



WHITEPAPER

HOW ENGINEERING AND INDUSTRIAL B2B BRANDS CAN USE SOCIAL MEDIA AS A SALES TOOL

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS HAVE EVOLVED IN RECENT YEARS, WITH NEW APPLICATIONS EMERGING, AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHICS EXPANDING, AND AN AUDIENCE CONTENT APPETITE THAT IS CONSISTENTLY EVOLVING.

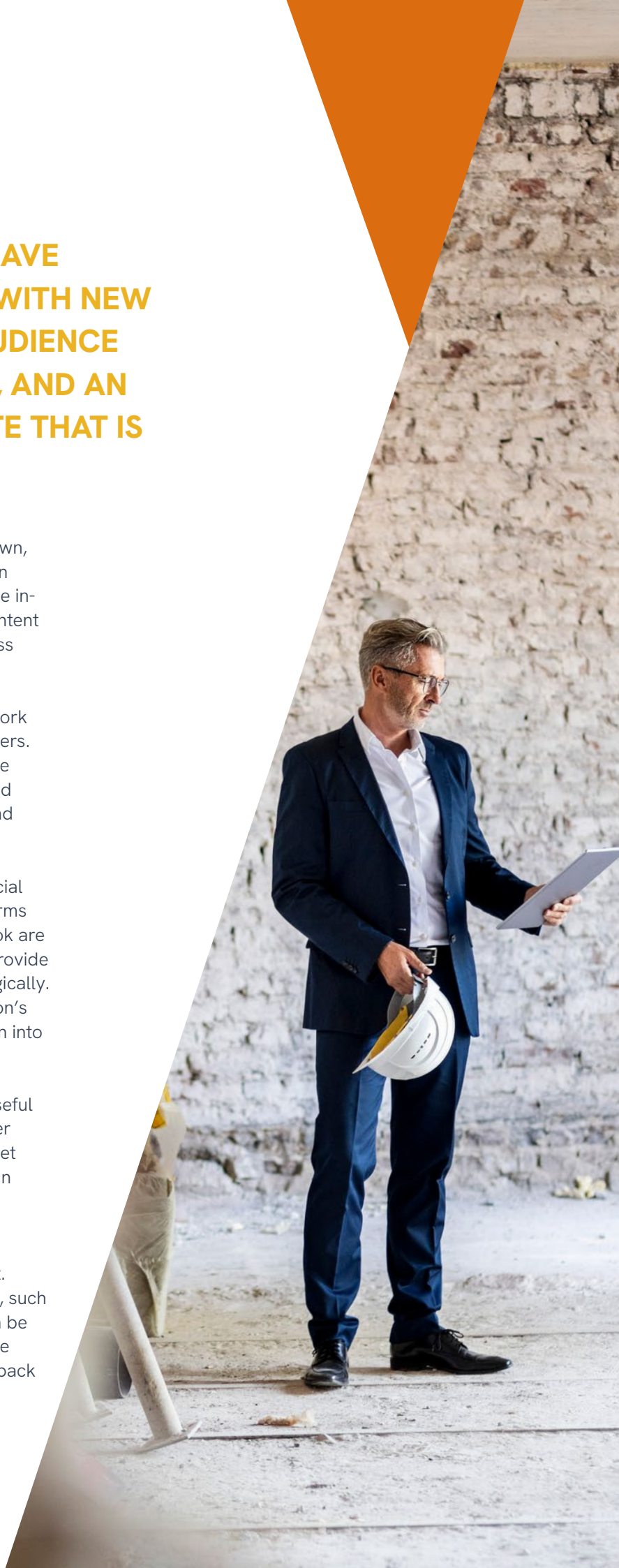
However, while the presence of social media has grown, many business-to-business (B2B) brands are lagging in their approach. Typically, these brands don't have the in-house resources to pull together strong, engaging content underpinned by a plan to leverage that content across social platforms.

