The Imagination Guide to B2B Social Journalism

PROJECT SUMMARY

What They Wanted
A smart white paper for CXOs that solidified the company’s thought leadership in content marketing.

What We Did
As part of the white paper team, we helped develop the journo-inspired “5 W’s and an H” format, interviewed experts, wrote in a style that combined personality with authority, and developed pull quotes and sidebars.

Why It Worked
A “chunky” format with sidebars, boxes, and pull quotes allows readers to dip into the white paper at any point and come out with a valuable piece of information. The just-fun-enough style reflects the social media topic while keeping readers’ interest high.
Contents

4 What
A handy definition—and what journalism brings to social for B2B.

6 Why
The reasons social journalism is worth real effort, plus a B2B case with pop appeal.

9 How
Your guide to finding your voice and mastering the art of sharing.

15 Where
Advice on avoiding a copy/paste approach to very different channels.

18 When
Because timing is everything—but not the only thing in the world of B2B paid push.

21 Who
All about your own thought leaders and your industry’s influencers.

23 The Kicker
The happy ending, big reveal and call to action—all in one.
For too many B2B brands, social media and thought leadership exist in two separate spheres: The former is breezy content—often posted by the interns—about your brand on Twitter and Facebook, and the latter is serious journalism, created by serious journalists, to share your most in-depth and timely ideas with your business audience.

This artificial separation of social media and “real” journalism no longer serves B2B companies and associations like yours. To many savvy thought leaders, there’s no longer even a distinction between the two: Social media is journalism because it’s where your audience goes to take in breaking news and expert insights.

This distinctive fusion is called social journalism, and it’s the most strategic way to make sure your thought leadership content reaches the newsfeed of the audiences that matter to you.

Every young reporter learns content should cover the five W’s and one H: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. This handy mnemonic applies just as well to social journalism, even if the order changes a bit. This guide will use it to explore how to apply journalistic practices to your social content—to boost your B2B brand’s credibility and thought leadership while achieving your business goals at the same time.

Let’s start with WHAT social journalism is all about.

**FILTER THIS**

Social journalism = B2B content + social media + audience development + business insights, all creating a cohesive brand strategy that drives defined results that stem from your audience’s feeds.
What
Social journalism is modern journalism. It can be difficult to reconcile the idea of B2B thought leadership coinciding with 280-character tweets, Instagram photos floating in a sea of selfies and Facebook posts surrounded by political rants—so let’s talk about how this remarkable mashup actually works as a way to further your communication goals.

Social media is where your B2B audience tends to go first for news and industry insights, and where they often leave disappointed by the subpar quality of said news and insights. Because there’s no barrier to entry—no editor, no publisher—users can post anything they want in the service of positioning themselves as experts. (And they do.)

The remedy is to take a journalistic approach to B2B thought leadership in the feed. You may not be able to cite your sources on Twitter, but you will have sources. You might not have 2,000 words to convey your brand’s story to your business audience, but everything you do on social media will jibe with that story.

Here’s what else journalism brings to social:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE CONSUMER SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETER:</th>
<th>THE B2B SOCIAL JOURNALIST:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curates and shares content from others.</td>
<td>Creates original content with an industry-insider mindset, along with strategic outside sharing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweets the latest trending content at the same time every morning.</td>
<td>Offers expert context to real-time events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungers for likes.</td>
<td>Pegs tactics to meaningful business results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connects for connecting’s sake (and to garner the above-mentioned likes).</td>
<td>Connects meaningfully with target audiences to build long-lasting relationships of trust.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Can you feel the benefits shining from the right side of the table? That’s social journalism in action. It’s the WHAT. Let’s check out the WHY.
Why
Chances are high you’re already spending a lot of time on your social output. Why put even more effort into your B2B social strategy by adding real-time relevance and a solid journalism component? We’ll give you four big reasons.

1. **It’s where your audience is**
Ignoring the sweeping scope of social is a mistake—especially if you want to reach millennials and Gen Zers, who often start there. In fact, a Bluecore study found that 85 percent of Generation Zers learn about new products on social media, and according to Nielsen, they’re also 59 percent more likely than older generations to connect with brands on social.

