

Social Media Marketing for Breweries

A social media strategy guide for beer marketers



UNION
metrics

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this comprehensive guide, you'll learn how to develop and improve your social media strategy, no matter the social media channels where you spend your time. Based on our experience working with social media's top brands and data we've collected from millions of posts across top social channels like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and more, this guide will go over everything you need to know create a multi-channel social strategy from scratch, or to polish your existing strategy to perfection.

This guide, written with the needs of beer and brewery marketers in mind, includes suggestions for creating and curating content, growing your audience, and finding the right metrics. We'll discuss tips on what kind of content to post - and where - and how to use hashtags effectively. Learn when you should post, and how often. This guide also discusses audience growth and engagement strategies, from how to reach a larger audience to how to identify influencers and gain more followers. Finally, the guide covers the most important social media metrics you should be monitoring, why they matter, and how to report on them.

While some basic rules hold true across social no matter the industry, beer marketers face a set of unique challenges and opportunities when using social media to attract consumers. Social media is an ideal platform for inspiring future happy hour plans at home and out on the town, and a strong multi-channel social media strategy can give beer marketers an edge, keeping their products top-of-mind for those looking to imbibe. Read on to learn how.

To create an impactful social media strategy across multiple channels, focus on creating the right owned content, curate the best user-generated content, grow your audience in non-spammy ways, and find the appropriate metrics to quantify your efforts. We'll start with content creation.

CREATE THE RIGHT CONTENT

Across social media - no matter what channels you're on - good content is good content. You may tweak certain aspects to ensure something fits in better on Facebook or Instagram, but a set of common rules apply across social media. The following guidelines should help you create killer, beer-specific content no matter where your multi-channel strategy takes you.

What to post

First, let's talk about what kinds of content work best on social media. Unsurprisingly, good social content looks a lot like good web content or good TV content or good print content; the **most impactful content is engaging, useful and unique**. It's content people actually want to see. Breweries have a singular advantage here; making and drinking beer is fun and lends itself toward interesting, beautiful content. All you have to do is capitalize on that. You probably have a substantial archive of content to mine, too.

How? We know that **the best social content is a mix of visual and verbal**. We recommend including images or video in at least some of your text-based content. Practically, posts with images take up more space in a social timeline than text-only posts, which means you grab more timeline real estate when you include an image. And there's growing evidence that suggests posts with images get more engagement from followers. Visuals attract more attention and often let you tell a more complex story than words alone.

If you use photos or videos, keep them simple and high-quality. Video gives you an opportunity to show and not just tell, but video is more time-consuming to produce than other content. The most impactful social video catches the viewer's attention in the first few seconds, so keep them short and get to the point quickly. For photos, make sure your images are in focus and require minimal editing. Vibrant images with bright colors catch the eye and tend to perform well, as do images with people in them.

Each channel has its own aesthetic, which you should embrace when resources allow. You don't need to create unique content for each of your social profiles, but you should tweak your content as you move it across the social web. Your **fans want to see content they can't find somewhere else**, so share alternate views or perspectives on different channels to keep it interesting. If you're posting identical content on every social channel, your fans

won't need to follow you in multiple places. So give them a reason to follow you everywhere you are.

For example, the most effective Instagram content is beautiful, high-quality imagery with a focus on the creative or artistic. On informal channels like Snapchat and Vine, you can take advantage of your audience's more casual expectations by giving a more candid, behind-the-scenes tour or making a silly video that shows off the personality of your brewery and the people behind it. Larger social media channels like Twitter and Facebook can support all different kinds of content, so you can experiment with a variety of formats here, especially as new live-streaming options roll out.

We recommend mixing up lifestyle content with content about your brewery's story. Followers expect to see some branded content if they're following a brand, so it's fine to show off your beer and talk about your unique story, highlighting new beers and upcoming events. But the best social content is more than just an advertisement; it encourages followers to feel inspired or motivated. This is particularly true for what consumers eat and drink. How can you best tell your brewery's story in a way that doesn't feel like outright advertising but helps your audience identify with a particular lifestyle?

The best social content is more than just an advertisement; it encourages followers to feel inspired.

No matter what, you need to first get to know your audience, and how they're different across social media channels. Listen to them, talk to them. Potential customers will have different expectations for the kinds of content you post on different channels, so think about who's where and what they expect from you there. **If you're just getting started, consider the powerful trifecta of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.** Each has a unique flavor, and potential customers will look for you there first.

