10 BEST PRACTICES TO DRIVE ON-SITE ENGAGEMENT
Introduction

Today's connected consumer has a number of fundamental expectations about what they should be able to do online. Regardless of the type of website (media, entertainment, retail, consumer brand, etc.), people increasingly expect an element of social interactivity. This shift in behavior creates new acquisition and engagement opportunities, and thankfully the tools that enable marketers to step up to this challenge are continually improving.

This paper explores best practices for incorporating social technologies into your site, including key considerations for how, when, why and where to integrate social components to maximize the experience as well as your return, along with some real-world examples.

We'll cover these opportunities to integrate social:

- Social Login
- Social Sharing
- Leveraging the Social Graph
- Loyalty and Rewards
- Mobile and Tablet Consideration
Leverage Existing Social Identities

When people arrive at a website, many of the actions they want to take require them to create a new, site-specific account—purchase, comment, create a wish list, contribute to a community, etc. Today’s consumer already maintains accounts on several different social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and LinkedIn, along with an email account from Gmail, Yahoo! or MSN, and would rather not set up yet another username and password. Research indicates that 86% of people would prefer to leave a site rather than create a new account.

With social login, people connect the social profile of their choice to your website, which makes the process quick and easy for them to maneuver. During the social login authentication process, they provide you access to their social profile data from those accounts. The rich data held in social profiles often includes information like name, email address, gender and date of birth, but also includes interests, activities, jobs, and their social graph.

Not only is social login significantly faster than creating a traditional account, once registered, people can immediately enjoy richer social interactions on your site using social tools that use their existing profile data.

“Let site visitors immediately engage on your site by removing registration hurdles with a social login solution.”
Define Reasons to Register

Most important to growing your audience through registration or social login is clearly defining and communicating why someone would register on your site in the first place. This critical step is often the most overlooked. People are rational economic actors and will weigh what they are giving up (personal information) for what they are receiving in return. Even when there is no money involved, people still need to find value in this exchange.

Although there are a number of ways to provide value for a registration, here are some ideas to start with:

Community
The ability to access and participate in message boards, comments or your branded social network are all valuable add-ons to your users’ experience—and are sometimes the primary experience provided by your website. In those cases, it’s natural (and often required) to register in order to participate.

Social Experience
Allowing site visitors to see which of their friends like your brand or actively engage on the site makes the experience social and more relevant. Shopping at ecommerce sites when you can see which products your friends like or have purchased is a more personal experience and likely to increase sales.

Premium content
Some websites keep high-value content behind a registration wall. There are many ways to build value into content, like creating long-form reports, high-value videos or early access to regular content. For content-driven sites, this is the easiest way to build value for registered users.

Dr Pepper uses social profile data to create a personalized, one-of-a-kind campaign.
Contests and promotions
Short-term contests with valuable prizes are a great way to increase registration and build your database of users. Remember that prizes don’t necessarily have to be expensive, but they must be valuable to your audience. An in-person meeting with a famous singer doesn’t cost anything, but has a huge value to fans.

Personalized experiences
67% of consumers claim that site personalization is highly attractive, and 52% believe that using social login will improve their site experience. People are more willing to share personal information in exchange for a personalized experience. Product and content recommendations based on profile data, in addition to site behaviors, is one way to tailor each visit.

The type of experiences you put behind registration will dictate the type of people who will register. Your most loyal fans will want access to premium content; more casual users may be interested in a contest (depending on the prize). Consider your goals in relation to the 1/9/90 rule: in general, 1% of users create content; 9% will comment on those creations; and 90% will be passive readers.

Start with identifying the actions you want people to take on your site and provide value in exchange for the personal information you want to receive.
Provide a Welcoming Return Experience

Consumers have told us that they like to be welcomed back at sites they frequent, in fact 65% of people in a recent study said they are more likely to return to a site that automatically recognizes them. Therefore, it’s important to consider the return experience early in the process of defining your registration strategy. For most websites, the value of a registered user is significantly higher than that of an anonymous user, so it is in your best interest to make it easy for people to re-enter the site and feel immediately connected.

This type of greeting by name is designed to show the user that the website recognizes and remembers them, and is ready to offer a streamlined and customized login experience.

Encouraging people to sign in to your site early with each visit provides a crucial strategic objective: it allows you to learn more about the actions they take on your site and build a rich profile of them over time. This becomes increasingly important as you personalize experiences and segment messages or offers based on preferences, actions taken on site, etc.

Other things to consider about the return experience:

- The welcome back message can be discrete, in the corner, or front-and-center, in a modal overlay or using prime screen real estate.
- Do you want the first prompt to log in to appear when they first return to your site, or at some other point as they are surfing the site?
- How many times do you want to prompt a user to log in when they return to your site? It doesn’t have to be just once.
Encourage Users to Link Multiple Social Accounts

The connected consumer maintains identities on a variety of social networks with different purposes in mind. While someone might prefer to log in to a commerce site using their Gmail profile, they may want to share content from a media site to Twitter or LinkedIn or invite their friends from Facebook to an entertainment site. Offering the ability to link multiple identity providers to their profile allows them to easily share, comment and connect with your site in the ways that they prefer.

Most importantly, account mapping allows you to build a more complete picture of the individual user by connecting data from multiple accounts in one place. That’s the strategy behind NASDAQ.com, which allows users to connect multiple accounts to their login profile.

Consider using a progress bar or other measurement icon to show people how far along they are in completing their profile, to encourage linking multiple identities.

NASDAQ allows users to map multiple accounts to their login profile.
Encourage Social Sharing

Social sharing allows people to tell their networks about the content, product or activity they have discovered on your website. This social endorsement amplifies your word-of-mouth efforts, since people tend to trust like-minded people they know significantly more than strangers or brands.

