

Nicole Thompson:

Hello everyone, and welcome to our first GLINC Outside the Box podcast of 2023. I'm your host for today, Nicole Thompson, one of the relationship managers here at Gerry Lewis Inc., or as we like to call it, GLINC. We're so excited about our 2023 lineup of podcasts, covering themes such as change management and communication, hybrid teams and employee engagement.

Our podcast today focuses on one of the most prominent changes we've seen in small businesses, the growth of social media for branding and online presence. We specialize in change management and communication here at GLINC, and we know firsthand how big of an impact social media can have on how a company can connect and communicate with their audience.

In today's podcast we'll cover practical tips on how to boost your business on social media. Joining me today are two of our social media experts from our team here at GLINC, Andrew Jenkins and Laura Herron. Andrew is the former head of social media strategy for the Royal Bank of Canada and has worked with a diverse list of companies in North America and Europe. He currently teaches Social Media Strategies For the Enterprise at the University of Toronto's School of Continuing Studies. He's also the author of Social Media Marketing for Business: Scaling an Integrated Social Media Strategy Across Your Organization. Laura is a social media strategist for GLINC specializing in financial services. She works closely with her clients to understand their needs and create a personalized plan to help their business succeed. Laura is also passionate about finding the human element of a brand.

Thank you both for being here today.

Laura Herron:

Thanks for having us.

Andrew Jenkins:

Great to be here.

Nicole Thompson:

Now, let's start with a scenario-based question. Let's say I'm a small business with no marketing department and I currently don't have an online presence, but I want to create one so I can expand my product offerings to consumers. There are so many things to consider, like types of social media platforms, types of content, when to post, how to post, the list is endless. My question for you is where do I start?

Andrew Jenkins:

Well, you don't want to boil the ocean. You want to make sure that your business objectives are clearly defined and you want to match your social media strategy to those objectives. You want to take a closer look at the different platforms that are available to you, see which of those platforms have active audience members that are a fit for who you're trying to reach, and then take a look at the kind of content that's being produced for that, those platforms, what's resonating with those audiences, whether or not that's the kind of content that you have in-house capabilities to produce or whether you would need to look to get additional support to create that kind of content in a consistent way. Then, once you've identified the platforms and the audience that you want to be on and that you want to reach, start putting together a preliminary content plan and overarching social media strategy. Again, not forgetting that they need to align with your business objectives.

Nicole Thompson:

That's great. Thank you, Andrew.

Laura, in your experience with clients who are just starting out on social media, what advice would you give them?

Laura Herron:

I definitely would make sure that you have enough content on hand, because once you get started you have to keep going. The social machine, it's never ending, and algorithms really favor pages that are constantly posting and have a regular frequency. If you're infrequent, it's going to be stop-start and then your audience may not pay attention and the content may actually not be getting displayed to the audiences that you want. I always think of it as a train and shoveling coal into the engine, it needs to be consistently fed in order to keep running.

Brands also need to be critical of what they're sharing and of their existing content, looking at it from a lens of is this valuable information for our audiences, are we just posting just to post or are we actually giving useful valuable information that will result in engagement, leads, whatever your business goals are.

Nicole Thompson:

That's a great point. I want to ask you a side question really quickly. How do you determine what type of content is best to start out with? I think something we advise clients of is to do a 101 about your company, who you are, what you do, what your brand stands for, but what other types of content do you think? I know it's based on a company of course and the product offerings they have, but is there any 101 or basic tips that can go into starting out with that content strategy?

Laura Herron:

Some basic things we've looked at in terms of our financial clients are aligning with the awareness months. We've seen in October and November, that's Investor Education Month and Financial Literacy Month, so that's a really good way to provide base level information in terms of a glossary, which are useful terms, because it may be to a brand common knowledge, but to a layman's audience they might not understand what certain terms mean, and then an FAQ series as well, so frequently asked questions about your product or the industry that your audience or clients may want to know information on.

