GUIDE

Social Selling Action Plan

Closing the Loop from Relationships to Revenue

Hootsuite™

Selling in the Digital Era

As a sales professional, you know that the buying process has changed. Whether you're in B2B or B2C, your customers are more sophisticated, more knowledgeable and more socially connected than they were even a few years ago. They have access to vast amounts of information, and can rely on huge peer networks for advice and expertise.

With so much information at their fingertips, buyers aren't interested in returning your cold calls. They do their own research. Recent studies show that today's business buyers do not contact suppliers directly until 57% of the purchase process is complete.

By the time they're willing to engage with you, they've come to their own conclusions, and you're just there to fulfill an RFP. You end up talking about features and price points, instead of having a strategic discussion. Sound familiar?

If you want to succeed in this sales environment, you need to reach buyers at the right times and know more about them and their needs than they know about you and your product. This is where social selling delivers. By being present on social media wherever your buyers are, you'll be better informed and more engaged with them at the critical moments of their decision-making process.

	1. AWARENESS	2. CONSIDERATION	3. TRANSACTION
Social Buying Process	Buyers use social media to actively search and evaluate products and vendors.		Buyers contact salesperson to request a proposal
Social Selling Response	Salesperson engages early in the buying process, builds a relationship as a trusted advisor, then closes the deal.		

Integrate Social Media into Your Workflow

Your potential customers don't limit themselves to just LinkedIn, so neither should you. It's vital to create a strong presence on multiple social networks, and to look for leads wherever they're communicating with their peers. With a rounded, real-time view of buyers, you'll improve your win rate, shorten your sales cycle, and grow your average deal size.

This guide will help you bring all of those channels into the Hootsuite dashboard, so you can smoothly incorporate social selling techniques into your regular routine. Remember, social media is not meant to replace the telephone or completely eliminate email. Instead, it's a new addition to your toolbox that will make communicating in other modes far more productive and time efficient.

This guide to social selling will help you maximize your results, using five key concepts that span the entire sales cycle: CLOSE

Create Compelling Social Profiles & Presence

One of your primary goals for social media should be to maintain an online persona as a trusted advisor. Present yourself as someone who is knowledgeable about your industry, attuned to customer needs, and focused on helping buyers overcome business challenges.

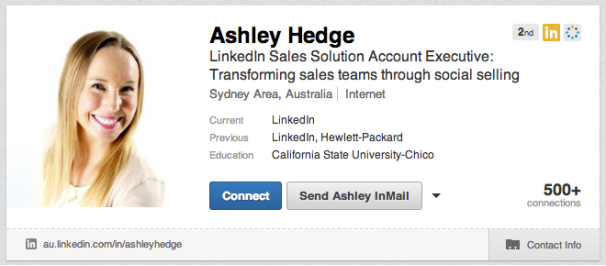
Show buyers that you're someone who can provide value in a consultative role, and they'll be far more likely to respond to your outreach.

Create Customer-Centric Social Media Profiles

You're looking to make sales, not land a new job, so build your social media profiles for prospects instead of recruiters. Think about it from the perspective of your prospects: how impressed will they be if your LinkedIn profile merely summarizes your previous work experience? Knowing that you exceeded quota for a former employer isn't relevant information for potential customers. There's nothing wrong with emphasizing relevant industry experience, but make sure to frame it in terms of customer value. Highlight the benefits that you can provide for buyers.

Your personal social brand is the foundation to your social blueprint. You need a strong profile and presence to build your sales success.

Gerry Moran,
Senior Director, Social Media Marketing at SAP



- What business objectives have you helped people accomplish?
- How do you help customers be successful?
- What knowledge can you offer them?

Leave a Trail of Content that Brings Prospects to You

Your social media persona is visible to potential customers 24/7, passively acting on your behalf even when you're not online. If you make your expertise visible by sharing useful articles, white papers, infographics and advice across multiple social networks, buyers will discover you at the early stages of their buying cycle while they're still building awareness and researching solutions.

