices for measurement, such as:
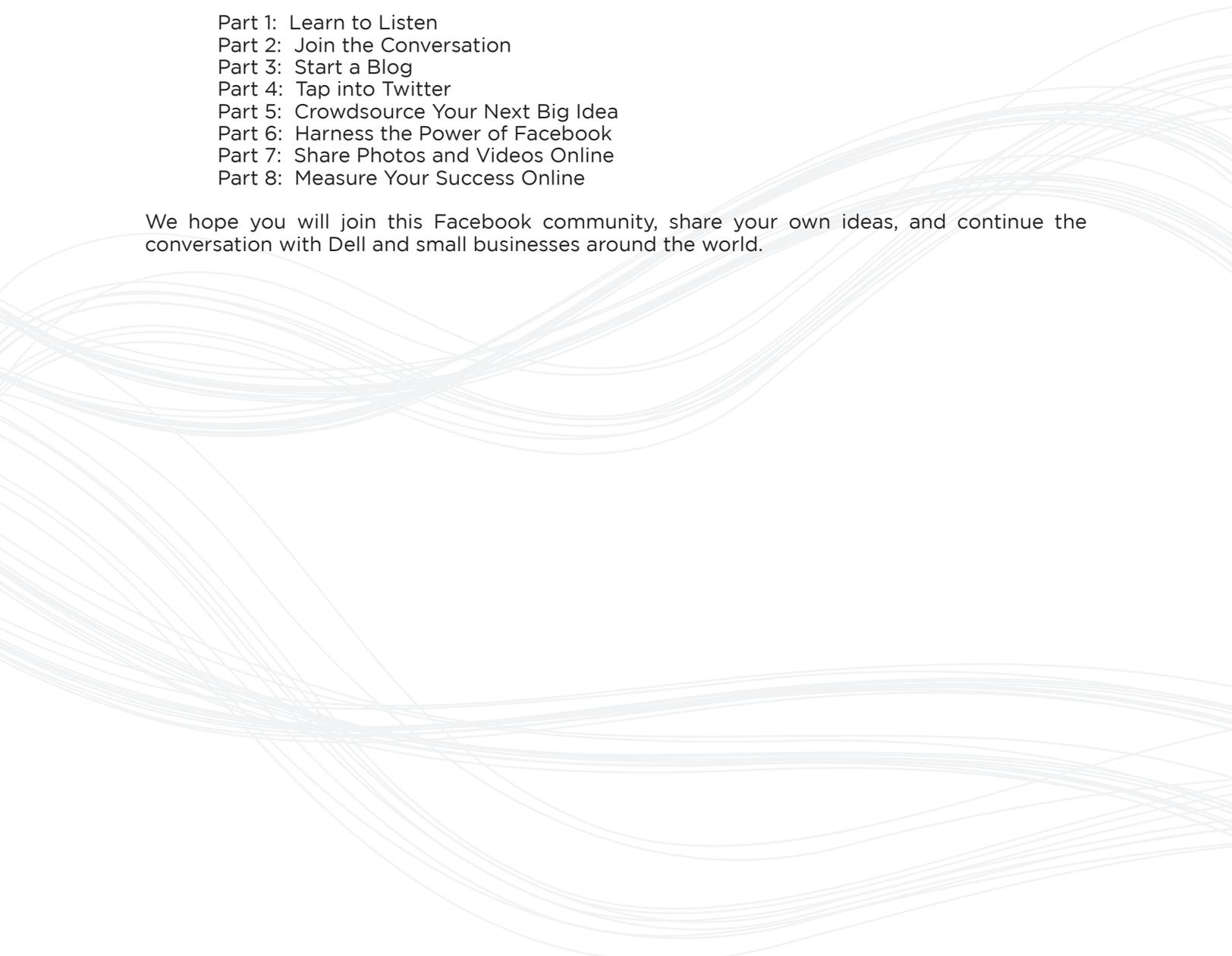
- **Ensure that marketing and communications professionals have access to Web site analytics**. All too often, this information resides with one IT employee or vendor.

- **Review online analytics weekly**. Companies that wait until the end of a campaign to measure the impact are missing the point. The real opportunity is to measure performance throughout the campaign and make adjustments along the way to maximize the impact. For example, you might discover that every time a particular blog posts on your company, traffic to your Web site spikes 50 percent. This might lead you to focus more of your efforts on that blog.

- **Think more broadly than traffic to your Web site**. As social media enables companies to distribute their content across many different Web sites, it's more accurate to measure engagement with a message instead.

ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SMALL BUSINESS

Visit www.facebook.com/dellsocialmedia to read all eight guides written by Dell's Small Business and Communities & Conversations teams:

Part 1: Learn to Listen
Part 2: Join the Conversation
Part 3: Start a Blog
Part 4: Tap into Twitter
Part 5: Crowdsource Your Next Big Idea
Part 6: Harness the Power of Facebook
Part 7: Share Photos and Videos Online
Part 8: Measure Your Success Online

We hope you will join this Facebook community, share your own ideas, and continue the conversation with Dell and small businesses around the world.