Even if millennials and Gen Z are not your B2B core audience, chances are still very high that your target audience is relying on social for thought leadership. And it’s not just LinkedIn, which drives 80 percent of B2B leads: Platforms such as Facebook (with its 2 billion monthly active users) and YouTube (with 1.3 billion users and 5 billion videos watched daily) aren’t just places people go take mental health breaks from work—they’re also gigantic search engines your audience is using as part of their work, to take in important news and industry insights.

If you’re not on social, to many members of your audience you simply don’t exist.

2. **You’re leading the way**
Social journalism offers a unique opportunity for B2B thought leadership. Because it can be so difficult to calculate ROI on social journalism, not many B2B companies and associations are taking advantage of it—leaving a wide-open field for smart brands such as yours.

3. **Social journalism is the real deal**
With all the clamor over fake news on social, people hunger for real, verifiable information and advice. Social journalism by trusted B2B brands like yours is an antidote to fake news, and as a thought leader you’re perfectly positioned to give

---

**FILTER THIS**

Social journalism checks all the right boxes:

- **Targeted.** Reach prospects at each point in their consumer journey.
- **Shareable.** Click and done!
- **Scalable.** Bigger audience does not equal more content.
- **Efficient.** Make your content multitask in different social channels.
- **Data driven.** Use your insights from the data to optimize future campaigns.
- **Value driven.** You’re offering thoughtfulness and relevance, not a quick shot of adrenaline.
With social journalism, you can’t coast your way with quips and facile insights. **You have to earn your B2B audience’s respect. Provide real value and expert context.** That’s why *Harvard Business Review* on social is a world apart from *BuzzFeed* LOL, yet both might attract the same audience.”

—Kim Caviness, EVP and Chief Content Officer, Imagination

4. **You guide clients and members on their paths**

Social journalism takes advantage of strategically chosen networks to reach your target audience via different touch points throughout their consumer journey.

Even if your audience is not seeing your feature-length thought leader pieces (yet), they probably already are on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and/or Instagram. Social journalism lets you intercept conversations and inject your brand’s value into channels like these, filling the gap left by your late-to-the-game competitors.

Channel optimization is key here: You don’t have to be present on **all** social channels to see business results. For example, LinkedIn is tailored to a professional mindset—61 million of its users are senior level influencers and 40 million are in decision-making positions—so it’s wise to showcase content there that provides value in a buttoned up way. But don’t exclude other channels for smart content, since 82 percent of Facebook users have attended some college. It all depends on what kind of audience your B2B organization is targeting.

Now that you’re ready to implement a B2B social journalism strategy, we’ll take a deep dive into **HOW**.

---

**On The Record: The American Optometric Association**

**THE CHALLENGE:** How to attract viewers—and ultimately new small-business members—by taking advantage of current news and trends, without crossing the line into irrelevant *trendjacking*. (Read more on trendjacking later in this guide.)

**THE APPROACH:** Remember *#thedress* debate, in which families were torn apart and friends parted ways over whether the dress in the photo was black and blue or white and gold? The American Optometric Association (AOA) tapped into pop culture with true, evidence-based information that proved both sides right. The AOA produced a story explaining the visual phenomenon with quotes from a doctor of optometry and promoted it with playful social posts. AOA kept up the momentum by using social journalism to educate the public on why the NFL’s “color rush” jerseys were a nightmare for the color blind and how to safely watch the solar eclipse of 2017.

**THE RESULTS:** AOA’s eclipse safety video garnered 176,000+ views on Facebook—a record for the association that eclipsed the previous high of *#thedress*. 

---

imagination.
How
Social journalism brings value to your audience while supporting your B2B business goals. Here’s how to create journalistic content on social that furthers your B2B thought leadership, harmonizes with your brand voice and offers solid business results.

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT
Before leaping into social and posting with abandon, consider your strategic goals. We’ll talk more about ROI and other key measurements later—but for now, to paraphrase many a business book, you need to define what success means to you.

Where along the customer journey does your social strategy lie? Are you looking to foster an audience, attract visitors to your website, persuade people to subscribe to your email list, jump straight to sales or membership sign-ups? Pick an objective and optimize your approach with that goal in mind.

