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SMART Goals for Your Social Media Strategy



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What Is The SMART Framework?

SMART is an acronym for a framework that helps with any type of project or business. The letters stand for **specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound**.

Taking the time to fill out the SMART framework can help you organize your social media strategy in a way that brings positive results.

In this ebook, we'll carefully explore each of the five elements for better goal-setting. You'll also learn to better achieve a SMART goal once you have set it.

SMART Goals Are

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Results-focused
Time-bound

Why Use SMART Goals?

Before you learn how to set a SMART goal, you first need to understand what SMART goals can do for you—and what you risk losing by not setting effective goals.

Your success depends on the goals you set.

The likelihood of meeting those goals depends on how the goal is framed.

Using the SMART framework assures that you are setting goals you can actually achieve and can prove in some way you achieved them.

For the social media manager, SMART goals are crucial to success. After all, social media marketing is highly scrutinized by the C-suite. Some social media managers are held to a higher standard to prove ROI than their peers in traditional marketing.

What might happen if you don't set SMART goals?

If you don't define what success looks like, you can't achieve it.

Sure, you can make marketing decisions, publish content, and engage online (social media for the sake of social media) ... But if your actions are not connected to goals, there's no point in taking those actions, from a business standpoint.

You can see metrics, and some might even grow. ("Oh, look, I got a lot of likes on that post!") But how do you know whether you're being successful if you haven't first determined what success means to you and your organization?

Recipients of your report will likely want to know:

- Are these good numbers or bad numbers?
- Are we achieving our goal?
- What's our return on investment (ROI)?
- How far above or below the goal were you?

Those questions cannot be answered if you haven't been clear about the goal in the first place.



"You'll never arrive at your destination if you haven't determined where the destination is."

Stephanie Leishman, Apiarity (@hatchsteph, @apiarity)

You might be undervalued by colleagues, even if your numbers are "good."

When reporting on your social media metrics to others in your organization, numbers don't mean anything without context.

Say you provide a lot of numbers, such as the average number of comments received per post this month—even how much you've increased over last month. People receiving your report may undervalue your efforts because you have not helped them form the connection between your efforts and the organization's success.

If you don't set SMART goals, your numbers will not show the impact of your efforts.

Always have your goal at the top of your report and help people see what you've been reaching for and how it applies to their bottom line.



"You can't just dump numbers onto a page and call it an analytics report. Reports need context."

Stephanie Leishman, Apiarity (@hatchsteph, @apiarity)

A Guide to Setting SMART Social Media Goals

1. Perform a brief review of your organization, including clarifying the priority

What is an important metric your organization has for the next time period you've determined?

Examples

- For a beauty company: The **number of units sold** in the UK is important to the company because it has a strong presence in the United States but wants to expand to Europe. The company is willing to take in less revenue per unit sold in the UK than in the US to temporarily increase its number of units sold because that expansion is important to them.
- For a non-profit organization: The **number of water purification stations installed** matters more than dollars donated or volunteer hours committed, although those secondary metrics help them toward its ultimate goal. Why are volunteer hours and money donated are secondary metrics? This non-profit would prefer a volunteer with more expertise who offers less hours than a volunteer with less experience. Also, the organization would prefer a local installation that requires less dollars donated in the first place than getting more dollars donated to fly someone out. The company focuses on its actual end goal: units installed.
- A maternity clothing e-commerce owner values **profit over revenue total or number of sales** because she needs to pay employees and take a healthy salary for herself as well.

2. Connect social media goals to the priority

The beauty company may want to expand its reach, impressions, engagement metrics, and click-throughs from UK-based social media users--not just all users in general.

The non-profit organization may want to focus on outreach metrics on LinkedIn with experts based in the countries where their projects are. The e-commerce business owner might care about click-throughs to product landing pages, especially those that are higher-margin products.

Notice that the three organizations have different business goals. Therefore, the social media metrics that matter to them differ.