Social media plays a large role in ensuring that the work organisations do is recognised by external stakeholders. It can help organisations reach new customers, create conversations around projects and business wins, and facilitate discussions with peers in the engineering and industrial solutions industries.

B2B brands are sometimes reluctant to engage in social media campaigns due to a misperception that platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and even TikTok are only for consumers. However, these platforms can provide a strong conduit to key B2B audiences if used strategically. And, they can also drive traffic back to an organisation's website, helping to develop leads that eventually turn into conversions if nurtured correctly.

Additionally, social media platforms can provide a useful window into customer sentiment, letting brands better understand how they are perceived among their target audiences and empowering organisations to engage in direct conversations with prospects and customers.

However, to use social media to their advantage effectively, businesses must first create great content. Then, they need to put that content in the right place, such as a blog on the organisation's website, so that it can be shared organically or through a paid campaign via the organisation's social media networks to drive traffic back to the website.



The four Cs of social media engagement

Making social media work for engineering and industrial B2B brands requires a mixture of four elements: content; cadence; customers; and conversation.

Content

Content should be the starting point for any social media plan. This means organisations shouldn't start with a desire to create a social media post; rather, they should start with great content that lends itself to sharing on social media. The right content can be used across various channels, beyond just social media, so organisations can really sweat the content they create for the best possible return on investment (ROI).

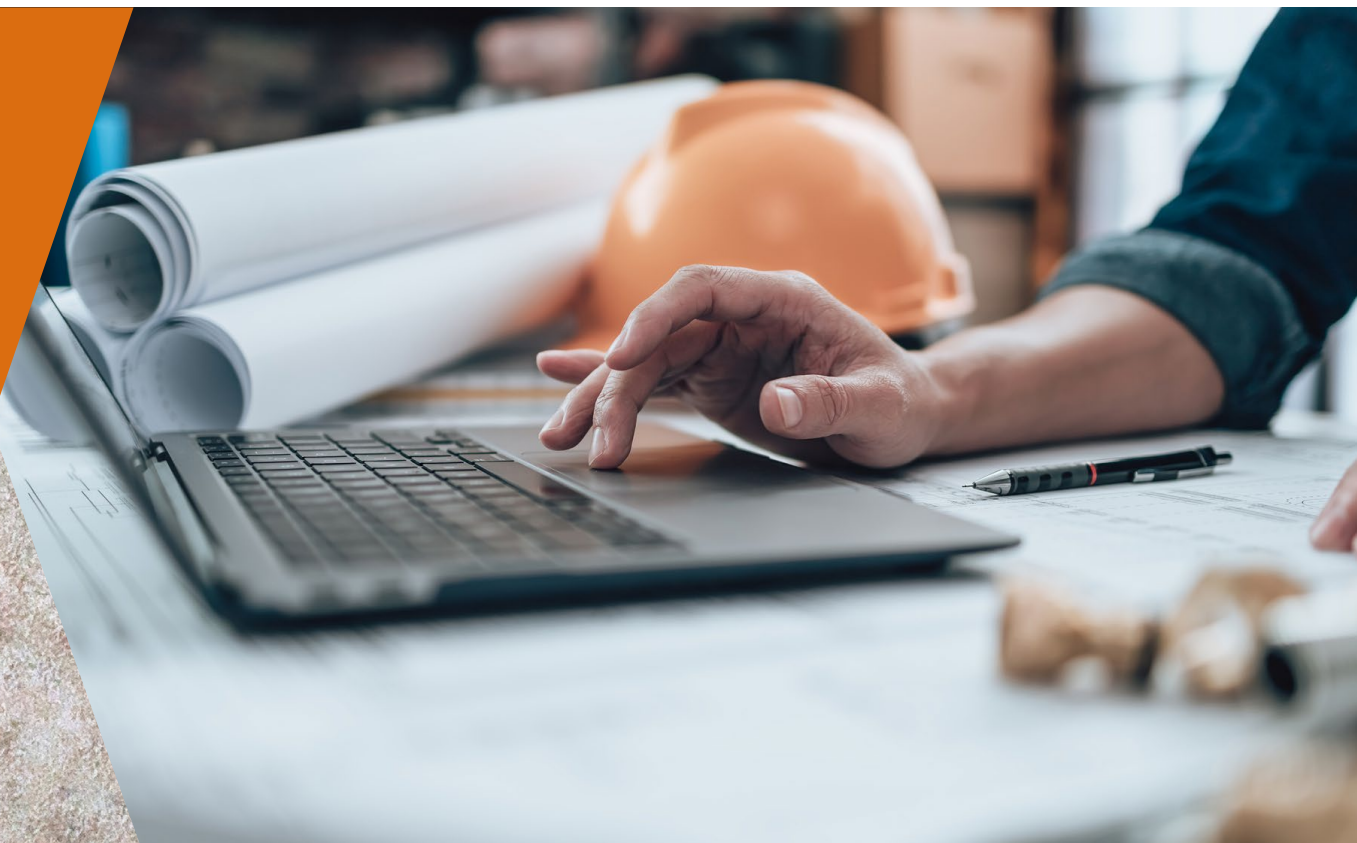
Regardless of how good an engineering or industrial B2B brand's content is, getting that content to the right people is essential. For example, sharing architect-focused content to a group focused on earthmoving equipment is unlikely to yield strong results. However, that same content could create interest and warm leads if it's shared to an audience of architects. So, it's essential to plan content carefully because dynamic, insightful, and interesting content can deliver an exponential benefit.

