

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE B2B BUYING PROCESS



By David Verwey,
VP of EMEA

www.INFUSEmedia.com

Synopsis:

- How social media marketing fits into demand generation efforts
- Social media marketing's possibilities, challenges and best practices for driving demand outcomes
- Example social media marketing campaign illustrating key concepts

It is undeniable that social media platforms have woven themselves into our lives. Indeed, [a 2022 GWI report](#) found that users spend an average of 2 hours and 26 minutes per day on social media, and that 77% of brand discovery happens through these platforms.

Following brands, comparing products, and locating social proof are all examples of buyer interactions that can be conducted via social media. For instance, according to the same study, finding more information on products and brands is reported by users to be the 2nd top reason for using LinkedIn.

This ties into the recent changes seen in the B2B buyer journey: more independent buyers who undertake deep research before taking any action towards a purchase. Marketers must therefore be attentive to leverage all platforms used by their prospects to learn about possible solutions to their pain points. This makes establishing a solid social media presence essential to boost the outcomes of marketing efforts, and contribute to the success of [demand generation](#) strategies.

This article shares insights on **strategic uses of social media to drive marketing results**, as well as how to tackle its top challenges and ensure best practices.

What is social media marketing?

Social media marketing (SMM) is a digital marketing strategy that involves the use of social media platforms, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram, to promote a brand. It encompasses activities such as community management, paid advertising, [content marketing](#), and social listening.

This approach centers on the creation and sharing of content to engage with audiences and drive brand awareness—making social media marketing a core element of demand generation strategies.

According to the [Content Marketing Institute's research on B2B content marketing trends for 2023](#), 95% of B2B marketers utilised social media to distribute content in the last 12 months, with 85% of them having used paid promotion on these platforms.

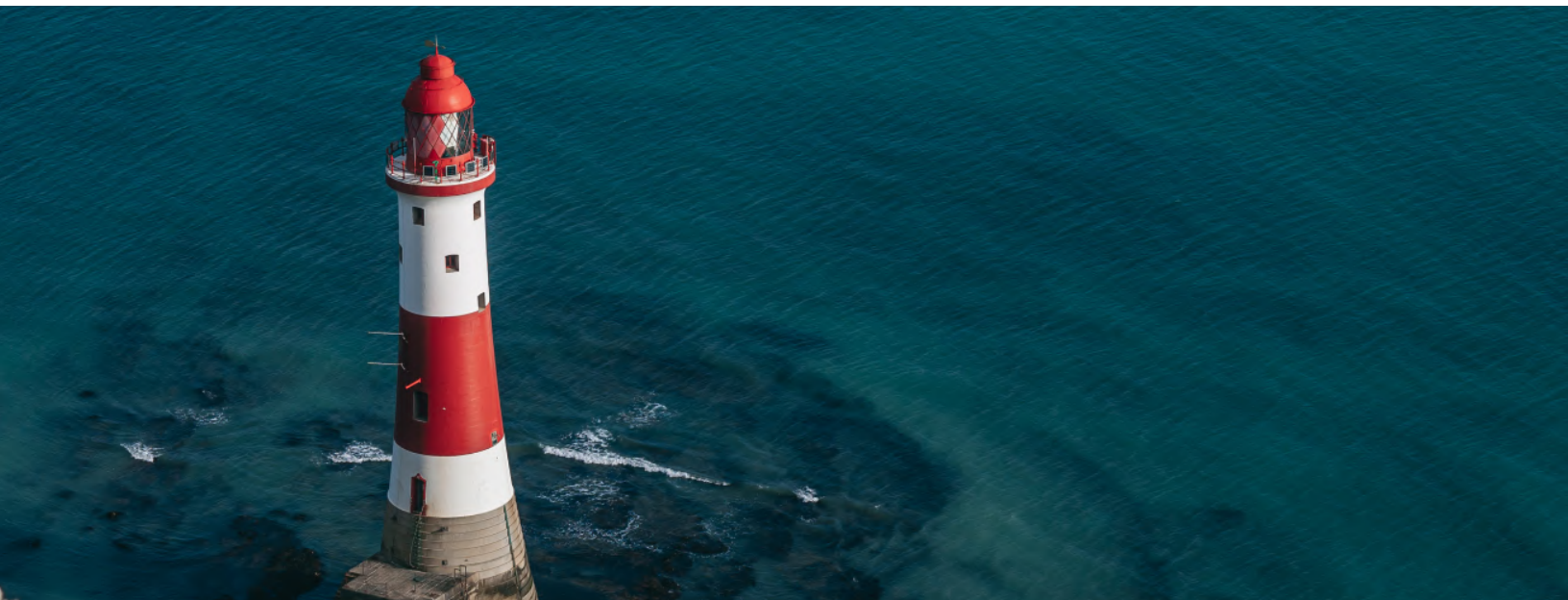
Why is social media important and how can it drive outcomes for businesses?