Nicole Thompson:

That's a great tip, thank you. That was the perfect segue into our next question. Laura, what would you say are the top five misconceptions companies have about how to use social media?

Laura Herron:

I think one of the misconceptions is that you have to be very serious on social media. A lot of brands are leveraging trends and memes, within reason because you don't want to get too silly around your messaging, but being human on social media is an asset. I think a lot of times brands forget that social media is a form of entertainment as well as education and you want to give your audience some candy so that eventually they'll eat the vegetables of your serious brand messaging that you want to deliver.

Another one is that you have to deliver a lot of information. You really want to stop the scroll. People are going quickly through their phone or on their desktop of everything and you want to make sure you

want to get something that's going to grab their attention quickly. How can you hook your audience with a very succinct message of what you want to say?

Another one is that you should just be broadcasting instead of listening and interacting with your audience. Engaging with your audience and other organizations is just as important as posting. It's community-based and you want to make sure you're listening to your audience as well as speaking to them. This can provide valuable information as well, of how your audience is receiving your brand and how can you tweak your strategy to make sure that you're connecting them in the best authentic way possible.

Another one is knowing when not to post. That's just as important as knowing when to post. There have been certain times in the last couple years, there's been global conflicts, controversial social issues, and just making sure you know when maybe it's not important that we comment on this or we actually pause our current posting schedule just because there are certain situations, that it's a very volatile online news cycle, and you just want to make sure you're not being tone deaf or adding to the conversation when it's not necessary.

Then thinking that social media is the end of the funnel or end of the comm strategy. Social media should be part of a brand's high level comm strategy, not an afterthought. More and more people, they're using social media as a search engine and they also form their opinion of a brand based on a brand social presence.

Nicole Thompson:

Definitely, those are some great points. Andrew, do you have anything to add to those top five misconceptions?

Andrew Jenkins:

One of the things that decision makers involved in social media strategy often do is they make their decisions or their approach to strategy development based on their own usage, personally, of social media, which often causes bias or clouds their thinking. They should be removing themselves from the equation and focus on who are we trying to reach, how, where are they, what kind of content do they consume, what engages them and so on. You need to remove yourself from the equation because if you're a person who thinks LinkedIn is the end all and be all, and that's okay if you are, but your audience is on Facebook, well, you've established unnecessary bias. You need to be unbiased in your approach to ultimately, again back to business objectives, where are they, where's our audience, what are we trying to achieve with them. Laura was talking earlier about lead generation and funnel, but social's also used for employee recruitment. That's a different business objective, that's a different type of content, it's sometimes different channels. Again, you have to give those some considerations.

The other thing that often people do is excellent is the enemy of the good, they focus way too much on production value, to the point of being delayed. They could be more agile with their content, this expression of just ship it, don't overthink it. You want to work smarter rather than harder, you do want to produce content that engages, but we're seeing the TikTok aesthetic, where it's raw, less produced, garnering more of an engagement, more response. We're seeing that aesthetic spill over from TikTok to other platforms, where people are forgiving lower production value for the immediacy of access to it.

Those are the ones that come to mind for me to add to what Laura was saying.

Nicole Thompson:

Yeah, those are definitely some great points. It ties into what Laura was saying earlier with when you're scrolling on your phone and you're seeing thousands of posts within a couple of minutes. What you want to do is post as much as you can, because a lot of the times companies are only posting once a week or a couple of times a month and it's very rare that a post like that is going to be seen or get a lot of engagement or impressions.

Sometimes you want to focus on quantity over quality so that you're really getting your message out there. I think that's something you folks have taught me as well, is recycling content. If you create a video, you don't have to just post the video once and have it be done with. You can leverage it in multiple different forms, whether it's an audiogram, a static pull quote post, a little snippet about the speaker and who they are, or even taking multiple snippets from that 30-minute video and you can post it in five different ways so that you're truly recycling and leveraging the content you've put so much money and time into creating. I think that's really important.