Social media content can be organic or paid. Organic content comprises the free posts organisations publish on their profile pages. This can include opinion pieces and thought leadership, compelling images, links to case studies and whitepapers, and more. It's important to connect with partners, customers, and other relevant

stakeholders through mentions, tags, and hashtags so that the content can be seen by as many relevant people as possible. For example, mentioning the installation contractor in a story about a successful project can mean that contractor will share the content to their own network, multiplying its effect.

Paid content can help organisations reach wider audiences than just their own and their partners' networks. By engaging in paid content, especially on platforms such as LinkedIn, organisations can ensure that a highly targeted audience is exposed to their content through boosted posts or targeted advertising complemented by downloadable, 'gated' content. This can open up new audiences and opportunities, helping to attract new customers and new partners.

Gated content requires prospects to provide their contact details in exchange for the content. This is a common and highly successful approach that works well for top- and middle-of-funnel prospects. However, it's essential to ensure that any content that is gated is worth the price of admission, providing thought leadership, value, or new ideas for the reader.



Cadence

The cadence of content is also important. While it's essential to keep a regular schedule of organic and paid updates, it's also critical to avoid inundating the marketplace. Doing so can devalue an organisation's content and result in valuable prospects switching off, becoming deaf to key messages that might otherwise resonate with them.

The correct cadence is likely to be different for every organisation. It depends on how much authentic and genuine news and thought leadership the organisation can generate, the size and breadth of its audience, and the resources available to develop high-quality content.

The cadence can also change at times. For example, if the National Construction Code or Australian fire regulations have recently been updated, then it might make sense for an engineering or fire safety consultancy to develop and push out content on those changes weekly. This demonstrates thought leadership and industry knowledge, while providing genuine assistance for prospects seeking to understand the changes. This type of content is highly valuable and can result in significant engagement.



Customers

Demonstrating the value that an organisation can provide through customer stories can be a powerful and compelling way to increase engagement. For example, showing before and after photographs of a ground remediation campaign can lead other potential customers to get in touch.

Third-party endorsements (i.e., from customers) and real-world examples are the most valuable types of content because they cut through strongly with target audiences. These audiences want to see proof of what's possible and they want to understand how positive outcomes were achieved. This is where a video case study or written customer story can deliver significant ROI for engineering and industrial B2B brands.

Often, a customer story results in more 'shares' and 'likes', with direct messages and engagement coming through to the organisation from customers in a similar situation, looking for a similar solution.

Likewise, if a customer posts a positive review of the project, the organisation can share this on social media platforms.