Learn from other successful brands (even your competitors and companies that don't sell beer), to get an idea of the kinds of content audiences prefer. For example, see how established beer brands like Dos Equis and innovative smaller brands like Lagunitas approach their social media strategy to get some tips. Also look at successful non-alcoholic beverage brands to see what aspects of their social marketing you can incorporate into your own strategy.

Finally, **don't be afraid to try new things.** Experiment with different kinds of content across the social media channels you're on. Maybe even check out a new channel. Keep track of what's working and what isn't, and do more of what works.

Using hashtags

We've said it before, but it's worth repeating: **hashtags are the key to discovery on social media**. Creating good content is important, but you need to get that content in front of the right people. Hashtags serve to organize your content, as well as spread it to new and relevant audiences. Hashtags are one of the best ways to share your social content with a wider audience; when done well, even a single hashtag can boost the reach of a post and lead to more engagement.

Use a mix of hashtags in your content, including popular and general hashtags like #imbibe, #beer and #cheers, alongside more specific or niche hashtags that are focused on your beer sub-category (like #IPAallday, #supportlocalbreweries or #craftbeerlife) and locations. The larger general tags will add your content to a larger conversation, but it's easy to get lost in the noise of those conversations. So you should also use smaller hashtags to target a highly relevant audience. For example, a craft brewer could chime in on craft beer festival posts even if they can't be present, to get an extra boost on brand awareness.

Try a variety of different hashtags to see what works best for your content. In some contexts, it's fine to add multiple hashtags to a post, depending on the social media channel you're on. For example, on Instagram, you can include 5-10 hashtags in a post without detracting from your content, but on Twitter or Facebook, it's best to stick to one or two hashtags.

Personalized hashtags are a great way to make a conversation easily searchable for future reference and accessible to participants. Many brands use them for conferences, campaigns or events. If you decide to use a unique hashtag, make sure it's not already associated with an existing event or issue. And keep your hashtags short and simple - fewer than 20 characters. If you use a really long hashtag, people won't have as much room to add their own thoughts and often run the risk of misspelling it.

CURATE YOUR CONTENT

Now that you've begun creating this amazing brand-specific content, you need to think about how you share it to achieve the maximum impact on social media. Here are some tips to help you make the most of your content.

When to post

We all know there's no single best time to post to social media. Different audiences are active at different times, and content will perform differently depending on so many varying factors. We know some channels are more active at night and on the weekends, like Instagram and Tumblr, but others see action during the work day, like Twitter and

Facebook. And that doesn't take into account time zones in any way; audiences are active all the time around the world. Your potential visitors are likely located in time zones other than your own.

Given that, **beer brands should post outside typical US business hours when possible**, especially on the more social of the social media like Instagram. Try to post content for users when they're checking their phones and thinking about relaxing, such as after work, on the weekends, and before they go to sleep. If you can, schedule a post or two on the weekends to see what kinds of engagement you get then.

The best time to post to your accounts is going to depend mostly on when the people you want to reach are around. So you'll need to keep track of what's working, and if you can identify trends in when your content gets more engagement. When is your audience most likely to respond? Be sure you're posting content then.

How often to post

In addition to deciding when to post, you also need to think about how frequently you should post. This will vary by social media channel, as well as how much available content you have, but here are some general guidelines that work for most beer brands.

First, take into consideration how saturated a particular channel is and how the platform displays new posts. Facebook, for example, doesn't show all posts to all fans, so you can post more often on Facebook without worrying about overwhelming your followers. The same goes for Twitter; content moves so quickly on Twitter that your post will be buried after just a few minutes, so it's fine to post multiple times a day. But on Instagram, you may want to limit how often you post, since there tends to be less content that lives a little longer there, and the new algorithmically-driven feed is still rolling out to all users.

In fact, if you have the right content and right audience, you may be able to post 10 or more times a day before seeing diminishing returns on your engagement. Established beverage brands are a great example of this; they often have a large content archive full of beautiful images and a fan base that is always hungry for more. Your particular cadence will depend on how much you have to post and how amenable your audience is to it.

Be sure that you stick to a regular posting schedule once you get started. In particular, **don't stop posting entirely unless you want to lose followers**. Many brands lose followers if they stop posting. So don't overcommit to a higher volume of social posts than you're able to maintain. If you have a backlog of content, don't post it all at once; space it out over time to keep up a queue. And keep your accounts fresh; try to have something new one every account at least once or twice a day.

