

Achieve Social Media Success: 12 Tips

Plus six vital regulatory insights for social marketing.



Jolene Hansen



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Social media has matured from its simple, sociable roots to become a critical component of any successful marketing initiative. Whether you're new to hemp or a seasoned grower, succeeding on social media is crucial to building your hemp brand and spreading the word.

To help you make the most of your posts and avoid unnecessary social setbacks, *Hemp Grower* spoke with three social media experts working in the hemp space.



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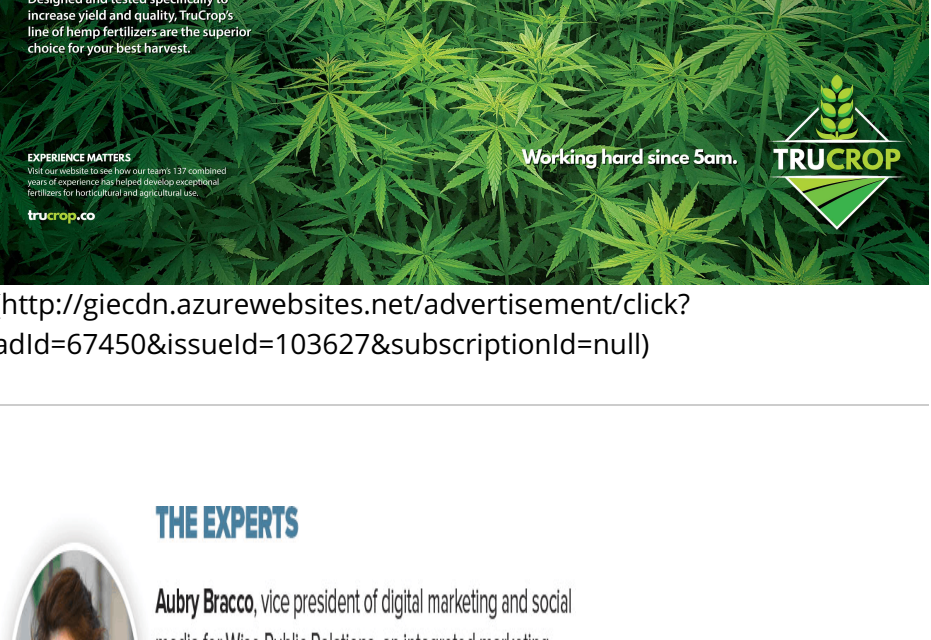
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The following are their tips to help your hemp company achieve social media success.

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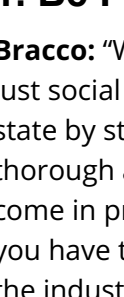
THE EXPERTS



Aubry Bracco, vice president of digital marketing and social media for Wise-Public Relations, an integrated marketing communications agency based in New York and Los Angeles.



Laura Momi Ginsburg, partner and principal at Blunt Strategies, a Minneapolis-based strategic consultancy specializing in government relations, marketing and PR for the hemp industry.



Charlie McHenry, founder and CEO of Impact420, an Oregon-based marketing, branding, social media and public relations agency serving the hemp marketplace.

1. Be Proficient, Prepared and Predictive.

Bracco: "We often think of social media in the larger sense as 'Oh, it's just social media,' but part of the job is navigating compliance and law, state by state and in the U.S. and Canada, daily. You have to be thorough and understand what you can and cannot do. ... You have to come in prepared with compliance rules as they currently stand, and you have to be predictive regarding trends affecting social [media] and the industry. It's something you have to have your finger on the pulse of every day."

2. Craft a Compelling Story.

McHenry: "Every company, large or small, needs to have a story—a background narrative that really explains their reason for being and their vision going forward and establishes their core messaging. ... Every farm has a story. It came into being for a reason. There's a family involved. There's land. As the French say, there's the terroir. ... All those things combine. All can be elements of a compelling story that is the heartbeat of their business."

3. Define and Refine Your Voice.

Ginsburg: "Even though social media platforms are designed for easy use, I recommend taking a second to step back. Start with figuring out: What is your voice, what do you look like, what do you sound like? If somebody was shown 10 different posts, would they be able to pick out the three that were you because there's some consistency and familiarity in how you are representing yourself? ... Taking that time to really define your voice and settle into what feels right is a really important starting point. [Social media] is just not something to be entering into lightly, even though it's quick and easy to get started."