Conversations

Engaging with target audiences on social media requires just that: engagement. It's not enough to post a few updates or pictures and leave it at that. Organisations must be on the lookout for the opportunity to have authentic conversations with prospects and customers. This means engaging with comments on the post, answering questions, tagging stakeholders, and keeping the discussion alive and positive.

If a customer or prospect engages with an organisation's social media in a negative way, it's important to have a strategy in place to respond. Many organisations choose to take the conversation into a different forum. Some choose to simply delete any negative comments.

However, this can be seen as disingenuous, and it's advisable not to take this approach unless the comments are clearly trolling attempts. Negative comments that come from a genuine place should be treated the same way as any other customer complaint: with sensitivity and respect. This can create an opportunity to turn the interaction around.

With a structured process and clear policies in place, it is possible to hold productive and positive conversations with prospects and customers, using the organisation's social media channel to bring stakeholders together and create a sense of community and belonging.

Social media platforms to consider

LinkedIn

LinkedIn has often been described as the world's largest, self-cleaning marketing database. This platform is designed for professionals to connect with other professionals and businesses based on their work history and stated interests. In fact, with more than 57 million company pages on LinkedIn, it is rated the number one platform for B2B lead generation, with brands seeing a 33 per cent increase in purchase intent from ad exposure on the platform.

Simply posting new content such as images and captions, or short opinion pieces, on a company page weekly can see twice the lift in engagement with the organisation's content.

Facebook

Facebook is one of the largest and most popular social networking sites currently operating, with over 2.96 billion monthly active users from across the world. Business decision-makers consistently participate on the platform and are twice as likely to be active daily users compared with all users, with 58 per cent using the platform to find information that is important for decision-making

YouTube

This platform offers a home for on-demand webinars, workshops, video case studies, and tutorial content. Content can sit on an organisation's company channel on YouTube. The videos should offer valuable insights that can be shared on an organisation's website and across other social media platforms.

Instagram

Using visually stimulating images or videos, Instagram can provide businesses with a way to highlight their products and how they work in a creative way. Companies that offer serviced product solutions, like home security, air conditioning units and air quality monitoring, and smart home appliances, can do well on Instagram through high-quality images and storytelling or trend-orientated video content. In 2022, 19 per cent of B2B marketers found that Instagram was the most important social media platform for their business.

TikTok

This platform's popularity continues to rise, with its number of users projected to rise 15 per cent year-over-year (YoY) to reach 955.3 million users by 2025. Although the platform is predominantly targeted at consumers, TikTok reportedly offers the second-highest potential for marketers to grow audiences in 2023 behind Instagram, making certain that content creation on TikTok is something B2B brands should keep an eye on.

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Measuring social media ROI

Social media platforms tend to offer a great deal of built-in measurement, making it relatively simple to identify whether a campaign has delivered a strong ROI. Some of the metrics that are covered include reach, engagement, and shares. This makes it easy for organisations to see how far their content is travelling, which audiences are seeing it, and whether it is resulting in conversions.

When the content is aligned with the audience, and it's shared on the right social media platform, organisations can see significant ROI. Organisations just starting out with a social media campaign can minimise costs by choosing an organic-only approach or limiting the budget for paid posts. This can help the business start to build a following and get some idea of the audience response before engaging in more comprehensive paid campaigns.

It's also important to be ready to tweak content across social media based on measurable results. Sometimes, a better caption or a different image can make a significant difference in getting prospects to click through to gated content.

How our expertise can help your brand

Write Away Communication—part of The Recognition Group, Australia's leading group of PR and marketing specialists—has been helping businesses in the built environment, engineering, and industrial industry since 1986. We understand the industry and how important leveraging social media networks is to build your brand in today's business environment.

Through our marketing-as-a-managed service offering, we can help you create informative, creative, and quality content that speaks to your audience, and work with you to develop and monitor targeted social media campaigns that bolster your marketing efforts.

To find out more about how we can help you to leverage social media as a sales tool, contact us today.

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