Generally, we recommend that you post the same content more than once to give your followers a better chance of seeing it. Post at different times on different days to catch people no matter when they're active. On Twitter, you can post the same article 4-5 times over a week without wearing it out. But don't literally repeat yourself; try using a different image or message, or adding a new hashtag or emoji to subsequent posts. That way if someone *does* see a repeat post, it won't be repetitious enough to annoy them and tempt them to unfollow.

Finding external content to share

Even if you have a lot of great original content, social media is the perfect place to also share others' content as it fits in with your brand voice. So don't be afraid to mix it up and share some content that you didn't create. This works particularly well if you can share or repost restaurants that serve your beer, or highlight customer content. People love when their favorite brand amplifies their posts, so it's a great reward for your customers, as well as a way to source more content for your social feeds. Repost when someone shares a beautiful image they took of one of your beers or tweets that they're excited to tour your brewery.

Sharing a customer's post is a great way to say thank you.

Identify a set of influencers or thought leaders in the beer industry and follow them (more on identifying influencers in the next section). If they post something interesting or relevant to your followers, feel free to repost or share it on your page.

Pay attention to ownership and copyright of any content you don't own, and make sure you attribute everything appropriately. Someone worked hard on that article or image, so give them credit and link to their account, just as you would want with your branded content.

UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

So far, we've mentioned the word audience a lot, in the context of paying attention to your followers to make sure you provide the right content at the right time to get the most engagement. So let's discuss how you can grow and get to know your audience. They'll likely be a mix of people who have tried your beer before, want to visit your brewery, love beer in general, or simply find the content that you're sharing interesting.

Getting more followers

If you're going to spend time on a social media strategy, you want to know you're not shouting into an empty void. And as much as you don't want to be measured according to how many followers your Twitter account has, you do want lots of people opting in to

follow your social accounts and consume your amazing content. So how can you get more followers?

One of the best ways to get more followers is to follow people first. Look at who's talking about things that are interesting to you (the craft beer industry, alcohol regulations, etc...), using hashtags you use, following accounts you respect, and follow them from your account. And make sure you're following your employees, everyone who posts about your brand or engages with your content, and anyone you can find who seems like they might be a good fit.

There are a number of paid ways to accumulate fans or followers. But beware that while these campaigns can be effective at increasing that follower count, the followers you get may not be as high quality as people who seek you out or otherwise follow you organically.

Post high-quality content. We've been over this quite a bit already, but the best way to get what you want from social media, including a larger following, is to post the best content. It's especially expected of higher end brands; the bar has been set high by big, established beverage brands, but you don't have to have their budget and resources to make your own brand shine. **Provide something of value, and people will appreciate it and follow you to get more.**

Use hashtags. When used correctly, the right hashtags get your content in front of new audiences. If they like what they see, they'll be likely to follow you to find more of that content. So try a variety of hashtags to find the ones that resonate with the audiences you're looking for. There's a lot more on hashtag use back in the first section on content creation, so flip back if you need a refresher.

Remind people where to find you. Post links to your social accounts on your website, your TV ads, your blog posts, any other brands you have a partnership with, wherever your customers are. And do some cross-promotion. If you have a well-followed Twitter account, remind your followers to find you on Pinterest too. **Make it dead simple for your fans and beer-lovers to find you**, no matter where they are on social media.

Finding influencers

Influence in social media is about more than just how many followers an account has.

Not only do you want to find new followers, you want to find really high-quality followers. Or, at the very least, you want to get in front of industry influencers. You want to find experts with large reach that you can learn from, share your content with, and just generally engage with on social media. So how do you find these popular imbibers?

In any conversation, there are a set of people responsible for

driving that conversation forward. The conversation about your brewery is no different. So first look for the people who promote your brand through search or social listening. Learn more about your existing followers and your biggest fans to tap into their networks. Some of these people will be influential in their communities. And don't just look for the ones with the most followers, but look for the ones who are repeatedly mentioned, those who generate lots of engagement, and the ones who seem to be actively participating in relevant conversations.

From there, learn more about the influencers in a particular sub-community. What keywords or hashtags are you interested in? Organic foods, hop enthusiasts, brewery tours? Start by searching for those and noting the accounts that appear to be important to that conversation. Look for the people a particular group seems to listen and reply to most. If you can, see who those people follow for insight into who they consider important. Tapping into influencer networks in any community, no matter the size, just takes a little research, but you'll be surprised at how easy it is to follow the social graph of a particular community. You'll start to see a set of names over and over; those are the key influencers.

And don't forget that influence on social media is about more than just how many followers an account has. Try to find the people who actually amplify a conversation, the ones who are actively engaged in a channel, and the people who can reach the largest and most relevant audience. **Don't just count followers**; look for action and activity in particular beverage sub-communities that are meaningful to your brand.