"There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all social media strategy!"

Stephanie Leishman, Apiarity (@hatchsteph, @apiarity)



3. Set the SMART goal with all five characteristics

Specific

First, name the goal with specific language.

Goals that are too broad aren't attainable because the boundaries of the goal are fuzzy, so you don't know whether you have ever reached the goal. For example, the goal of "build awareness of our products" is too broad. A goal that is more specific might be "achieve an average reach of 3,400 on Facebook posts this year."

Examples of vague goals and how to make them more specific:

Too vague	Try this
Gain more customer satisfaction	Increase average Yelp rating
Increase social media engagement	Increase comments on our Instagram posts
Make customers feel special	Send customers personal Twitter replies
Sell more products	Sell more of our fall line via e-commerce

Measurable

A goal that is measurable is quantified in some way. If your goal contains a number, even better: an upper limit to reach or surpass, a percentage growth relative to last year, etc. In the example above, I chose an average reach of 3,400. I can actually measure my post reach over the year and prove whether or not I hit that goal.

Using our examples from above, let's make our goals measurable:

- Increase average Yelp rating **from 4 to 4.5 stars**
- Increase comments on our Instagram posts **to 14 per post**
- Send **30** customers personal Twitter replies
- Sell **5%** more products via the online store

Achievable

Goals that are achievable are realistic. Not too pessimistic (meaning too easy) and not too optimistic (meaning impossible). **Give yourself a goal that pushes and challenges you but can be achieved.**

For the goal to be achievable, something about the goal moves it from yet-to-be-achieved to achieved. Vague goals can never be achieved; they could go on forever. You can always gain "more awareness." When is the awareness enough?

One way to set an achievable goal is to break it down.

If you set an annual goal, divide the quantifiable metric of that goal by 12 to see what you need to achieve per month. Does the quantity seem realistic? Compare your goal to your achievements in previous years or months as well ... Is the increase you seek too aggressive? Is it just the same as last year, requiring no stretch?

Results-focused

Realistic goals are also results-focused.

If you set a goal that has no result or impact on your business, you will waste your time. For example, getting 10,000 Twitter followers is not a goal. There's no clear result or "why." Sure, it might be achievable, measurable, and even specific, but once reached it should have impact.

To make sure your goal is results-focused, add a "because" clause.

- Increase average Yelp rating from 4 to 4.5 stars **because I believe it will cause more customers to dine at our restaurant than at our biggest competitor's restaurant.**
- Increase comments on our Instagram posts to 14 per post **because it will increase our reach in people's Instagram feeds.**
- Send 30 customers personal Twitter replies **because I believe it will improve customer sentiment and improve long-term sales and customer retention.**
- Sell 5% more products via the online store **because it will help decrease our average selling (or SG&A) cost per good sold.**

Time-bound

For example, a goal to “increase engagement” has no end point. If you increase engagement from yesterday to today, are you done? Or is it an annual goal?

Give your goal a deadline and put it on your calendar. If it is a large annual goal with a metric that is a number, then divide that number by 12 months ... Now you have monthly mini-goals to reach that will get you to your end goal.

We live in a universe that experiences the passage of time, but each culture also has seasons and special markers of time that affect our goals. Many people tend to make goals for the year because most cultures have some sort of new year, whether it begins in January or another month.

In higher education, the calendar starts in the fall and finishes at the end of spring, at which point summer planning starts. Some industries report each fiscal quarter.

Determine the industry and cultural context for your business and make goals that make sense within that context.

Finally, what’s your deadline? Let’s add a deadline to our examples:

- Increase average Yelp rating from 4 to 4.5 stars **by the end of the fiscal year.**
- Increase comments on our Instagram posts to 14 per post **by August 1, when our new fall line launches.**
- Send 30 customers personal Twitter replies **every week.**
- Sell 5% more products via the online store **by June 15.**

Review for Specificity

Now review each of the steps above for specificity.

For example, is the “time” part of your goal an actual date?