Social media has a myriad of uses that each contribute to driving results for different business initiatives. For example, it offers an unrivaled capability for businesses to directly reach and connect with their audiences, humanising the brand and earning trust, as companies leverage these platforms to build relationships with their prospects and clients.

Furthermore, social media marketing is a great approach to drive brand awareness and increase inbound traffic, due to it being the [preferred channel for users to discover new brands and products](#) (GWI, 2023 Global Report). Some platforms, such as LinkedIn and Instagram, even include [lead generation](#) opportunities, via forms, landing pages, and calls-to-action (CTAs), among other resources.

Finally, another core use of social media in B2B marketing is as a [lead nurturing channel](#). Nurturing cadences must be delivered in a series of different formats to cater to different buyer preferences, which highlights the importance of social media marketing to ensure the personalisation of the brand nurturing experience.

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Social media marketing duties for each sales funnel stage

Thanks to its immense versatility, social media can be leveraged to support strategies throughout all stages of the sales funnel.

However, marketers must be ready to not only craft resonating copy, but also to employ assets such as images and video, due to the especially remarkable impact of posts featuring these. On LinkedIn, for instance, posts with images, on average, result in a [98% higher comment rate](#) when compared with plain text. Video posts across all social media, on the other hand, tend to generate [1200% more shares](#) than pictures and text combined. In sum, it is essential to research the most effective ways of sharing content on each platform, to ensure optimal results.



This section explores social media marketing's specific goals in each funnel stage:



Top of funnel (TOFU)

Social media marketing strategies can be implemented in the top of funnel (TOFU) stage, with a specific focus on building brand awareness and reaching new audiences, via targeted advertising, or sharing content organically. In this stage, free, bite-size content featuring attractive visuals, such as infographics, is your best option to draw user attention.

LinkedIn, the preferred platform for B2B social media marketing ([utilised by 96% of B2B marketers](#)), even has its own proprietary lead search solution, the Sales Navigator, which Sales Development Representatives (SDRs) can use to prospect for [qualified leads and accounts](#).

Launch your TOFU demand generation campaigns with

[How to Kickstart Your Demand Generation Strategy for Success: Top of Funnel Guide](#) →





Middle of funnel (MOFU)

As your leads progress on their buyer's journeys, social media marketing has other functions that can be explored to encourage these prospects to continue down the sales funnel.

In the [MOFU stage](#), social platforms can be leveraged to address client queries, engage leads in nurturing cadences, and attract visitors to your website, where prospects can offer opt-in information in exchange for valuable gated content. Marketers should strive to build social media strategies at this stage to establish and strengthen relationships with prospects, creating a [positive client experience](#) (CX) that keeps your brand top of mind.



Bottom of funnel (BOFU)

For the BOFU stage, social media platforms offer an opportunity to boost engagement with BOFU leads in your audience by amplifying the reach of social proof, such as testimonials or case studies. BOFU leads who indicate [intent](#) to purchase are also prime candidates for social media advertising that features limited-time offers, encouraging conversions.

