



LEADING FROM THE FRONT

Effective social media engagement
for business leaders



Leadership in the age of social media

Social media has fundamentally transformed the way that leaders communicate. As employees, investors, media and the public have become accustomed to using social media channels, an increasing number of business leaders are seeing the opportunities to engage with these audiences on the channels where they are spending their time.

And now in these uncertain times, when people are fearful of the future in light of Covid-19, there is even greater need for real leadership. Without the ability to be physically present it is even more essential for leaders to be virtually present where employees are spending increasing amounts of time – on social media platforms. We are seeing the response to the pandemic as a tipping point for leadership engagement on social media.

Half of the businesses in the FTSE 100 and 67% of top 100 companies in the S&P 500* currently have CEOs with a presence on social media and while not all of these are regularly posting content, for those that are, the benefits of active engagement are clear.

81%

of people believe that CEOs who engage in social media are better equipped than their peers to lead companies in the digital world **

82%

of people are more likely to trust a company whose leadership team engages with social media**

80%

of employees would prefer to work for a social CEO ***

For the leaders who are actively engaging, success comes as no accident. Successful leaders have comprehensive and tailored social media strategies that underpin their engagement – and the day to day execution of the strategy is flawless. Similarly, when these channels are used most effectively, they become a key tool to promote and manage company reputation.

Is social media right for all leaders?

The time has come for every leader to have a presence on social media. That said, we do not advocate a one-size-fits-all approach. For some, a presence may be as simple as an optimised LinkedIn profile to support search engine optimisation (SEO), whereas for others it could be impactful and active engagement across multiple social media platforms.

Social media use supports leaders in:



Developing stronger relationships through direct, personal and regular communication



Building trust through increased visibility and transparency



Practising what they preach on innovation



Supporting company reputation through amplifying company and employee content



Actively and visibly communicating during crisis situations



Managing their own online presence and reputation

Achieving social media leadership

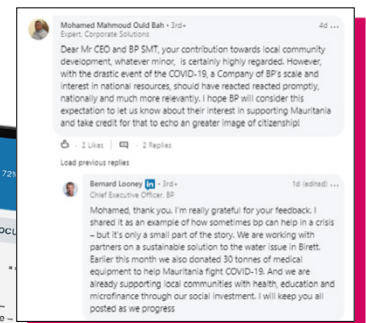
As leaders increasingly venture into the world of social media, the age-old question of “what does good leadership look like?” must be redefined. For every leader whether their profile is managed personally or by a team around them, following our five core principles will help ensure they achieve their goals and achieve real social media leadership:

1 Authentic

How a leader speaks on social media is as important as what they say. Whether it is in 280 characters or 700 words a leader's voice must be accurately represented in their social media content. If it doesn't authentically sound like them or feel like them, then it is just another corporate channel. Unilever EVP Marketing Aline Santos is enthusiastic, fierce and passionate, you can feel her personality in everything she publishes. Starbucks CEO, Kevin Johnson, frequently shows his humour and appreciation for banter.

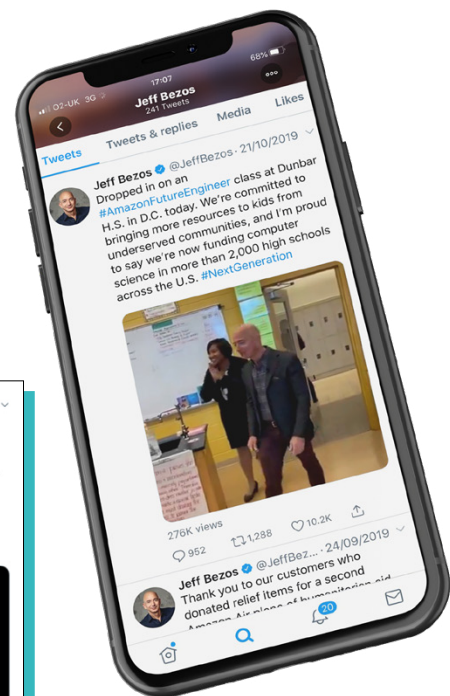
2 Disciplined

Launching a social media presence is a commitment to an ongoing dialogue between a leader and their stakeholders. This commitment requires discipline to consistently engage with the audience, remain transparent and publish insightful and engaging content. Since his social media debut BP CEO, Bernard Looney, has been consistent in his posting, tone and message, even in the face of a global pandemic. He has also been consistently replying to, and engaging with his audience, even when their comments have been challenging.



3 Creative

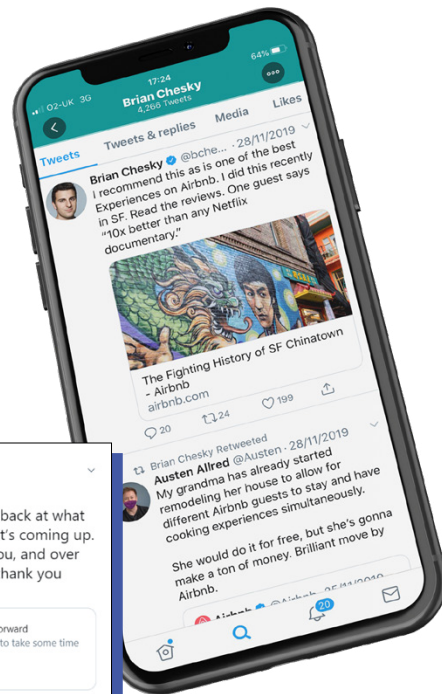
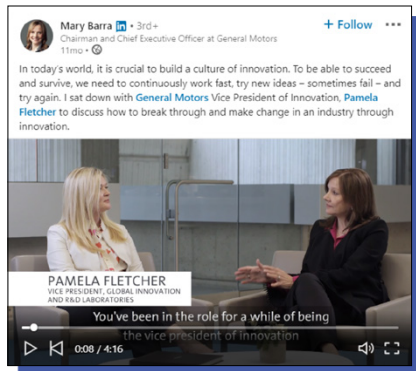
Being active on social media presents leaders with an opportunity to position themselves as innovative and a thought leader in their field. To do this, their communications should be unique and offer the audience exclusive content which they can't get anywhere else. T-Mobile CEO John Legere frequently shares business updates while doing his #SlowCookSunday – exclusive information shared in his own unique style.