Andrew Jenkins:

The shelf life of a social post is very short. You can post something at 10:00 AM on Monday and have one section of your audience see it and an entirely different section of your audience see the same content on Thursday at 4:00, and there's very little to no overlap. It's just giving yourself permission to keep things in rotation. Again, most organizations have more content than they think they do and to squeeze as much juice out of the content lemon as possible.

Nicole Thompson:

Yeah, I love that, the content lemon. I think what you said about authenticity is super important as well, because a lot of times people think they need to make something super perfect, but at the end of day, like you said with TikTok, people are connecting more on an authentic human basis when you're just showing your raw self and that it's okay to make mistakes. I think what Laura said as well, knowing when not to post is super critical, because a lot of times companies think they should comment on things or they don't realize that a larger event is happening in the world and that it's maybe not the best time to post. Even if it affects your analytics at the end of the day, it's probably best for your messaging and for your brand as a whole to just be silent for a little.

Now we're going to pivot. I know both of you have a vast amount of experience helping companies create education and awareness online. We've covered some of the dos and common misconceptions companies have about starting out on social media. Do you have some don'ts or tips on common mistakes for our listeners?

Andrew Jenkins:

Sure. To build on what Laura was saying earlier, this idea of you don't have to comment on everything. Sometimes when there's something happening in the media in the world and you feel compelled to weigh in, think about just your audience and the broader audience need to hear from you. Are you adding to the conversation, are you adding value, or is this about I will feel better if I say something or I somehow want the halo effect for my brand? Sometimes it can often put your brand at risk, unnecessary risk, and you're better off just to stay quiet.

A recent example was when the Queen first fell ill before she passed away. A lot of organizations were saying to themselves, "We can pause here. Our marketing agenda is not so important that we need to get out in front of something so important to so many in the world or that's being followed by so many or paid attention to. Let's just pause, be respectful." If you think that your social post can't wait a day,

yes, there are marketing events that are necessary in some cases, but usually, you know what, we're safe to take a pass on this and just let things be. Sometimes when you post something juxtaposed with what's happening in the media and you look tone deaf and you look for which and insensitive, you have to weigh out, was it really worth it because of what brand risk we created for ourselves.

Nicole Thompson:

Thank you, Andrew.

Andrew Jenkins:

No problem.

Nicole Thompson:

I'm going to pass the next question over to Laura. Laura, I know you and I in the past have talked a lot about the importance of getting people within the company to boost posts on social media. Can you tell me a bit more about how companies can leverage employee advocacy and partnerships to grow their audience reach?

Laura Herron:

Definitely. Employees are your best asset at growing a brand presence on social. People are more likely to listen to your message if it's being shared by someone they know rather than a brand. Also, yeah, if you can also leverage those peer organizations and create a relationship or a quid pro quo, it's a great way to amplify both your message and another organization that you're aligned with. Not only can you reach out to your audience, let's say you have 5,000 followers or so on, you can amplify it by reaching out, you're expanding your reach by using the employees to reach out to their audiences as well. It just creates just a wide spray of reaching your content out farther. If your employees are behind your message, then further audiences will be behind your message as well. You can't really grow your message without your team being advocates for it.

Nicole Thompson:

Definitely, yeah. It's like with peer partnerships as well, making sure you're liking, sharing and commenting on each other's posts, following each other back on social media. If you're able to access a certain contact within that other organization to form a relationship with, whether you're doing a podcast together or some sort of shared partnership online, I think that's a great point as well, campaigns together. I know some companies also engage YouTubers and TikTokers, influencers, so they can leverage their massive audience in reach. That's another strategy often used.

But Andrew, do you have anything to add?