These platforms can also be leveraged as nurturing channels for BOFU leads that require further nurturing before being pushed towards a sale, complementing strategies deployed across multiple channels, such as email.

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Post-sale stage

Social media marketing also plays a role after leads have converted and can help to keep current clients engaged, as well as lead to stronger [relationships](#), brand loyalty, and evangelism. Furthermore, referral programs, [surveys](#), and feedback requests can all be actioned with clients on social media platforms, all of which offer relevant insights to inform marketing efforts.

At this stage, social media can also be utilised to kickstart driving upsells or cross-sells for other products or services, enhancing client lifetime value (CLTV).

Unsure of which type of content to post on your brand's social media? Download our [Social Media Content Type Cheatsheet](#) to maximise your performance →



10 strategic uses of social media marketing to boost demand generation outcomes

These are some of the most effective ways to leverage social media marketing in your demand strategies:



1. Lead nurturing

As evidenced, social media has the potential to be incredibly useful as a lead nurturing channel and an alternative for ensuring that content is delivered to prospects on their preferred platforms, and contribute to expanding reach with paid advertisement and organic sharing.

Furthermore, leveraging social media alongside other nurturing channels helps to diversify your channel approach, avoiding lead fatigue. This also grants prospects greater freedom to determine their own buyer's journey, amounting to an improved experience, and paving the way for tactics such as multichannel marketing and omnichannel marketing.

Read our [Definitive Guide to B2B Lead Nurturing](#) to drive conversions with high-performing nurturing cadences →





2. Multichannel and omnichannel strategies

As single-channel marketing strategies lose efficiency and become obsolete, campaigns leveraging multiple marketing channels, including social media, grow to be the industry standard. Marketers hoping to stay ahead have two primary approaches to choose from: multichannel marketing and omnichannel marketing.

Both strategies leverage multiple channels to reach their leads and prospects, but achieve this in distinct ways. Multichannel marketing leverages different channels separately, with each performing distinct strategic functions, whereas omnichannel marketing is based on a client-centric outlook that aims to deliver a single, uniquely personalised experience that transitions seamlessly between channels.

Therefore, social media platforms play a crucial role in both of these strategies, as their ubiquity makes them advantageous to reach prospects and clients.

Decide on the right strategy for you with our guide: [Omnichannel Marketing vs. Multichannel Marketing](#) →



3. Social listening

Social listening refers to the process of tracking and analysing social media conversations that directly mention your brand, industry, competitors, and other related topics. Thus, businesses can acquire relevant data that serves as a reference to plan marketing initiatives and ensure their relevance to target audiences.

To ensure the efficiency of your social listening practices, it is essential to select the appropriate topics, keywords, and hashtags to monitor. As a starting step, identify your audience's predominant demographics, interests, and behaviours to help draw correlations.

By conducting an in-depth analysis of data and tracked conversations, marketers can evaluate audience opinion and general sentiment towards your brand, competitors, and industry developments. Furthermore, social listening grants insights into major pain points and audience preferences, such as [favoured channels](#) and ideal posting times and frequency.

Finally, regular analysis of social listening findings is essential to keep track of changing behaviour and ensure your strategies are based on up-to-date data.



4. Enabling sales representatives

Strong alignment between marketing and sales teams is crucial to ensure the maximum efficiency of your strategies. Just as SDRs must strive to leverage their close contact with leads to glean valuable insights that bolster marketing initiatives, marketers should leverage relevant data gathered from social listening practices (alongside other marketing feedback) to equip salespeople with relevant materials. Sales teams can then keep prospects engaged with these assets, and encourage their progression.

The rise of social selling



By Mukesh Rajpurohit,
VP of APAC Sales

Social selling is a sales strategy in which SDRs leverage social media platforms to build relationships with prospects and clients. As these networks become increasingly ingrained in our daily lives, social selling offers SDRs the ability to reach prospects directly, wherever they may be, while also helping to avoid the complexities associated with buying lead lists—which often fail on delivering ROI due to outdated and unqualified contacts.