Social sharing can start with a click on a sharing button or in a number of other ways. Some possible sharing events include:

Making a purchase: Encouraging customers to share their purchase with friends can significantly impact sales growth with no effort on your part. With each purchased shared, Zappos has seen an incremental $33.66 in sales from Twitter referrals and $2.08 from Facebook referrals.

Reaching the end of an article: People who read an entire article are more likely to share it than those who read just the first paragraph. Encourage sharing with a prompt at the bottom of a page.

Commenting on a piece of content: The publication of a comment can trigger a recommended sharing event. In this case, the comment contributor is not done with the comment flow until they decide whether they want to share the comment to their social network.

Completing a sequence of events: The completion of events or accomplishments make for potentially sharable experiences, whether that’s viewing a video series, completing a survey, registering for an event, or interacting with advertiser elements on your site.

Marvel offers multiple flavors of social sharing, including share to Facebook Timeline and email.
Drive Engagement by Including Friends

Encourage social participation on your site by providing the tools for people to invite friends to join them. While social sharing is a great broadcast tool for sharing content and products, sometimes people want to send a message to specific friends. Birds of a feather tend to flock together, so the majority of a user’s friends might enjoy rock music, but perhaps an upcoming concert for a local folk indie rock band is only relevant to a handful of friends.

That’s why the ability to Invite or Refer A Friend with a targeted share is an important additional tool: more targeted, more personal. This functionality gives the user control of who they share the message with, and can be used for a number of purposes like sharing a deal or offer, telling friends about an achievement, coordinating a group-purchase gift or asking a friend to join the user in a new social experience.

Inviting or referring friends with a targeted message is important functionality to consider as it creates higher-value, more personal experiences than broadcasting to their entire network. Not surprisingly, targeted messages are more effective than anything you could send directly from the brand. Open rates on messages and emails from known contacts are 43% higher than from email marketers, and transaction rates are 2.5 times higher.

Bloomingdale’s Ask a Friend poll adds an element of social shopping into the online experience.
Optimize for Mobile Browser Experiences

Mobile and social work together well because people want to share experiences with their social network as they happen. They want to tweet about the concert while they are there, and allow their friends to share in some of the excitement in real time.

Before they can engage and share, people need to register, which can be especially frustrating on a mobile device due to the small screen and keyboard. Offering a pleasant user experience and social login makes even more sense on a mobile device than on the desktop for this very reason. The annoyance of typing personal information into form fields makes clicking a button to sign in with a social provider the preferred choice for most people.

If you are building a custom UI for your login experience, the best practice is to build in a mobile-optimized login flow. Button sizes, number of selections and visitor return experiences should all be designed for touch interfaces, with larger buttons taking up the majority of the screen.

Often it’s more efficient to look to a service that conforms to mobile browsers automatically, where layout, fonts and image sizes render correctly out of the box, saving development time and resources.

Official Drake App mobile integration makes account creation easy on a small screen device.
Reward Participation and Loyalty

Loyalty and reward programs can encourage people to engage with your site in ways that you deem valuable. Establishing clear goals and task paths helps acclimate new visitors to the site, and provides incentives for desirable behaviors, like filling out their user profile or sharing products they’ve purchased, that can be leveraged to further socialize the site experience.

Critical to developing these paths is to identify early indicators of success for your key performance indicators. If you know that a high percentage of people who place items in a Wish List or Shopping Cart will buy those items, then reward shoppers for taking that action. When people reach new levels or earn points for their actions, it provides a natural shareable moment, which further drives the entire social experience on your site.

Tracking and incentivizing user contributions, behaviors and actions on your community site helps you define a program of increasing relevance for your users, and value for your brand. Evolving your loyalty program over time is important for maintaining high interactions for long-time users. Don’t allow your most valuable users to feel like they know the system and understand the rules and that there’s really nothing new for them to discover. Continue to offer new challenges and goals to reward them for being a loyal advocate of your brand and participant in your site.

Yamaha encourages account creation with real rewards tied to participation.
Offer Ratings and Reviews

Whether you’re selling high-priced electronics or commodity coffee beans, consumers want to know that people like them, who had a problem or desire like theirs, had a positive experience with your brand. According to Nielsen, 92% of people trust people they know and 70% trust consumer opinions posted online. It’s important to offer a platform for real-life consumers to share their experience with your product or service in order to facilitate trust.

Authenticity in ratings and reviews is the most important criteria. In order to maintain the quality of your reviews, it’s important to require a real identity to be linked to the user’s account on your site. Even better: have people use their real names, and put a face and reputation to a critical review. Of course, this becomes another shareable element on the page, so set up social sharing for all review actions.

92% Trust the opinions of people they know
Test, Learn and Iterate

One thing is certain in social media: there will be new features and experiences that users respond to in the very near future. That’s why staying in tune with consumer trends, testing new tools and experiences, and learning what is effective will continue to be important.

Track time on site, conversion rates, pageviews and other basic website analytics elements for logged-in users vs. anonymous users. This metric will indicate the increased value of site visitors that are socially engaged right away, and help build a business case to drive more people into social funnels over time.

In addition, analyze performance for social metrics like frequency of visitors, average sharing activity and return traffic from social channels. Doing so will allow you to understand what experiences and content are valuable for your audience, so that you can adjust your online strategy to continually engage and connect with your audience in ways that maximize your return.

Technology solutions that integrate with your existing analytics tools are critical. Make sure that standalone analysis provides additional value beyond the metrics you are tracking currently.
Conclusion

A healthy online social experience requires a number of elements working in harmony. Much like any other community, websites need to provide the features and content that their audience wants to engage with, along with the tools to encourage participation.