It’s hard to achieve results when the deadline is “ASAP,” “soon,” “sometime next year,” or “when it feels right.”

Also, for the “results-focused” part of your goal, quantify it with dollars, number of units, percent growth, or some other standard unit of measure. It’s not a result if it’s as vague as “sell a lot of products” or “be successful.”



Types of Social Media Goals

Let's discuss some types of social media goals you might set for your efforts. Here are just a few of them.

Awareness-based goals

Goals that promote the awareness of a service, product, or organization are usually meant for anything that isn't getting trial or purchase because few people know about it.

You might set a goal for a percent penetration of awareness in certain groups. For example, if you were to poll 100 people who are members of a county Facebook Group, what percentage of them would have heard of your business?

A social media goal that would apply to that type of business goal might be something like "Increase total Facebook post impressions by 10% next quarter."

How might you achieve that goal?

You can keep posting at your usual frequency but create better content that is shared more by users. Or post more frequently with different types of content that reaches different networks of people.

Conversion-based goals

Perhaps profit or sales has something to do with your priority this year. Getting consumers to act with their wallet requires a conversion-based goal.

Social media metrics related to this priority usually include click-throughs to a purchase landing page.

If you want to increase purchases of your Pro-level subscription service, for example, your social media goal might look like this: "Get 1,500 click-throughs on our Facebook Ads for the Pro subscription by August 30."

How might you achieve this goal?

Study consumer behavior principles to optimize your ad content, so you are better able to influence Facebook users to want to click and not keep scrolling through their news feed. You might also better target your ads when selecting audiences.

Mistakes to Avoid

The types of mistakes you will want to avoid in setting SMART goals usually have to do with missing one of the letters in "S.M.A.R.T."

For example, some social media managers will set a really ambitious goal with a short timeline. Gaining one million Twitter followers in one week isn't totally impossible, but ... it's aggressive.

Maybe you are missing the "A" because it's not totally achievable. Perhaps your deadline of one week is just too short, meaning you're not totally missing the "T" (your goal is technically time-based), but it's not necessarily the best "T" for your goal.

Other social media managers tend to set a goal that is super-vague—maybe they want to "grow awareness of their brand." In that statement, the "S" (for specific) is missing, and so is the "M" for measurable. What would "more awareness" look like exactly?

One of the biggest mistakes I have seen is leaving out the "R" (for relevance).

Many well-meaning social media managers set a specific, time-bound goal that is achievable, but it ties to a different business priority than the one their organization is focused on.

An example

Years ago, the social media manager of a university museum came to one of my events. I asked how things were going, and she proudly beamed that she had set a goal to increase their shares and likes of social media posts significantly. And she had successfully done so.

Many people were sharing and liking the posts she was publishing on the museum's Facebook Page.

But ...

When I looked at their content later on, I noticed that they had been publishing a lot of BuzzFeed articles and funny animal GIFs that had nothing to do with their mission and vision as a museum. Hundreds of people had shared their GIFs.

What happened?

This social media manager had changed people's perception of the museum from a reputable, smart, creative place of learning to a junkyard of memes.

Did the Page get a lot of likes? Yes.

Did those likes translate into business goals achieved? Not really. In fact, if someone who had engaged with the Facebook Page had shown up to the museum, he or she might be surprised to find that the real-life experience was completely different than what they had experienced online.

Integrating Your SMART Goals Into Your Social Media Strategy

To integrate SMART goals into your social media strategy, I recommend you start backwards.

Use this following template to set your SMART goals and how you will achieve them.

Next, I have included instructions for this template, so keep reading.