Use Content Discovery Apps

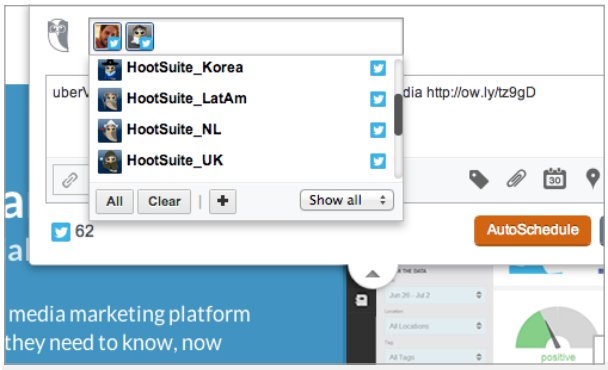
trendspottr Nexalogy ENVIRONICS

You don't have to write all that content yourself. Save time by using tools to discover and share great content that already exists. Create a new tab in your Hootsuite dashboard and populate it with custom Twitter search streams, RSS feeds, and content discovery apps from the Hootsuite App Directory. When you find an item worth sharing with your contacts, share it directly from your stream or schedule it to go out at a more opportune time.

With trendspottr, discover trending content as soon as it starts to heat up, so you can be the first to share it with your prospects and offer your own opinions and insights. At a glance, see the top concepts, hashtags, and links among the people you follow on Twitter with Nexalogy.

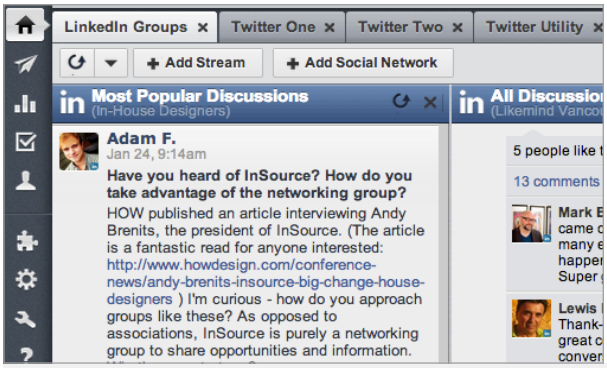
Participate in Social Communities

Participating in LinkedIn Groups, Twitter live chats and the comment sections of important blogs will make you valuable and visible at the early stages of your prospects' buying journeys, even before they make contact with you. When you respond to someone's question on one of these channels with useful advice or compelling content, you highlight your expertise for every other member of the community.



Install the Hootlet extension for Chrome or Firefox

When you discover valuable web content for your prospects and customers, you'll be able to share it right away without even having to open up the Hootsuite dashboard. Schedule your posts for a specific time or let the AutoSchedule tool work its magic. This browser extension will save you time by letting you share content right from the source as soon as you discover it.



Monitor up to 10 LinkedIn groups in one tab

Switching back and forth between all of your LinkedIn groups can eat up your time and kill your workflow. Use Hootsuite to manage all of your LinkedIn groups from one interface, with up to 10 groups side-by-side in each tab.

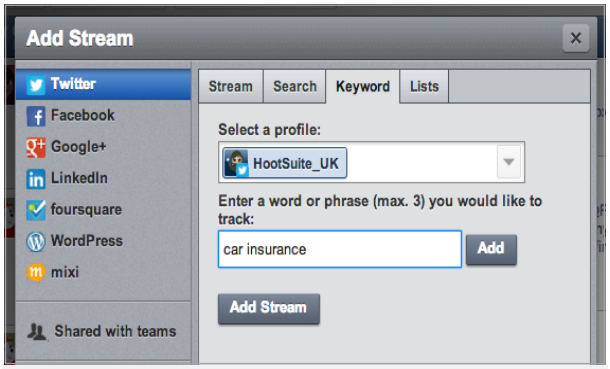
Listen to What Your Industry is Saying

In order to serve your prospects as a trusted partner, you need to keep up-to-date with developments and trending topics in your industry that could impact their companies and their professional objectives.