Achieving social media leadership

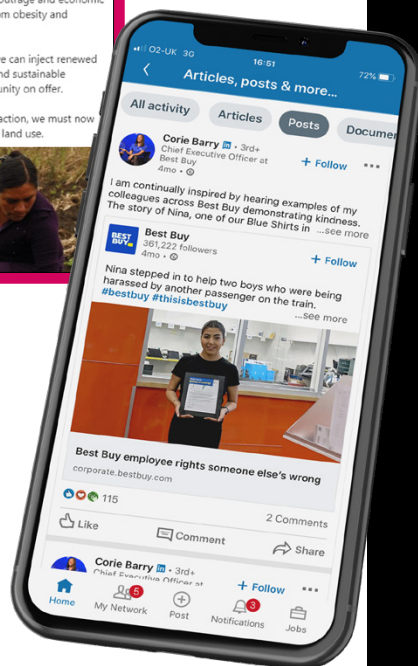
4 Aligned

While a leader's presence should be distinctively different from the corporate channels, it is essential that their communications are aligned with the corporate goals and messaging. This doesn't mean that all the content needs to be from the brand, rather it is a consciousness that the ultimate objective of social media leadership is to support the business. Monzo CEO Tom Blomfield and Airbnb CEO Brian Chesky actively promote their brands in a way which aligns with the informal and community-orientated nature of their respective businesses.



5 Emotive

Unlike a corporate channel, a leader has the unique opportunity on social media to create meaningful human interactions which elicit an emotive response from the audience and in turn drives behavioural change. As such, emotive messages and showing personality should be at the core of a leadership social media profile. Former Unilever CEO Paul Polman's passionate language connects the audience's emotions with the issue and with himself. Best Buy CEO Corie Barry similarly shares stories which evoke emotion.



Avoiding the pitfalls

Try and avoid the following approaches:

Hit and hope

The most common mistake we see is leaders launching social media channels without a strategy. The content tends to lack impact with key audiences and has limited alignment with the business' agenda.

Here today, gone tomorrow

Inconsistency is the greatest of social media leadership sins. An inconsistent account demonstrates a lack of forethought, commitment and care for audiences - the very opposite of what a leader should strive for.

Me, me, me

While the ultimate objective may be to raise an individual's profile, this shouldn't become solely about self promotion. Nobody likes a show off.

Two-way street

The clue is in the name – social media is a place to be social. This requires two way engagement. Many leaders fail to engage with others and respond to comments, which makes the presence less authentic.

Head in the sand

Often leaders have no social media presence at all. External parties will shape their online reputation for them, whether they like it or not.

Leading with impact

Our approach to supporting leaders

While FTI's approach for supporting different business leaders is entirely bespoke, there are a number of fundamentals which underpin all our programmes:



Bespoke

Every leader has a unique personality, skillset and interests. Furthermore their reasons for joining social media and the organisational needs they are supporting are distinctive. As such the support we provide is bespoke to each leader and organisation.



Strategic

Our strategic approach ensures that the leader's social media presence supports the business objectives, and has clarity about the direction that the engagement will take. We seek to answer the strategic imperatives of why the leader is engaging, what they will say, who he or she will connect with, and on what channels they will be present.



Data driven

Deep social media and industry knowledge is combined with a robust measurement process and clear KPIs. Ongoing insight is the rocket fuel for the leader's communications.



Original

Whether it's building a new profile, developing training, deciding key themes or creating content, originality is a key priority for positioning leaders as creative thought influencers and helping content stand out from the crowd.



Practical

We establish clear processes around channel management, content posting and sharing, to mitigate risks and ensure consistent quality. Everything we do is fully aligned with the communications team and the leader.

 [@ftidigital](https://twitter.com/ftidigital) [ftidigital](https://www.instagram.com/ftidigital)

Contact

Andrew Williams
Managing Director

+44(0)203 727 1530
andrew.williams@fticonsulting.com

Richard Blundell
Senior Consultant

+44(0)203 727 1132
richard.blundell@fticonsulting.com

Betty Ansah
Senior Consultant

+44(0)203 319 5592
betty.ansah@fticonsulting.com

About FTI Consulting

FTI Consulting is an independent global business advisory firm dedicated to helping organisations manage change, mitigate risk and resolve disputes: financial, legal, operational, political & regulatory, reputational and transactional. FTI Consulting professionals, located in all major business centres throughout the world, work closely with clients to anticipate, illuminate and overcome complex business challenges and opportunities. For more information, visit www.fticonsulting.com and connect with us on Twitter (@FTIConsulting), Facebook and LinkedIn.www.fticonsulting.com. The views expressed in any of the articles or other content hosted on this site are those of the author(s) and not necessarily the views of FTI Consulting, its management, its subsidiaries, its affiliates, or its other professionals.