SMART goals template

	Examples
Your Goal	Achieve 30,000 Facebook Impressions by June 30, Increase average Yelp review to 4.4 by June 30
S: Platform + Metric	Facebook Impressions, Yelp review average
M: Where will you gather the data	Facebook Insights dashboard
A: Is this goal within reach, and still stretch me?	Yes and yes
R: What is my organization's priority? Will achieving this goal impact my organization's priority?	Our restaurant wants to increase patrons per day and a higher Yelp review average would send more tourists our way.
T: Deadline, report dates, and goal progress per report	I want to reach my goal by June 30. I'll review metrics and put together a progress report every month until June 30. Since I am at an average 3.4-star rating on Yelp on January 1, I need to gain 0.1 stars every month. So, when I report on February 1, I should have achieved a 3.5-star rating.
Who will I report to?	Owner, Director of Marketing
How often will I report?	Every month at the beginning of the month

How will I integrate my SMART goal into my social media strategy?

Your approach to integrating your SMART goal into your strategy involves determining your actions.

Use a calendar

First, remember that **your goal must be time-bound**, so let's determine all the dates that should matter to you.

Get out your calendar and start marking off when you will gather, analyze, and report on your metrics. Perhaps it is the end of the calendar year. It could also be six weeks from when you launch a new product.

Give yourself a deadline.

Next, **write (into the dates) the results you expect due to your efforts within that time period**. What outcomes should you see on those deadlines? Perhaps you want to make a certain amount of revenue from a specific product by the end of the calendar year.



Set expected progress and track actual progress

What do you need to achieve to get those results? This is the action plan or tactics that have to happen for you to get the results you expect.

If you need to sell 5,000 units of one product by your deadline, then you can start to brainstorm the social media content and engagement within your power to get you there. **This is the step where you'll get your content calendar out and strategize what you will do every day until the deadline you set for the result you're looking for.**

An achievable goal is one that can break down into a tactical plan with tasks you can do.

A goal itself can't be done—it is the result—but what makes it a goal is its achievable quality, or the fact that it can be incrementally achieved through tasks as parts that make up the whole.

Let's add some achievable steps to our examples from above:

- Increase average Yelp rating from 4 to 4.5 stars
 - **Link to your profile in your email footer with the text "Find us on Yelp!"**
 - **Respond personally to each 1- and 2-star review**
- Increase comments on our Instagram posts to 14 per post
 - **Post questions that encourage responses**
 - **Ask customers to vote between two choices**
- Send 30 customers personal Twitter replies
 - **Identify customers on Twitter talking about our product/service**
 - **Attach unique GIFs to Twitter replies**
- Sell 5% more products via the online store
 - **Include links to products in at least a third of our social posts**
 - **Offer a promotion for those who shop online**

Calculate what you might need to do to achieve your goal.

For example, if every time you tweet a link and photo to your product you get X click-throughs and a certain percentage Y% of those click-throughs put the product in their online cart, then you have a conversion rate to help you know how many times you'll need to tweet a link to the product page before you get to your deadline date.

If it turns out you'd have to tweet about that product 10 times per day, and that's a bit much for your audience to handle, you will have to figure out a strategy for getting more people to that product page without being the most spammy business online.

Think about changing your Twitter bio's website field to that specific product page.

Consider pinning to Pinterest.

Run a user-generated social media campaign that goes up to a week before your deadline for customers to get a shout-out, free product, discount, or some other benefit for posting about the product.

When you report, define the metrics and what you achieved but also the impact of those metrics. Is there a dollar amount associated with the metrics? A qualitative impact on brand equity? Click-throughs on links, likes, comments, or answers to questions are all examples of metrics that can measure your achievements.

Plan your marketing actions

Next are the achievable social media tactics in your calendar.

Ask yourself questions like the following:

How many times will you tweet per day?

What call to action (CTA) will the content need to contain (e.g., a link to your website, email signup form, a specific product)?

What channels will you use and what messaging and frequency will they require to get you to the results you want?

And are your metrics specific?

Do you want to measure clicks on links in general, or do you specifically want to measure the clicks on the links to the product page?

Use Tools to Help You Achieve Your SMART Goal

A tool that helps with achieving your SMART goals is Airtable. This cloud-based database software helps you manage many different marketing tasks in a spreadsheet-like atmosphere, but build relational fields and tags that help you organize your efforts.