YOU BE YOU
If you post a smart and snarky industry insight on Twitter and then wax philosophical on LinkedIn, steeped in arcane industry jargon, that’s a problem. Yes, the type and length of content the platforms allow affect what you post on each of them, but your brand needs to strike a balance so you don’t befuddle your audience with an inconsistent voice and POV.

Here are five exercises that will help you figure out your brand’s persona, so you can offer your audience an on-point experience with your B2B social journalism.

1. Play author
Fiction authors are taught to write extensive biographies for their main characters: What challenges they’ve overcome in their lives, who inspires them, what motivates them, what their childhoods were like. Do this exercise for your brand as if it were the protagonist in a novel. (Bonus points for doing it for your audience as well.)

2. Pick an adjective
Gather your team, or leverage a focus group, and ask them to share three adjectives they think best describe your brand. If you hear one or two adjectives repeated frequently—like, say, premium and creative or trustworthy and caring—consider how you can apply these characteristics to your social content.

3. Identify your brand value
Sally Hogshead’s book How the World Sees You can help you discover what qualities make your brand valuable to others, so you can incorporate those qualities into your content.

4. Personify your brand
Pretend your brand is a person. How would this person create a LinkedIn article, an Instagram story, a Facebook post? How would he or she speak to others at a cocktail party? This helps your brand sound natural on social, and avoid the common risk of coming across as awkward and off-putting. Making your B2B organization or association human and approachable is key.

5. Lurk and learn
Figure out where your audience gathers online—for example, industry forums or LinkedIn Groups—and study how they talk to one another. You don’t want to play copycat, which your audience will spot immediately, but let their tone and style influence your own social content. By lurking, you have a unique opportunity to intercept conversations in an organic, contextual way—but only in spaces that are relevant to you, whether that’s a LinkedIn Group or hashtag search on Twitter or Instagram.

The first two steps to a social journalism strategy that works were all about you,
you, you. Now let's talk about what your business audience is looking for on social.

**FIND YOUR SLIVER**

On the Venn diagram of your social strategy, your sweet spot is the sliver where what your company or association does and what your target audience finds interesting overlap.

Your job is to figure out what that sliver is, and make sure that's where your social content resides. Once you figure out the intersection and dive into it with the best practices in this section, you'll find that it becomes deeper and wider than you ever imagined it would.

**SPIN YOUR CONTENT (BUT NOT IN THE WAY YOU’RE THINKING)**

Developing valuable social journalism content is hard work, so make your efforts do double (and triple, and quadruple) duty.

One lightning-strike idea, thought leader piece or surprising snippet of information can serve not only as a tweet or LinkedIn update but can also be reworked into an infographic, a slideshow, an image and more—each one targeting a different segment of your audience at a specific point in their customer journey. Just stay in the sliver and optimize for each channel, and your content will keep working for you.

**OFFER CONTEXT**

With so many would-be B2B thought leaders simply regurgitating industry news on

---

**FILTER THIS**

**Keep in mind:**

Unless you already have a rock-solid brand persona in place, yours will be a work in progress as you become more involved in social journalism. That's OK.

You can infuse not just your copy but also your creative with your brand's voice. Images, videos and even infographics can all fall in line with your B2B brand's unique style.

Social is for people. Even in a jargon-heavy, technical industry, take care to keep your brand's voice approachable.
The Imagination Guide to B2B Social Journalism

Smart journalists these days use social media to find story ideas and even sources, to share and distribute, and to interact with people who have legitimate comments or questions. Legitimate is the key word there. **A little back and forth is healthy for thought leaders—but the internet-age wisdom of ‘don’t feed the trolls’ still applies.”**

—Chris Blose, VP of Content, Imagination

Social, your brand can be thumb-stopping by providing **expert context** on what’s happening. When you’re developing social content, consider:

- Can you add your unique B2B POV to the data?
- How does the information or news affect your industry audience in particular?
- How can you make this information provide **lasting value** to your readers?
- Can you argue the opposite point to bring a new industry POV?
- What can your audience members do with or about the information to change their lives (and business results)?
- How do you see this piece of news playing out in the future?

This is a checklist traditional journalists run through when hunting around for ideas for their articles. Readers don’t get much out of hey-isn’t-this-cool top-ics, so B2B journalists brainstorm ways to make the information relevant, useful and—most important—**actionable** for their insider audience.