Ginsburg: "LinkedIn is a really smart space for hemp companies to be showing up because LinkedIn is the business social network. ... I'm seeing LinkedIn as a place where these more serious conversations [are happening] about what's going on with businesses and what are the ramifications of living in these gray areas. I think that's really interesting, and it marks this bigger shift in the hemp industry really earning its credibility."

5. Choose Your Social Media Handles with Care.

Ginsburg: "A couple of real brass tacks are thinking about what you want your handles to be and making sure that they make sense and go with your brand—and, ideally, getting the exact same [handles] across the platforms that you want to be on. ... You want to be as consistent and seamless as possible across any and all platforms that you use."

6. Plan Your Work, and Work Your Plan.

McHenry: "A 52-week content schedule is a real important tool for any social media marketing. It involves sitting down and coming up with a content schedule for the year, like an editorial calendar on the journalism side. It needs to be flexible so you can react to things as they come up, but it's a pathway, a road map that gives you a source of ideas for developing content. When you look from a 52-week perspective, you realize seasonal opportunities that need to be addressed, events during the calendar year that can be leveraged. ... Opportunities will reveal themselves if you take a good, long, 52-week look."

7. Keep Your Messaging Tight.

McHenry: "I tell my clients to start with one core piece a week, usually a longer piece, like a Facebook post or a company blog. Generate that piece, and then use it for all the messaging for the rest of your social media all week long. Parse it into snippets for Twitter or take a paragraph for a Reddit post or take the images and use those [as] Instagram posts. You can keep messaging tightly coordinated across a whole bunch of social media platforms if you really organize yourself and derive all other social from that core piece."

8. Keep Your Overall Marketing Strategy in Mind.

Bracco: "Digital brand management, social media marketing, the social care—all the customer service and the community management strategies—all have to work in tandem with your integrated marketing communications program and your public relations program. ... Decide very clearly which channels serve which purpose in your overall cohesive PR and marketing program."

9. Cut Through the Noise With Authenticity.

Bracco: "People know when you're just being a billboard. ... If you invest in being honest about who you are and what your company stands for and the values that you have, and you show people how you're doing that behind the scenes and what you're doing every day to adhere to those values—and you do that in an authentic way—people will respond to it."

10. Let Technological Tools Simplify and Inform the Process.

McHenry: "There are many tools—Hootsuite and Buffer are two—for managing content across a variety of different social media platforms and queuing your content up so you can schedule it in advance, all from a single platform. ... Any tool that helps automate the process for you is a great tool. You can organize your whole week Monday morning and rest assured it's posted on the schedule specified."

Ginsburg: "If social media is an aspect where you really want to make an impact, really understanding the data behind it can be just as important as crafting a great message with a beautiful image. I would not discount getting into the real nitty gritty of it. Social media marketing is not always just a beautiful message that compels action. It's also that technical component of when is the right time to deliver this and who's it going to."

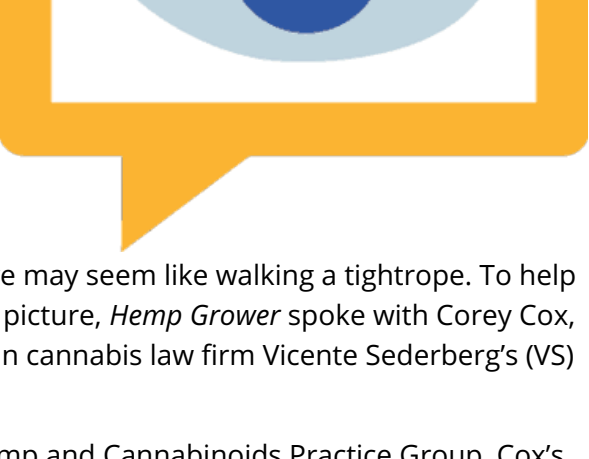
11. Understand That Multiple Metrics Matter.