Engaging in conversation

Once you have followers, it's important to keep them happy. This is where the social part of social media comes in. Be social! **Spend time getting to know your followers and engaging with them.** Repost or like their content, reply to their posts. Ask them what kind of happy hours they like to attend, what types of beer they prefer, what they're excited about each season when it comes to food and beverage pairings. The key is to participate, not just broadcast. Try some of these tactics:

- Ask questions.
- Create interactive content that gets your existing audience involved.
- See what else your audience wants by asking them.
- Encourage responses or comments in your posts.
- Run contests or polls or participate in chats to get conversation going.

And answer questions. Social media can be a great place to learn from your customers, but it's even better to help them. Many people will turn to social media to ask brands questions

they can't get answered on the phone or your website. Listen to those questions and answer as many as you can. Direct people to the appropriate channels or resources, and just generally be there to help. After all, if you're more responsive than the competition, they're more likely to pick up your beer on their next shopping trip or even book a trip to visit your brewery.

Which brings us to: **Monitor your social accounts, even at nights and on weekends.** Once you've opened the channel for interaction, some of your customers will take you up on it (a lot), and on their own schedules. Be there to answer their questions and help however you can all the time. If you won't be monitoring an account during a certain time, like overnight, be sure that's posted somewhere (like your bio) so your audience knows when to expect a reply.

Have some personality on social media. Especially as a beer brand, **it's okay to be human and to talk like a human.** If it makes sense for your brand, use a conversational tone in your social posts. And when - because it will happen - you accidentally post a typo or broken link, correct it and apologize, and then move on. Even the largest brands are run by people. Don't be afraid to put yourself in your customer's shoes: when was a time a company communicated with you in a way that made you feel valued? What made you recommend them? Remember that communication is a two-way process; don't use social media as a one-way broadcast channel. You'll get a better response by listening and responding.

But above all, **be true to your brand voice, even on social media.** You've worked hard elsewhere to develop a specific brand voice, so don't abandon it on social media. Find a balance that maintains your brand voice, but is relatable, relevant, and occasionally fun. Use this voice consistently in all interactions across social. And like we said earlier, it's okay to tweak this voice channel-by-channel. Your Snapchat voice might be more informal than your Twitter voice and that's fine. Just keep it consistent with your brand's image and the image you want to convey of your corner of the beer world.

MEASURE YOUR PROGRESS

No social media strategy is complete without a discussion of measurement and reporting. The only way to know if what you're doing is working - and worth the investment you've put into it - is to measure your results. There are a set of metrics you should be monitoring, no matter the social channels you're participating on.

What to measure

There are many ways to slice up your social data and thousands of different metrics you could be reporting on to your stakeholders. Here are a set of our favorites, and how you can incorporate them into your social media reporting.

Volume

The simplest social media metric to measure is volume. Volume is the size of the conversation about your brand or your campaign, and is a **great initial indicator of interest**. People tend to talk about things they either love or hate, but rarely mention things they simply don't care about at all. While volume is a simple counting metric, it's still an important baseline to track over time. Measure the number of:

- Posts about your brand
- Mentions of your owned accounts
- Unique people talking about you

Monitor how these numbers change over time and look for spikes or dips outside your normal ranges. What happened to cause these changes? Are there times when more people talk about your brand? Use this information find better times to post to increase engagement.

Reach

Reach measures the **spread of a social media conversation and can help you understand the size of your potential audience**. Learn how far your content is disseminating and how large the audience for your message is. A large audience is valuable on its own, but reach alone does not provide the full picture. Use your reach metric to provide context for your other metrics. You can look at engagement or action numbers like clicks, shares or comments and divide them by reach to calculate an engagement rate. Of the possible total audience for your campaign, how many people participated in the conversation. Reach helps contextualize other metrics so you can better understand your actual impact.

Engagement

Measuring engagement is essential to your social media strategy, as it helps you understand **how your content is performing and how you can improve**. Dig into how people participate in the conversation about your brand. How does your content spread (if it does at all)?