**LISTEN, RESPOND, REPEAT**

Making business decisions based on online feedback might seem unusual, but if you’re not willing to do so, even the most insightful and helpful social journalism will quickly lose its effectiveness. Shouting into an echoing void is what you don’t want to do, but wrangle the wild world of social media into a digital focus group and you’ll always be able to gather insights about what’s valuable and interesting to your industry audience on each channel.

The truth is, people on social don’t take kindly to being asked to fill out surveys or even to answering questions such as “What would you like to see from us?” Even though they’re disguised as being about the audience, they are really about the brand—and everyone knows it.

Instead, listen to how your audience is commenting on, sharing, and interacting with your content, and then create a virtuous circle where you combine your new insights with your audience’s smarts to optimize your brand’s content.

Hashtags are an important social listening tool: Searching the keywords that are relevant to your B2B organization and your industry will help you with all this listening, learning and optimizing on social media.

Another crucial social listening practice is **sentiment analysis**, which is the process of examining social mentions to determine the opinions and emotions of the user when it comes to your brand: positive, negative or neutral. There’s a whole science behind sentiment analysis, but you don’t need to be a scientist to keep an eye on your organization’s social mentions and figure out how your audience is responding to your social journalism strategy. You’ll always find a mix of opinions, but you can watch for
the prevailing wind and change your tack when needed.

Keeping one ear tuned to the murmurings of your social audience will ensure that your B2B content is melding more and more closely with what they want and value—and will keep you stocked with enough ideas to last years.

REPLACE ROI WITH ROR

You know your business goals—which, as we mentioned earlier, is the first step to developing a successful social journalism strategy. The challenge comes in tracking how close you are to those goals in the constantly shifting world of social media.

As important as ROI is in traditional business strategy, we respectfully suggest that for your social journalism strategy you replace this acronym with the much more useful ROR. That’s return on relevancy, where you quantify the impact you have on your core audience. Instead of measuring your results in dollars, you measure them in engagement and trusting relationships between you and your audience.

This approach meshes well with the fact that more touch points offer better B2B results and that the average decision-maker reads 10 content pieces (that includes social!) before finalizing a purchase decision, according to LinkedIn. The more social engagement you have, and the stronger your audience’s trust is in you as a thought leader, the more marketing touches you’ll achieve.

But isn’t measuring relationships even more difficult than counting beans?

YOUR GUIDE TO SHARING OTHER PEOPLE’S CONTENT

To retain your credibility as a B2B thought leader, you need to produce your own content. However, you don’t want your social content to be all about you—not to mention, developing enough original content to fill all your social channels can become an onerous task.

So here’s how to know when to share content from others.

SHARE IF: | DON’T SHARE IF:
---|---
It’s something you would email to a close business colleague. | You get the feeling your business colleague would instantly delete your email.
It makes you say “wow.” | It’s interesting or relevant—but not enough to spike your wow meter.
You can add your own POV, context or commentary. | You can only make it work as a standalone link or quote.
Your audience would thank you for sharing it—literally, as in they would send you an email or DM to say thanks. | It would be just another piece of informational detritus passing by in your audience’s feed.

“Subject matter expertise gives us an edge because we speak our clients’—and their clients’—language.”

—Marla Clark, VP of Content, Imagination
That’s where the listening we talked about earlier comes in. Yes, it’s subjective, but the amount of audience engagement your social content generates; how much your brand is part of the conversation; and the overall sentiment of shares, mentions and comments provide a good snapshot of your brand’s ROR.

Social media analytics platforms like Sprout Social and Snaplytics can help you track all this to ensure that the ROR of the content you produce is trending upward—and that you’re able to serve your clients or members at the next touch point along their B2B journey.

**KEEP YOUR SOCIAL SAFE**

The traditional social media tactic of sharing fun videos and memes about your industry presents little actual threat to your B2B organization. But we’re talking about social journalism here, where you’re developing and sharing expert insights, addressing potentially controversial topics in real time and offering insider context found nowhere else in your industry. The more unique, controversial and thought-provoking your content is—especially if you’re criticizing, rethinking or overturning core beliefs in your industry—the more likely you are to upset some members of your audience.