Combine your research on social media with traditional sources such as news stories, corporate websites, press releases and annual reports to gain a holistic view of your prospects and industry.

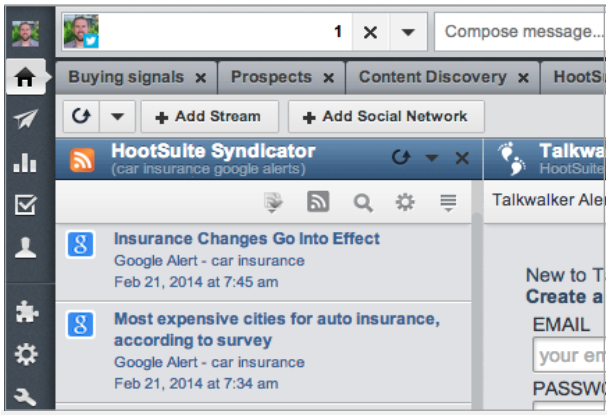
Monitor Twitter Hashtags

Hashtags are an excellent way to monitor and reach people who have self-associated around a particular topic, trend or idea in your space. To discover the most active and influential hashtags, use the Nexalogy app and look for them in your prospects' own Twitter messages and profiles. If you're at an event or conference, make sure to follow the official hashtag to discover new leads.



Create Keyword Streams

The best way to track hashtags in Hootsuite is to create keyword streams. Each keyword stream can track up to three different words or phrases, so you can group similar hashtags into the same stream. You don't need to include the "#" symbol.



Bring Google Alerts into your Dashboard

Google Alerts are an excellent way to monitor buying signals from non-social sources, and you can make them visible in your Hootsuite dashboard alongside your social media streams. Create RSS feeds for your custom Google Alerts and then add them to Hootsuite with the Hootsuite Syndicator app. Never miss important developments at companies you are targeting.

Observe Prospect Buying Signals

Your future customers are in plain view on social media, talking about their business needs, asking questions about issues in your industry, revealing intelligence about their own companies, and reaching out to their peers for advice.

Listening for these real time buying signals on multiple social networks will allow you to not only find new leads but also identify when prospects are at the most important moments of their buying process.

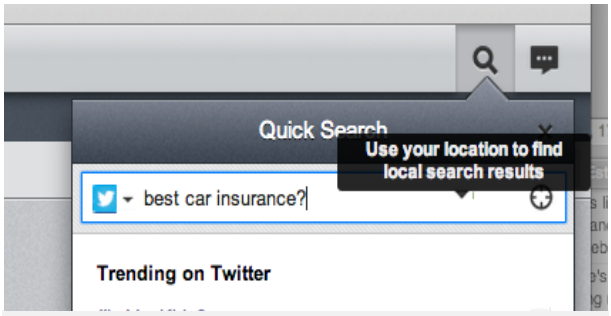
Discover More Leads With Early Stage Buying Signals

Modern buyers complete most of their buying process before they reach out to a vendor. The good news is that those critical early stages of the cycle aren't happening behind closed doors, but on social media where you can see them. Early stage buying signals indicate that leads are near the beginning of their decision-making process, when they can be challenged to think strategically.

Examples of early stage buying signals:

- Question about a business problem
- Frustration with a competitor's solution
- Announcement of new senior management hire that indicates budget expansion
- Geographic expansion

If someone is signalling that they're in the early stages of their purchasing cycle, help them, don't sell to them. Give them advice, or empower them with awareness-building content from your marketing department and links to third-party sources. By influencing their thinking early on, you can effectively position your solution against the competition and expand the scope of your discussions to grow eventual deal size.



Set up custom Twitter search streams to find leads

You can't spend your whole day monitoring social media for buying signals. The trick is to work it into your daily routine in a systematic way.

- Set up Twitter search streams in your Hootsuite dashboard to persistently look for the keywords and phrases that people in your space use when they start looking for solutions to their pain points.
- If you work in a geographic territory, you can filter your streams to only display tweets from people within a specified radius.