In addition, we must consider the undeniable changes in the way we approach buying, especially after the pandemic. More than ever, prospects utilise social platforms to acquire information on new brands and products—with 75% of B2B buyers relying on social media to inform purchase decisions, according to research conducted by LinkedIn. The same research reports that, as a consequence of these changes, 78% of SDRs who leverage social selling achieve greater performance than those who do not.

These factors highlight the importance of leveraging social media networks as channels in all sales strategies, catering to the evolving needs and preferences of buyers. For this reason, social selling has the potential to overcome cold calling as an outreach tactic, making the sales process more personal and convenient.



5. Community building

Community building around a brand, even if a long-term and complex endeavour, helps companies keep their clients and prospects engaged, leading to a steady flow of qualified leads, renewals, and recommendations.

Establishing a solid community also helps businesses earn brand awareness and client loyalty, while presenting an accurate, trustworthy source of feedback that grants unique insights into an audience's pain points.

Utilising social media to build communities involves not only monitoring and replying to user interaction, but also fostering meaningful, productive conversations among audience members. Leveraging user-generated content (UGC) also helps to build relationships with dedicated followers, and may serve as a powerful source of social proof. Finally, these platforms offer great opportunities for promoting incentivised referral programs and gifting campaigns, as the inherently social nature of these channels enables users to easily share your content.

However, prior to launching your community building initiatives, be sure to identify and target the appropriate audience, through social listening, for example. Furthermore, social media community management can be a time-intensive activity that often relies on third-party software—which makes it essential to allocate sufficient budget and resources.



6. Thought leadership

According to [LinkedIn research](#), 60% of surveyed buyers identify thought leadership as one of the most powerful tools for new brands to build trust in their product categories, while 47% of buyers state that thought leadership initiatives encouraged them to purchase from companies not leading in their industries.

In social media marketing, thought leadership should be promoted via company leaders' and salespeople's personal profiles, through which they develop their personal brand and reach unique audiences. This helps cement their position as experts, which, in turn, earns the company client trust and engagement. Furthermore, team members and executives must play an active role in supporting brand initiatives on social media by boosting each other's posts and engaging in discussions.

Such an approach becomes especially effective as human-to-human (H2H) marketing continues to gain popularity, placing greater value on forging relationships between a brand and its audience.

[Discover how to create and leverage high-performing thought leadership content](#) →





7. Influencer marketing

Influencers are individuals who guide their followers with their opinion to affect perception, behaviour, and purchasing decisions. In the B2B space, these influencers gain prestige for their unique perspectives, knowledge, and authority in their fields (essentially, thought leadership). Influencer marketing, therefore, involves striking [partnerships](#) with these individuals in order to achieve certain marketing goals.

Partnerships must be established based on the audience, reach, and engagement of each influencer to achieve the desired outcomes of campaigns. Be sure to research and choose B2B influencers who are an authority in their niche and effectively engage their communities.

Furthermore, be sure to provide influencers with clear terms in partnership proposals, including the [content creation](#) process expected for the campaign. Consider revisiting campaigns while they are live to offer the influencer additional guidelines and assets to ensure success.

Finally, it is essential to track the performance of these campaigns. These are some **KPIs to analyse the outcomes of your influencer marketing campaigns:**

- **Reach** (total number of views or impressions)
- **Engagement rate** (percentage of viewers who interact with the campaign, such as liking and commenting)
- **Conversion rate** (percentage of viewers who take the action motivated by the campaign, such as signing up for a newsletter)
- **ROI** (revenue generated by the campaign when accounting for the initial investment)





8. Paid media advertising

Most social media platforms offer paid advertising solutions, which allow companies to go beyond their follower base and extend their reach to new, unengaged audiences. Platforms provide highly detailed targeting options that allow brands to engage with audiences most in line with their ICP and [buyer personas](#), increasing the likelihood of engagement and conversion.