Many social experts say that if followers aren’t getting angry with you at least some of the time you’re doing it wrong, but there’s a razor-thin line between generating a bit of controversy and committing a gaffe that lands your B2B brand in the Social Media Hall of Shame.

Take these two steps to keep your brand safe while keeping it real on social media:

1. **Make new friends**
   Building a strong working relationship with Legal and Compliance will help you ensure your social journalism content is covered. Get to know the teams, ask what their red-light words are for content—for example, maybe the word *guarantee* makes them jittery since there’s nothing that can be guaranteed 100 percent—and bring them on board when launching a new social journalism strategy.

2. **Make a list**
   Work up a list of hot topics you’ll want to address in your social journalism plan each week, define a range of responses that are acceptable to your brand, and run the list by your legal department and other key players as necessary. This will give everyone peace of mind that you’re ready to address difficult topics—*without* sinking your brand—when your business audience turns to you for your POV on a complex and timely issue.

   You have your goals, you’re in your sliver and you’re producing thought-provoking, original social content that’s tied to your B2B goals. Now, where do you put it? That’s what we’re going to tackle next in WHERE.

---

**On The Record: Sears Home Services**

**THE CHALLENGE:** Reach a broader audience of homeowners on Facebook with the objective of driving them to the Sears Home Services website to engage with content, while achieving a secondary goal of on-platform engagement to promote the booking of maintenance and repairs.

**THE APPROACH:** Throughout 2017, Imagination used paid social media campaigns to distribute SHS content to a homeowner audience across Facebook. The idea was to test engagement by promoting a variety of different topics and content types that would be relevant to readers. We promoted a variety of types, from link posts to videos, with topics including appliances, maintenance, and tips and hacks.

**THE RESULTS:** A Facebook quiz about laundry skills performed extremely well. The laundry quiz post garnered more than 76,000 link clicks at a cost of $0.20 per link click. The click-through rate was very high at 7 percent, compared to a typical retail click-through rate of 1.59 percent—showing that SHS’s target audience highly engaged with the post and content. With this in mind, we created future content to mimic this top-performer and optimized campaigns with the data-driven insights obtained from this quiz.
Where
So much valuable content, so many platforms ... so much confusion. Let’s parse what content works best on which platforms for B2B and how you can keep the journalism aspect alive in your social content—even in the least journalism-friendly channels.

**KNOW YOUR CHANNEL BASICS**
The fun of these wildly different social media platforms is that they offer unique ways of presenting your content that appeal to different segments of your audience. However, attempting to cram a feature-length LinkedIn article into a 280-character tweet, and then tossing the accompanying image onto Pinterest, is not how it works.