Andrew Jenkins:

Well, just oftentimes organizations think that their reach is bigger than their employees. When you add together all of the networks of their employees, they tend to be an order of magnitude greater in terms of size and reach and even influence, because of the relationships that these individual employees have with their respective networks. It's worth leveraging, because those trusted relationships are with those people. Yes, you have brand trust to a degree, but the trust that the employees have. Again, it goes back to people buy from people they know and like, and people who know and like them in return. That's people to people and that's the spirit of social anyway. The brand has an agenda, obviously, as an

organization, but employees can help on not just lead generation, but dissemination or information, conveying culture. If your employees, even without being asked, they're actively sharing your content, that speaks a lot to the culture and the kind of company that you have, that employees are totally game to be sharing your messaging with pride. That's invaluable.

Nicole Thompson:

Yeah. That reminds me of a tactic we've used with one of our clients actually, where if you're struggling to get your employees to re-share your company's content online, you could do a little bit of a contest as a way to encourage them. If you have an employee, let's say who had the top number of likes, comments, shares, however you want to measure it, on a certain number of posts, they could win a little gift card or something like that. It's a short-term strategy I know, but it is a fun way to get them kickstarted for people who aren't super comfortable just yet or need that motivation. You can definitely also give them tips on the type of copy they can post or the types of hashtags to use just so they have some sort of guidance and they feel a little bit more comfortable knowing what to say when they do decide to re-share something.

Andrew Jenkins:

Well, and just to add to that, whether it's a contest or you're just asking people to share, if you track that and you see that, oh, these 10 employees shared a piece of company content and it had 10 times the reach of our company page, that helps rally people around this employee advocacy approach should be considered to as an ongoing activity as part of your strategy.

Nicole Thompson:

Definitely. We've covered some good ground here, Andrew and Laura, from initial steps for starting out to some common misconceptions and mistakes often made, to building employee advocacy within the company and to boosting the company's social media posts. These are all great insights on where to start in social media and what to watch out for. Let's now shift our attention to looking at and understanding how we're doing once we've posted. Are there any specific tools you'd recommend people use, whether it's for scheduling posts or analyzing data and key insights after the fact?

Laura Herron:

I think definitely your first step should be getting a scheduling tool, this lets you automate the process. It definitely relieves you having to post every single day. Once you have a month of content, two weeks of content, that gives you more time to get further and further ahead in how much content you have. It compiles all of your engagement in one place so you don't have to click between social channels and look at who's liked your post, who's commented, it puts it all into one spot. Then you can automate the process as well and whether you want to set up automatic responses or just look at them day by day or week by week, where you can respond to any comments or questions from your user base.

Another really great tool is called Rival IQ. It's really great for competitive analysis, tracking trends and benchmarking. I can look at a week, a month, a quarter, a year and compare trends over time. Meltwater as well, it's really useful for social listening and analyzing your peers, competitors, keywords, et cetera.

Nicole Thompson:

Going back to that scheduling tool, I think we've used things like Hootsuite and Sprout Social. Did you have any other tools to recommend?

Laura Herron:

Yeah, Sprout Social, Hootsuite, Buffer, Lately, those are all great ones that we've used, had experience with. It just comes down to what your goals are and what your budget is.

Nicole Thompson:

Definitely.

Andrew, do you have any other tools you'd recommend?

Laura Herron:

Well, not so much recommend, just to make people aware of, Falcon, Hootsuite Enterprise, Sprinkler. They're substantially more expensive, but some enterprises are big enough when they have different departments that need to be using it, they have a high volume of inbound comments from stakeholders in their audience. Again, it comes back to these are just tools, do they meet your needs, do they help with your objectives?

One of the other things I'd like to highlight beyond just the tools is whether or not those that will be tasked to use them are comfortable using them. What's the onboarding process? Are they complicated tools to use? Do they like using them? Do they get value out of them? Because if an organization has decided to subscribe to something and nobody likes using it, you've done yourself a bit of a disservice. Sometimes you're signing up for an annual contract that you can't get out of until it's expired, so you're going to have to deal with some complaints.

The other thing is not just the user likability, if I'll call it that, is how well those vendors support you, from a customer success representative, technical support, to help you use the solution to its optimal level. Those are some considerations as well when you're evaluating, budget, the technology, usability and support.