Airtable can switch the display of entries between list view, calendar view, and Kanban view (among other filtered, grouped, and sorted views). I can use Airtable to manage all my content as it moves through the publication timeline (viewing it in Kanban style) and then view entries in a list so that I can use a "count" formula to know how many pieces of content I've published that supports a unique SMART goal.

If you'd like to help your colleagues view past reports and keep goals top of mind, you could even share a cloud-based space that allows for knowledge sharing, such as Evernote or Notion.




Those tools feel like a shared Wiki where you can keep files, write rich-text notes, include links and tables, and do even more than that.

Keeping the whole team in the loop (and away from email, which is usually less effective for project management) is a key to success. Even a shared Google Drive folder can work wonders.

A social media management tool is critical to achieving your goals because it allows you to act on the different SMART criteria of your goals. For example, with a tool like Agorapulse, you can schedule content in advance and re-queue that content to continue posting through an end date. This allows you to promote a product or service for a specific amount of time. Choose a social media tool that has reporting capabilities so you can assess the measurable aspect of your goals.

Use a great social media management software to make your efforts more effective. Agorapulse has social media reports that help you assess your quantitative progress toward your measurable goal. What is unique to Agorapulse, for example, shows in its Facebook report how many comments and mentions I have reviewed and my response time.

From 8/19/2017 to 9/18/2017 ▾

Response time ⓘ		10h 39min				Hide ▾
		Reviewed	Deleted	Comments	Messages	Response time
	Sami Barud	289	11	24	3	10h 55min
	Ángela Monfón	104	0	2	0	2h 11min
	Thiara Deusdedith	44	0	1	0	20h 19min

So, if my goal is to reply to all social media messages with an average response time of 12 hours, Agorapulse keeps me accountable by showing my progress toward that goal.

Another tool you can use to track your goals is Trello, which has a Kanban setup, allowing you to list your marketing content and move it through phases, such as "upcoming," "draft done," and "published."

Evaluate Your Progress

After you have set your SMART goal, don't forget to report and evaluate. Did you make your deadline? If not, given how far you got, calculate when you might actually get there. How far off was your estimate? Did you achieve your result in full or in part? What is the gap between your goal and your achievement? Did you surpass your goals or did you fall short, and by what magnitude? This will help you set more appropriate goals next time.

Setting the right goals and your plan for achieving them takes as much work as actually achieving them! However, it's worth the upfront effort to get it right. The metaphor I use is: You don't want to hastily put down a train track to get your train moving but end up in New York when you wanted to arrive in Miami. If the goal is important to you, use the SMART framework and you will end up where you wanted to go.

Good luck!

About the Author

Stephanie Leishman is owner of Apiarity, a digital marketing agency that teaches and executes exceptional digital marketing strategy. She is a prolific writer, public speaker, and advisor. She earned MBA and MSIS degrees from Boston University and a Bachelor of Arts from Harvard. As co-founder and co-host of Positive Feedback Loop Podcast, she shows what it means to have meaningful and enjoyable discussions with those who disagree. She co-developed the popular edX course Strategic Social Media Marketing, in which more than 72,000 students have enrolled, and has published several books, chapters, and articles on business, marketing, and innovation. Prior to founding Apiarity, Leishman was MIT's first Social Media Strategist, building its online community to the millions with quirky, intelligent content that perfectly portrayed what makes MIT unique. At her core, she is both compassionate and effective; she received the Infinite Mile Award from MIT's Office of the President for her client relations and customer service. If you follow Stephanie on Twitter, you'll notice she engages authentically with those who ask her questions, and mentors those who seek to grow in the digital marketing industry.

Email: stephanie@apiarity.com

Twitter: @hatchsteph, @apiarity

LinkedIn: <http://linkedin.com/in/stephaniehatch>

Web: Apiarity.com

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