You already know that Twitter allows for microblogging and Instagram is mainly about dynamic formats like photos, stories and video—but it goes so much deeper than that. The limits and expectations of each platform will have an enormous impact on the content you’ll post to each channel. Here’s a quick analysis of the major platforms for B2B, so you can share your thought leadership in the way that works best with each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLATFORM</th>
<th>USE IT FOR</th>
<th>DON’T USE IT FOR</th>
<th>BEST PRACTICES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facebook</strong></td>
<td>Showing up. Facebook may seem like the least likely contender for B2B content, but the median amount of time spent on Facebook by business decision-makers each day is 74 percent higher than other people on the platform. (Source: Medium, 2017)</td>
<td>Chit-chat. Engagement is highly positive—especially with recent algorithm changes—but leave random customer service interactions to your client/member experience team. Your focus on Facebook is leveraging the world’s largest social network to meet your organization’s business goals through social journalism.</td>
<td>Be real. Talk to your audience, not at them. Be useful. Facebook’s early 2018 algorithm change will prioritize information from family and friends while de-prioritizing content from businesses and brands. This creates an opportunity for strategic brands that offer thoughtfulness, journalistic value and industry insider information people will want to share.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Twitter</strong></td>
<td>Positioning yourself as a thought leader. Twitter is where businesses often turn for breaking news developments and advice. Just be sure the information is relevant to your brand and useful to your audience. Images and video. Twitter is a surprisingly robust platform for these content tools.</td>
<td>Pointless messages. On this short, quick and often informal platform, it’s tempting to post banal (read: boring) details about your business, justifying that they’re part of your brand’s story. Keep your brand’s image sharp by sticking to your social journalism strategy.</td>
<td>Get verified. If your business or association boasts that little blue checkmark meaning you’ve been verified by Twitter, your audience knows they can trust your brand’s content. Be part of the conversation. Make sure that your hashtag strategy is smart and concise. Intercept discussions where you need to, but don’t overdo it. Repeat yourself. Twitter users’ feeds scroll by so fast that posts have a very short half-life. That’s why it’s important to repeat messages over time while varying the language in each post’s copy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLATFORM</td>
<td>USE IT FOR</td>
<td>DON’T USE IT FOR</td>
<td>BEST PRACTICES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>Thought leadership. This business-friendly platform lets you publish long-form content that lends itself to discussing complex ideas while users are in the industry mindset to receive them. While about half of B2B marketers believe their thought leadership builds trust in their organization, a whopping 83 percent of actual buyers are on board with this belief. (Source: LinkedIn, 2017) <strong>Industry-specific news.</strong> LinkedIn is a professional network, meaning it’s expected that you’ll be sharing information for those in the know.</td>
<td>Frivolity. There’s a mindset for LinkedIn users. Think professionalism. Think aspirational. Show your brand’s personality, but keep it professional and avoid overly light posts that will seem like a waste of users’ time.</td>
<td><strong>Post like clockwork.</strong> Become a trusted adviser by posting on a regular schedule. We recommend posting updates two or three times each week. <strong>Don’t be all business.</strong> Even though LinkedIn is a business networking tool, be sure to post also about topics that don’t directly promote your brand. Hard selling is your enemy, and shareability is your friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>Peeks behind the scenes. Instagrammers love seeing what it’s like at your brand, as long as it adds value to your backstory. Got a unique tradition that speaks to your office culture? An employee with an unusual story? Capture them in images or on video. <strong>Slice-of-life posts.</strong> What happened in your business or association today that’s just too weird, funny or ironic to be true—and that others in your business audience can relate to? <strong>Giving props to your audience.</strong> Showcase your customers or members, and how they use your brand.</td>
<td>Randomness. Be sure each post ties back somehow to your B2B organization’s strategic messaging and story.</td>
<td><strong>Set the bar high.</strong> Instagram is a visual platform, so make sure your photos and videos are high quality; however, to keep it authentic, not all posts should look like they were staged by a professional. <strong>Develop a signature look.</strong> Choose a theme for your posts and even a mood or color scheme that works with your brand. When you look at your feed as a whole, you should feel a sense of brand harmony.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>Images that tell a story. Show your brand, product or service in action—and in context. <strong>How-to images.</strong> Show followers how they can use your brand to improve their lives—and their professional results.</td>
<td>Repurposing content. OK, you do want to use Pinterest to repurpose text-heavy content into image-friendly content—but you don’t want to simply pin image after image from your brand’s website or blog. Offer your Pinterest audience some unique content just for them as well.</td>
<td><strong>Get crystal clear.</strong> Images should be sharp, well lit and attractive. <strong>Create readable images.</strong> Add a text overlay to your images so followers will know what the linked content is about.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost as important as what you post is **WHEN** you post and promote it, so next we’ll work on your brand’s social timing.
When
There are three key lessons to the WHEN part of the equation: When to post your social journalism content, how timely your posts need to be and when to use paid versus organic social.

WHEN ... AND HOW MUCH?
Social is always “on,” and new opportunities to offer industry context pop up every minute, all of which can drive a B2B social strategist crazy. Here are our guidelines on posting frequency.

Slow down. Don’t make the mistake of letting your social journalism strategy devolve into a mishmash of thought leadership, community management, selling and customer service that requires you to be on alert at all hours of the day. B2B social journalism is about storytelling, expert context, and carefully curated news and information (with value-adding context), so it’s OK to post only when you have something important to say. Your social media staff and client/member experience team can handle the rest.

Be reliable. While we’ve absolved you of the chore of supplying a never-ending stream of posts, you also don’t want your followers to see virtual tumbleweeds in your social channels. Some platforms encourage more posting—like Twitter, where tweets fly by in minutes—while others, such as LinkedIn, are more tolerant of less-frequent content.