Find Late Stage Buying Signals to Close Deals Quickly

Recognizing late stage buying signals will help you focus your efforts on prospects who are looking for help and ready to make decisions, and stop wasting time on those who aren't. Look for prospects that are actively considering solutions, then rapidly assist them by answering their questions and providing them with relevant, educational content. It all adds up to a shorter sales cycle and more closed deals.

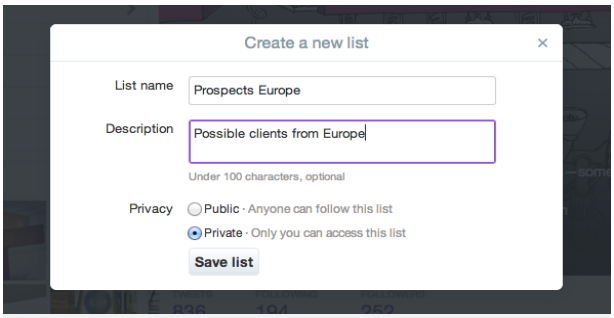
Examples of late stage buying signals:

- Request for product or service recommendations
- Engagement with a competitor's sales engineer
- Request for pricing information

Monitor Your Competitors and Partners

Keeping an eye on your competitors' interactions on social media will not only help you discover more leads, but give you valuable insight into where their prospects are in the buying process.

- If someone is interacting with a competitor's lead development representative, they're in the early stages. Help them with awareness-building content and seek to influence how they're conceptualizing their needs.
- Social connections with a competitor's sales engineer are a sure sign that a prospect is in the late stages of their process, evaluating solutions. Move quickly to make a connection if you haven't already, and look to provide more sales-focused content such as a buyer's guide or feature checklist.



Use Twitter list streams to monitor prospects

By setting up dedicated streams in your Hootsuite dashboard to monitor prospects, you'll be able to stay in touch with them more frequently and make sure no good opportunity for engagement is missed.

- Organize your prospects into Twitter lists that align with your sales workflow. For example, you can group them by company, geography, or industry.
- Make your Twitter lists private, or your competitors (and everyone else) will be able to see who you're monitoring.
- Create a "Prospects" tab in your Hootsuite dashboard, then add up to 10 different Twitter list streams to monitor side-by-side.
- Filter your Twitter list streams by keyword to hone in on buying signals. You can adjust your filters at any time. To discover questions that you can answer for prospects, filter for the "?" mark.

Social selling generates 40% more qualified leads and opportunities than cold calling.

(Source: Customer Think)

Seek a Warm Connection

With some quick research on social media, you can discover shared contacts, interests, hobbies, and other common ground for starting a new relationship.

Every new connection you make through social channels will open up new opportunities for referrals and introductions to decision-makers.

Gain a 360-Degree View of Your Prospects

According to CSO Insights, 42% of sales reps feel they do not have the right information before making a call. If you're not prepared, even the most promising lead can be lost after just one phone call. Buyers expect you to know who they are and what keeps them up at night before you call them, not after.

The most effective way to gain insight into your contacts and their companies is to integrate multiple sources of intelligence. That means being present everywhere your prospects are, whether it's LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Slideshare, Google+, Pinterest, or any other social network. When you make new contacts, make sure to find them on other channels for a comprehensive view of their personalities, interests, and business contexts.

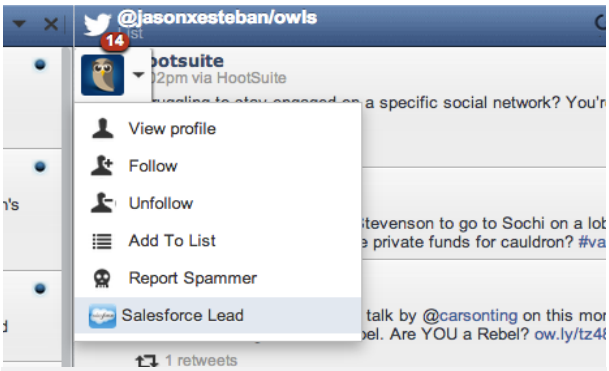
Turn Cold Calls into Warm Calls

Social media isn't the best place to make a sales pitch, but it's invaluable for making first contact with prospects. With a few non-interruptive interactions on social media, you can establish a precedent for a personalized email or a phone call. If a lead already recognizes your name, you're far more likely to make a good impression during the all-important first call.