Paid social media advertising also plays an important role in deep funnel marketing techniques, which make use of pixels, cookies, and other data collection systems to track lead progress in individual buyer journeys, and deliver retargeted ads that offer content according to their stage in the buying process.

Social media networks also offer programmatic marketing options, which leverage real-time bidding on digital advertising space. Programmatic marketing systems analyse user profiles and match them with different ads from an inventory, conducting split-second automated biddings, optimising placement and cost-effectiveness.

Furthermore, programmatic marketing provides rich data insights that enable marketers to enhance their targeting accuracy, therefore increasing their return on ad spend (ROAS). For this reason, this marketing method aligns perfectly with performance marketing strategies, which focus on delivering tangible, measurable outcomes (such as measuring cost per click, CPC).

[Discover the potential of programmatic media buying to drive results for B2B marketing efforts](#) →



9. Hashtags

Hashtags are keywords marked by the number sign (#) that serve as search identifiers in different social media channels, often utilised to indicate topics, inviting other interested people to the discussion.

For this reason, hashtags present a unique opportunity for brands to join ongoing conversations to engage prospects, by utilising trending hashtags related to the audience's interests to tag their content. This also helps users in the same niche to discover these brands, expanding reach and attracting new prospects.

To leverage hashtags in social media marketing strategies, marketers must first identify and analyse hashtags that may resonate with the audience's interests, monitor user behaviour (social listening), and collect insights to inform their initiatives. Brands with a well-established social media audience can also utilise unique or branded hashtags for effects similar to that of catchphrases or slogans, earning brand awareness.

However, there are some necessary precautions for utilising hashtags in your social media posts, such as avoiding an excessive number of hashtags to not be marked as spam. Furthermore, hashtags must be thoroughly researched to better understand the way they are currently used, avoiding negative interpretations.

Finally, remember to [measure the success](#) of content utilising different hashtags, in order to discover which ones best resonate with your audience.



10. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a business approach that seeks to integrate social concerns into a company's business practices. This concept has rapidly grown to be a standard among large companies not only for its inherent importance, but also to address changing public demands.

Social media grants businesses a unique opportunity to showcase their CSR initiatives and get prospects involved—visually appealing posts, thought leadership content, and hashtags are some social media strategies that can be leveraged to boost the visibility of your CSR efforts.

Furthermore, as the general public develops deeper awareness of social and environmental issues, they become more likely to take action and engage with campaigns that resonate with their personal values and causes.

For this reason, it is also beneficial for companies to establish [psychographic](#) profiles on their audiences, seeking to uncover interests and values that may resonate with ongoing CSR programs, or even serve as a starting point for new initiatives.

[Unlock the full potential of psychographic segmentation with our Definitive Guide to B2B Psychographics](#) →



Top challenges in social media marketing

Here are some common challenges of social media marketing to be mindful of when building campaigns:

- ▮ **Lack of alignment between departments:** Misaligned sales and marketing efforts create friction across the buyer's journey, which can be especially damaging considering the rising expectation for seamless experiences in their buying processes. Furthermore, good alignment avoids data silos and enables the sharing of data insights. It is therefore no surprise that, according to [LinkedIn research on client value](#), 87% of sales and marketing leaders state that aligning these departments is a crucial step towards business growth.



Discover 10 best practices for driving sales and marketing alignment in a [whitepaper by INFUSE Founder & CEO Alexander Kesler](#) →



- ▮ **Lead attribution:** Gleaning attributed insights from social media efforts can be difficult, especially in an era in which [omnichannel marketing strategies](#) are becoming an industry standard. Although many platforms offer tracking and analytics tools, many interactions exceed the reach of these technologies, giving rise to what is known as the dark funnel. In social media marketing, dark social is the term for all social traffic that cannot be tracked by analytics, such as sharing of materials via private messaging apps.

Offering user-friendly share buttons with embedded tracking, conducting social listening, and implementing trackable QR codes for live events are all viable ways to avoid the dark funnel.