A SEASON FOR EVERYTHING
Trendjacking (aka newsjacking) is crafting content around trending topics and breaking news whether or not there’s a natural connection. While this strategy gets attention, it’s not the kind of attention a thought leader needs and it’s not the kind of content your business audience expects. Social journalists are all about creating and sharing useful, relevant, actionable content—so there’s no need to dilute your power by desperately scanning Google Trends for eyeball-grabbing content.

Brands that try to piggyback on the news without an actual connection aren’t admired—they’re mocked for lapse in judgment.

Of course, sometimes the stars align and a trend or piece of news fits perfectly with your brand’s story and message (as in the AOA color-of-the-dress case study earlier in this whitepaper). If you’re an order fulfillment service or an association for corporate relocation professionals, for example, feel free to create content around National Bubble Wrap Appreciation Day in January.

WHEN IT PAYS TO PAY
Organic social, where you simply post and hope for the best, still has its place as a lights-on approach if you’re looking to use your social channels exclusively to host content that boosts brand awareness. However, when you use organic tactics as your macro social journalism strategy, you’re competing not only with other brands but also with social users’ friends and family members. In fact, while Facebook’s total reach spans the globe, the organic reach of your company page posts is as low as 2 percent! So if you’re looking for people to actually lead with your

FILTER THIS
Be smart about sharing, and be sure to listen more. Unless you have something brilliant to say or a deep insight to add to the conversation, keep it to yourself; you can always collect these thoughts to create more expert content later. Remember: In B2B social journalism you’re an expert, not a marketer.
thought leadership, you’ll need a smart, robust paid social strategy. The challenge is finding the sweet spot between organic and paid that works for your B2B brand because they complement each other. You can have content that organically boosts your credibility, but you won’t reach your audience without paid media support. On the same note, your content could be going viral thanks to paid media dollars, but this means nothing if your social channel is completely void of content.

Think of it like dating. Paid is the initial conversation that gets you out there and noticed when you walk up to someone at a bar and they engage with you. But this doesn’t necessarily last enough to get a date; do you have the interesting conversation (content) to keep the spark alive? Organic does. It’s the equivalent of sitting at the bar ready with great conversation starters and hoping that someone you’re interested in who is sitting at a nearby table will find you and interact with you. Unlikely, but possible. See why it’s important to have a mix of both organic and paid?

Bottom line: Organic alone just won’t cut it anymore if you’re looking for visibility, reach and business results—and who isn’t? Here are just a few of the paid media tactics B2B brands can leverage on social, plus advice on when to use them.

**Promoted Posts and Sponsored Updates**
These allow you to promote your posts to a targeted audience on Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn—reach prospects, which you can achieve by uploading your email list to these ad platforms, or segments that you define by gender, age, location, industry and so on. These posts are effective because they don’t look like ads, which many social users bristle at. They’re your usual helpful, insightful posts, except that you’ve put some media dollars behind them to expand their reach. (Bonus: You can boost your Facebook posts on Instagram with the click of a “promote” button.)

**When to use them:** You have an especially high performing organic post or one that’s directly relevant to your business goals—in other words, a post that’s worth backing with money.

**Right-hand Ads**
These LinkedIn and Facebook ads are less invasive as they don’t interrupt the user experience on the channel’s feed. However, they are eye-catching in that they stand out and appear in their true form as an ad instead of a typical post. Keep in mind that you have room only for a thumbnail, headline or call to action, and a short body for these ads, so choose your copy wisely.

**When to use them:** You want to send users off-platform to your landing page, website, sign-up form or a download.

**LinkedIn InMail**
This is a more personalized form of advertising that goes right to your audience’s InMail box (private messages). It displays a CTA button at the top and a large image on the right that promotes the information you’re including in this email type format. You can send InMails to users who are on your email list, not necessarily connections, or segments targeted by industry, employer, job title and more.

**When to use them:** You have useful content for the InMail itself (that will fit in under 2,000 characters), but also want to drive users off-platform to a sign-up form, a download or a landing page. Sponsored InMails work best for warm audiences who are already open to your brand and your message.