- Reply to their questions to demonstrate your expertise and willingness to help.
- Follow them on as many social channels as you can find them on. Follow them even if you don't consider them a high priority in the short term, because they are likely to follow you back. This will bring them into your social audience, allowing you to convert them with quality content and messaging over the long haul.
- Like, Share, and re-Tweet their posts, but don't overdo it. Pick the updates that you find most relevant and make it clear where your interests overlap with your prospects.

90% of prospects hit the delete button when receiving an email from someone they do not know.

(Source: Inside view)



Push intelligence from social media into CRM

Save time and streamline your lead generation from social media by connecting Hootsuite with your CRM system, such as Salesforce or SugarCRM. CRM integrations in the Hootsuite App Directory allow you to gather personal and contextual information from social media profiles, then push it to new or existing lead records in your CRM, directly from the Hootsuite dashboard. This will give you a rounded view of your leads that you can access at any point during your sales process.

Before LinkedIn and other social networks, in the sales world, ABC stood for Always Be Closing. Now, ABC means Always Be Connecting, because your connections lead to your next lead and your next close.

Jill Rowley,
Social Selling Evangelist

Hootsuite University offers a step-by-step best practice course on how to generate leads and close deals with social selling.

42% of sales reps feel they do not have the right information before making a call.

(Source: CSO Insights)

Educate your Prospects for Success

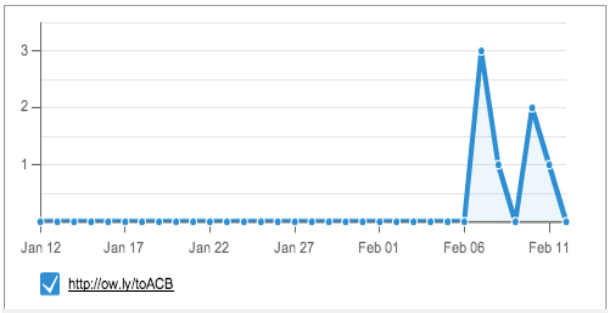
With buying cycles getting longer, there will be times when you're not directly communicating with prospects—but that doesn't mean they're not still evaluating you against your competitors.

Social media allows you to stay top-of-mind during periods when you would otherwise go dark, by responding to developments at their companies and in their industries with credible, relevant information. Transform yourself from a vendor into a trusted advisor.

Choose Appropriate Content

When communicating with individual prospects, it's important to utilize the best content for the situation. Leverage material from your marketing department and independent sources that's crafted for people in their role and industry. Don't add to their information overload—help them cut through it.

> Social selling is not chit-chat. It's leveraging relationships and insights to create a better buying experience.
>
> *Ralf VonSosen, LinkedIn*



See whether your prospects are ready for a follow-up

When you share content with your prospects, use a link shortener such as ow.ly to make your links trackable. For links you provide in private messages or emails, a quick look at the ow.ly click stats will tell you whether your prospect has viewed the content, so you can follow up with them to talk about it.

95% of B2B buyers chose the vendor that supplied relevant content throughout the sales process.

(Source: Demand Report, 2010)

About Hootsuite Enterprise

Partner with Hootsuite to accelerate your social transformation

Hootsuite Enterprise empowers organizations to execute business strategies for the social media era. As the world's most widely used social relationship platform, Hootsuite Enterprise enables global businesses to scale social media activities across multiple teams, departments, and business units. Our versatile platform supports a thriving ecosystem of technology integrations, allowing businesses to extend social media into existing systems and programs.

We help organizations create deeper relationships with customers and draw meaningful insights from social media data. Innovating since day one, we continue to help businesses pioneer the social media landscape and accelerate their success through education and professional services.

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