Ginsburg: "When you really care about building community and good credibility [so] that you are there and you're available to interact in a positive way, that's pretty invaluable. However, people do assign credibility and worthiness to the number of likes and follows you have. Doing things like consistently posting great content, following other companies and individuals, commenting and interacting in a way that gets them to link back to you or like your stuff in return, that does matter. How many followers you have can influence how you show up in results and can certainly influence buyer behavior."

12. Strive For Meaningful Engagement.

Bracco: "I believe the health of a [social media] community can be gauged by the comments and the sentiment of what people are saying. Then it's about engagement. Are people actually making substantive engagement? Any person who comes to your community who is a detractor is someone you can make into a customer. Everyone who is a customer is someone you can make into a repeat customer. Every repeat customer can be a brand advocate. ... If someone feels compelled to share what you're saying about your brand, what you stand for or what you sell, to me that's the highest level of engagement you can possibly have."

6 Vital Regulatory Insights for Social Media Marketing



Ensuring that your social media marketing is compliant while effective may seem like walking a tightrope. To help you understand the big picture, *Hemp Grower* spoke with Corey Cox, J.D., associate attorney in cannabis law firm Vicente Sederberg's (VS) Denver office.

A member of the VS Hemp and Cannabinoids Practice Group, Cox's primary focus is regulatory compliance for hemp and marijuana businesses. In that role, he assists hemp businesses across the supply chain, including working with clients on risk-informed marketing. The following are six essential insights Cox shared.

1. Social Media Is a Regulated Space.

"Advertising and marketing activities—even those on social media—are regulated, and they are regulated by multiple government agencies, potentially at various levels of government.

"At the federal level, the FTC [Federal Trade Commission] actively regulates marketing of products, including those on social media. Then the FDA [Food and Drug Administration] is also very interested in the claims that businesses use to market products. At the state level, you have consumer protection laws about how certain products can be marketed or what constitutes a false claim.

"With social media, these rules aren't necessarily specific to hemp. They may be specific to social media or advertising in general."

2. Social Posts Can Constitute Advertising.

"If a business is posting an Instagram post, it has a picture, and it has a description. That can be an advertisement, even if it's not a paid ad through Instagram. That discussion they're having with potential customers, like in the comments section of an Instagram page—those can be claims and can constitute marketing claims by the company.

"People will think 'Oh, I'm just making a post. I'm just engaging with my customer,' and that is what they're doing. But that is also a regulated form of advertising, and there are rules for what kinds of claims they can make on their pages."

3. Only FDA-Approved Drugs Can Make Drug or Disease Claims.

"One concern is ingestible products, specifically ingestible [cannabidiol] CBD products, which are basically any CBD products someone can eat, drink or swallow.

"Every warning letter the FDA has issued against a CBD company cites that the company was making drug claims or disease claims that they are not allowed to make. Only FDA-approved drugs are allowed to make those types of claims.

"As a baseline rule, regardless of what type of product you are making or selling, you cannot make a drug or disease claim about this product. You cannot say it will help someone or will cure a specific condition or will help with a specific state of bodily dysfunction."

4. The FDA and the FTC Are Watching Social Media.

"In warning letters [to hemp and CBD companies], the FDA and the FTC are regularly citing content that companies have [posted on] social media platforms. ... They are using social media posts, blogs and website content as grounds for enforcement action against companies."

5. Your Social Media Claims Have Consequences.

"The claims people make have a direct impact on how regulators approach and even regulate that product. The FDA could view the same exact product as either a cosmetic or a drug, and that determination could be based solely on the marketing materials used for that product.

"It's critically important that people understand this is a regulated space, and your claims really matter. They matter in terms of how the product is regulated, and they matter because they have an impact on your risk exposure and can result in major consequences for your business, whether it's a regulatory action by some agency like the FDA or whether it's disgruntled consumers that are suing the companies. We have seen a growing number of class action suits that are emerging as a result of claims people are making in advertising."

6. Other People Are Watching Your Social Media, Too.

"These businesses are under a higher than normal level of scrutiny by regulators and plaintiffs' firms. [Businesspeople] should be aware that other people that potentially want a negative outcome for these businesses will also be looking at their advertisements."

Jolene Hansen is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to GIE Media publications. Reach her at jolene@lovesgarden.com.