Generally, social media has three types of engagement: amplification, interaction and acknowledgement. Amplification engagement - such as shares, retweets, reblogs - spreads your content to a new audience. It's incredibly valuable and probably one of your main

goals on social. Interaction engagement is still very important, but typically doesn't spread your content beyond your own followers. Interaction - like replies, comments, clicks - indicate that someone saw your content and did something with it. Acknowledgement - in the form of likes, favorites, views - indicates that someone saw your content and had a reaction. Of all of these, acknowledgement engagement is the easiest to come by, but is also an important metric to track. And while it's a fairly passive action, it's still action. Measuring amplification is important to know how far your message reaches beyond your direct audience. Measuring interaction helps you know which content is resonating and can inform your future content strategy. So think carefully about your social goals and the kinds of engagement you're interested in measuring, and be sure you're watching the ones that matter most to you.

Share of voice

Understanding share of voice on social media comes down to knowing **what percentage of a particular conversation your brand owns relative to your competitors**. Measuring your own activity is useful, but using a share of voice metric to develop benchmarks will help you know how exactly well you're doing and where you can improve.

First, decide who you want to compare your brand against. Find your main or most active competitors to track. It's possible that what your customers perceive as related to your brand might not be on your list, so research all your options before committing. Make sure you also set up monitoring for a set of related keywords and those of similar brands to see what else your audience is talking about that might not be obvious. Listening to the broader conversation can provide a great deal of insight into what your customers consider important in their beer, and give you content ideas for the future.

Use a few different metrics to truly understand share of voice. One brand might have a high reach, while another could receive a lot of engagement. Use several metrics to compare, to see where the patterns are and what makes most sense in your industry.

Reporting tips

In addition to monitoring the right metrics, you'll need to prepare the right social media reporting. We have a set of recommendations to help make your overall reporting easier.

Plan ahead

If you can, plan your measurement strategy in advance. There are ways to analyze historical social data, but it can be costly and difficult to access. When possible, **set up your social media measurement as early as you can**, and always before you start a big campaign or promote a new product or seasonal release. The social channels all have some basic internal analytics to help you understand the impact of your content, and there are a

number of third-party tools to help you measure the earned and competitor components (more on this next). Think through what you want to measure and set it up as soon as you can. Accessing real-time data and building your own analytics archive is better than having to rely on digging up historical data later.

Rely on the right tools

There are myriad social media measurement and analytics products you can choose from. However, there are only a few products that will help you get exactly what you need. Finding the right reporting product is a time-consuming process, but it will save you time later. Again, if you can do this in advance, your future self will thank you.

You'll need accept that no one product is going to be exactly what you're looking for. Every tool is going to have a different perspective and provide different metrics. Social data is far from perfect and the kind of information that can be pulled from a particular social media channel will vary depending on the channel. However, there is a product out there for you (and it might even be the Union Metrics Social Suite!).

One thing to note: you often get what you pay for with social media tools; free tools are likely to have less reliable data than their fee-based counterparts, or they will go out of business in a few months and won't be around at the end of your campaign. **You need to trust that the product you choose will be around for the long haul, gets the highest quality social data, and continues to evolve their features as social media changes.**

Make sure you're collecting the right social data from the right sources.

Collect the right data

Make sure you're collecting enough data for your reporting. Is the data you're accessing full-fidelity? Don't rely on limited or sample data when the full dataset is generally available for most social media platforms. And the longer you collect data, the more information you'll have to base your conclusions on. Creating benchmarks is easier if you have relevant data from this time last year, for example.

More data doesn't matter if you're collecting the wrong kind of data. Make sure your metrics aren't later impacted by a data quality issue. Where is your data coming from? And is it coming to you in a form you can actually use? Spend some time researching where your data comes from so you know what you're getting.

Finally, are you searching for the right posts? Make sure you have the ability to customize your search queries, and that you're looking for all the relevant keywords, including all possible spellings and combinations of your brand and product names.

Find the right timing

Finding the right cadence for your social reporting can be tough. Some reports need to be created monthly, while others are needed more or less often. And there's definitely someone on your team will want to see end-of-year reports every January. Generally though, **most metrics don't need to be reported on weekly** (though your content team or social media manager should likely be on top of these metrics weekly or even daily). Monthly reporting is a maintainable cadence for most social media reporting.

A FEW FINAL WORDS

From how to create the right content for social media, to learning how to better curate your content, to growing your audience to setting up better measurement, hopefully you've picked up a few tips you can use in marketing your beer on social media. The exact social media channels you're participating in are less important the overall guidelines we presented here, so you should be able to apply these lessons no matter what your social mix comprises.

Above all, we can't stress enough how important it is to test, test, test. Try these tips and keep track of your progress. See what works for you, and identify areas you can improve. Social media itself is always changing, so your social strategy should evolve alongside it. And if you ever need help, we're here for you at [Union Metrics](#). Good luck!