Nicole Thompson:

Yes, I think training for employees is so important because if you're not leveraging the tool properly, you're not getting all of the value you could out of it.

Something else that came to mind was copywriting. There are multiple different tools you can use for AI-generated content if you want some kind of inspiration on what to write for a certain international awareness day, for example. I know I've dabbled with one in the past, but I do want to say I wouldn't recommend copying and pasting an AI-written message directly into your social media account, just because you want to tweak it and add in your company's voice, brand, instill any values you have, just to make it a bit more personal. But those are other tools I know we've used in the past.

Andrew Jenkins:

You want to make sure that even though you might use those tools to do the heavy lifting that you apply an editorial eye. Also make sure that, because if you're too quick with it you can overlook some localization things like labour with O-U-R for Canada and England and so on, subtle things like that are a red flag, obviously, you didn't write this for the region or the audience that you're trying to talk. Something just small like that, but can easily be overlooked if we defer to too much automation.

Nicole Thompson:

That's a good point as well.

Before we wrap up, Andrew and Laura, is there anything else you want to share with our listeners that we haven't yet covered today?

Laura Herron:

I think I really get excited about social media because it's still a relatively new technology and it's always rapidly evolving in the way it's used by individuals, companies, government even. It's exciting to see the ways in which brands are playing with the dichotomy of traditional communication strategies and creating new ways of interacting with their customers and fellow brands. That's why I love working in this industry. But yes, it's always evolving and you basically are using it for fun, but then also for work and trying to keep track of all the new platforms and everything that are coming out on the daily.

Nicole Thompson:

Definitely. Andrew, are there any final words you'd like to leave our audience with?

Andrew Jenkins:

I've got a couple of things to share, but if you're going to do just one thing in social it would be to listen, because that informs so much of the decisions to that you make after that. It'll help you identify where the audiences are, what platforms, what they're paying attention to, what's engaging them, et cetera. Even if you're apprehensive about establishing a presence in social, that doesn't mean you shouldn't be aware of what's going on in those environments because there could be conversations about your brand that you're completely unaware of because you, to this point, have not been listening.

The other thing is if you are going to establish a presence, you don't have to be on every social media platform, but you can't just be on one. To truly reach every facet of your target audience, you're going to find pockets on a variety of platforms, so you need to be prepared for that. Like Laura was identifying earlier, be human, be social. This isn't about just dry broadcast, buy my stuff, buy my stuff. It's about having a conversation. With the rise of TikTok and platforms like that comes the rise of rich media. Organizations have to be prepared to up their content game. There's nothing wrong with writing a blog, but you can't hang your hat just on blogs alone. People are wanting richer media, it goes back to stopping the scroll, what was the last thing that caught your attention. No disrespect to some of the content providers, but it may not have necessarily been an article. It might have been an animated GIF, an animation, a video of some kind, whatever. The demands for attention, the war for attention isn't getting any easier.

Nicole Thompson:

Thank you both for the insightful advice. I think those are super key points with technology constantly evolving and new tools and platforms coming about. We always want to be on our toes and make sure we're taking a look at different types of content that are being posted and see how we can leverage our brand's voice in that way. Thank you both for sharing that information.

To conclude, on today's podcast, we've covered how to set up a social media strategy, from defining your target audience to defining which social media platforms to be on, what types of content you should post and how frequently, all the way to some common mishaps, how you can leverage employee relationships with peers, influencers, and as well, specific tools and resources we use here at GLINC.

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It was a pleasure having you today, Andrew and Laura. I want to give a shout out again to Andrew's book on social media marketing for business. We'll make sure to include a link, so if viewers or audience members are interested in reading more about it, you'll find that information in the show notes. But yes, thank you again, Andrew and Laura, it was a pleasure having you.

Andrew Jenkins:

Thanks for having us.

Laura Herron:

Thanks for having us.