Discover how to track unseen buyer behaviour to glean powerful insights with our [Definitive Guide to the B2B Dark Funnel](#) →



- **Proving ROI and gaining stakeholder buy-in:** Managing social media communications, especially with community building initiatives in play, is a time-intensive task that often requires dedicated hiring, and usually leverages specific software. For this reason, significant investments are demanded, and marketers often struggle with securing buy-in. Furthermore, some of social media marketing's goals are oriented toward long-term results, which can be challenging when trying to [assess ROI](#). This gives rise to a catch-22 situation in which social media initiatives demand investments in order to prove their ROI and earn further investment. To avoid such pitfalls, marketers may rely on third-party data and research that highlight social media's unique marketing potential.



Best practices for B2B social media marketing

Below is a list of best practices social media marketing to tackle challenges and support performance:

- **Utilise a robust and up-to-date tech stack:** Leverage the right tools and platforms to collect accurate data insights, reduce workloads, and ensure efficiency. Selecting software capable of tracking lead behaviour and analysing campaign results, as well as listening to your audience and competitor's conversations around your brand and industry, is crucial to gain actionable insights. There are a myriad of social media marketing management tools, such as Semrush, Outreach, Salesrobot, or the LinkedIn Sales Navigator.



- **Leverage your audience's preferred platforms:** Although LinkedIn predominates as the standard for B2B social media marketing, it is important to analyse data on your audience's channel preferences, implementing multichannel and omnichannel approaches that leverage their preferred platforms to deliver personalised experiences.
- **Favour a personable tone:** While mass communications such as press releases, statements, and articles should follow a more concise tone for the sake of professionalism, it is important for individual SDRs to make use of an amicable, warm tone in their communications with clients and prospects, fostering a sense of community, proximity, and trust. This is a particularly prudent strategy given the rise of H2H marketing and the importance of personalisation.
- **Share insights from social media data across all departments:** It is imperative to share collected insights across all departments that may benefit from them. Ensure open communications between sales, marketing, creative, and product development teams to make sure that data insights direct all efforts.
- **Review all social media content prior to publishing:** The fast-paced nature of social media communications favours agile publishing. This trait of social media marketing, however, can also backfire: posts that give way to misinterpretations, comments in poor taste, and other *faux pas* may be quickly shared among your audience, leading to a significant impact on Public Relations (PR). Therefore, having an agile and in-depth content review process is a must to mitigate such risks and ensure consonance with your brand voice.
- **Measure results, compare performance, and update strategies:** As with other marketing strategies, it is crucial to keep track of your campaigns' performance, selecting the most relevant KPIs prior to launch and accompanying their evolution. This enables marketers to locate improvement points to be actioned in future iterations of campaigns, ensuring maximum efficiency over time.



Example social media marketing campaign

WorkSafe is a B2B company that specialises in personal protective equipment (PPE) and provides assessments to ensure client facilities and services meet legal PPE requirements. WorkSafe aimed to boost their marketing performance by leveraging social media marketing, and designed and implemented the following campaign:



1. Conducting audience research and social listening

As a starting step in their campaign, WorkSafe analysed current followers to identify audience segments, looking into demographics, verticals, and interests to create detailed buyer personas. Furthermore, the company conducted social listening on topics related to their practice, their brand, and major competitors.

From this, WorkSafe could notice a predominance in their audience of male 35+ year-old project managers, working in construction and manufacturing verticals. Worker safety was a priority topic, but their marketers also noticed a trending concern with worker mental health. This information serves as a foundation for accurate targeting and content creation.

2. Attracting new audiences and expanding reach

Armed with the data insights, WorkSafe crafted easily-digestible posts with visually appealing content, such as infographics, regarding personal worker safety and PPE legislation. By making strategic use of hashtags and promoting their posts via influencer partnerships, WorkSafe ensured their posts were delivered to a wider audience, earning new followers that proceeded to share content, boosting reach even further. Furthermore, a steady stream of CSR posts cemented WorkSafe's brand values of workplace well-being, industrial safety, and health concerns, contributing to brand awareness.

3. Creating community building efforts

In order to focus on building meaningful relationships with their clients and prospects, WorkSafe published thought leadership content that sparked deep discussions across social platforms. The company then allocated dedicated marketing professionals to interact with these visitors, answering questions and furthering the discussion, earning the brand a reputation of being a caring, human-based initiative.



4. Delivering accurate nurturing cadences

Employing lead scoring and qualification methods, WorkSafe compiled a list of social media users that engaged the most with their posts, filtering for the appropriate verticals and company sizes. These leads were then engaged with nurturing cadences sent through their preferred platform—in this case, LinkedIn, via InMail.

WorkSafe also engaged these leads via other channels such as emails and events with an omnichannel approach to deliver relevant content according to their progress in the buyer's journey. Keeping careful track of these leads' interactions with the brand's materials, WorkSafe was able to identify leads in the final stages of the funnel, who demonstrated urgency to purchase solutions as well as interest in their brand. For these leads, WorkSafe shared case studies and testimonials that highlighted the efficiency of their services.



5. Targeted advertising and sales enablement

In order to encourage these leads to take the next step in their buyer's journey, yet allow them to progress at their own pace, WorkSafe deployed targeted paid advertising campaigns toward key accounts offering attractive discounts and bundles. Marketers also shared data on these leads and accounts with sales representatives, informing them of their clients' most relevant pain points, and how WorkSafe can help users overcome these challenges. Marketing teams also designed content pieces to address these topics, which sales teams could utilise to inform themselves and their leads.



6. Continued support and pooling of feedback

In the post-sale stage, WorkSafe marketers leveraged their social media communities to continue engaging clients with nurturing materials, supporting the onboarding process and sharing other information that may improve CX and Client Success (CS) initiatives. Later on, they leveraged their social media contacts to deploy a feedback campaign in order to gather client input on possible points of improvement for future service updates, involving the clients in a collaborative dialogue with development efforts.



7. Ending the cycle: referral program

Finally, WorkSafe marketers developed a referral program, encouraging clients to invite peers in exchange for perks, such as discount packages for additional features. This also presented WorkSafe with an interesting opportunity for upselling. The program was announced with social media posts that highlighted the importance of client collaboration for the platform's development, featuring testimonials from brand evangelists whose suggestions were incorporated into future product updates.

The referral program finishes the campaign with a step that feeds back into its start, enabling it to be repeated continually, taking advantage of any insights and observations that arose throughout the process.

Key takeaways

- Leverage social media's unique capabilities to **engage audiences**, as well as to deliver **nurturing cadences** to prospects and keep in touch with past clients, **building valuable relationships**
- Conduct **social listening** on different social media platforms to glean powerful insights on your audience and competitors
- Collect information on your **audience's preferred social media platforms** to focus your efforts and investments
- Promote **thought leadership initiatives** not only on your brand's profile, but also on key team members' personal profiles
- Establish and maintain healthy relationships with personalities who are authoritative in your niche, enabling **influencer partnerships**
- Harness **paid media advertising** and **programmatic marketing** to deliver highly targeted messaging and cost-effective campaigns to key accounts
- Strive to **keep marketing and sales departments aligned** and **share social media insights** across the entire business
- Invest in **software** capable of **scaling and automating** your social media marketing processes, reducing spend on human resources and optimising team efforts
- **Audit all content** before publishing to avoid negative PR and misunderstandings
- **Measure results** continually, adjusting strategies accordingly to ensure long-term success with social media

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About the Author

[David Verwey](#), INFUSE VP of EMEA, has extensive experience incubating and growing technology and marketing businesses worldwide. As Vice President and Data Protection Officer of INFUSEmedia, David leads international growth and operations through EMEA and APAC alongside his team in the United Kingdom.