The four W’s and one H we’ve presented so far all rely on one very important thing—the right team to make it all happen. That’s where the final W, **WHO**, comes in.
Who
You need the right people to brainstorm, create, post, track and optimize your B2B social content. Here’s how to find the social superheroes who can turn data, and the seeds of sharable ideas, into expert content.

**MAP GOALS TO SKILL SETS**

Earlier we talked about identifying your strategic goals first, and that advice goes double when it comes to your social journalism plan. Each goal, from building an engaged industry audience to winning sales or membership sign-ups, will require a different flavor of skill in your social staff. Hire for the superpower that matters most to your brand content needs and that complements the skills of others on your team, even if the staffer isn’t dedicated to your B2B content efforts full time.

**HIRE RENAISSANCE MEN AND WOMEN**

If you’re looking to build a whole team to handle your social journalism strategy, you’ll want to gather employees or contractors who offer up a smorgasbord of skills such as journalistic writing (especially on your topic of expertise), editing, industry communications, analytics and graphic design. You don’t have to look for a one-to-one match of employee to skill: You may find one hire who’s adept at journalism, editing and communications, another who can handle graphic design and audience engagement, and a third who’s a pro at analytics.

They often don’t come fully formed and get better with training and experience—but they do exist. With all the recent changes in the marketing field, smart marketers have realized they need to be able to move seamlessly from one role to another as the situation demands. Some J-school programs are even training their students in social journalism.

**WHO REPS YOUR BRAND ON SOCIAL?**

There are two ways to go. When it comes to client/member service and community management, using your staffers’ real names goes a long way toward humanizing your brand and giving the user confidence that they’re being helped by an actual human being. But in B2B social journalism, using your brand name in the social handle creates authority and thought leadership—which is essential in B2B marketing.

**STICK WITH SENIORS**

If you’re using social journalism to provide thought leadership for your peers, prioritize it as a role for your senior content team instead of handing it off to an intern or a new hire. If your brand targets CEOs, for example, only your senior staff will be able to provide the expert context and insider viewpoint these professionals need.

We’ve covered the five key W’s and the all-important H, but there’s one more element every good piece of journalism needs to have: **THE KICKER.**
The Kicker
In journalism, the term “kicker” refers to the end of an article—or even the last story or news segment in a larger piece. The kicker is where you’ll find the sum-it-all-up happy ending, the big reveal and the call to action. Since we like to go big here at Imagination, we’ll give you all three.

**The happy ending:** Bringing journalistic methods and industry insights to your B2B social media strategy will help your brand prove its worth in a world of professional pretenders, bring true value to your discerning business audience and propel you toward your business goals. What’s happier than that?

**The big reveal:** Social journalism is not an ivory tower concept, and it doesn’t have to be a costly undertaking either. It’s 100 percent accessible to every B2B brand and useful in every industry. Whether you’re a microbusiness or a massive association, you can start right now to incorporate some of these ideas into your day-to-day social strategy.

**The call to action:** Social journalism strategy is no longer a nice-to-have—it’s a must-have in an era when your current and next generation B2B audience increasingly turns to social for industry news and insights. You’re a leader in your industry. Start working on your social journalism strategy before it becomes just another box to tick on every B2B brand’s marketing checklist. You’ll be well positioned and in the right place to win respect, loyalty and business.

Don’t want to go it alone? Imagination’s dedicated B2B social journalism team is available to talk about how your business or association can achieve results that matter to you—and your audience.
Contributors

Kim Caviness
EVP, Chief Content Officer
kcaviness@imaginepub.com

Kim is a nationally recognized leader in creating award-winning content marketing programs for brands in four verticals: financial services, B2B, retail and associations. She’s charged with leading Imagination’s teams to dream up, produce and optimize boldly strategic, creatively daring social journalism and other content experiences that meaningfully connect across channels and platforms, delivering thought leadership results that matter to brands and their audiences.

Kim has worked at top content agencies and media publishers for more than 20 years. She grew up in Puerto Rico and speaks fluent Spanglish. Her favorite channel is Instagram.

Chris Blose
VP, Content
cblose@imaginepub.com

With nearly two decades of experience in journalism and content marketing, Chris is all about the story. Whether crafting a single story or a brand's or organization's strategic narrative, he works to tell the most complete, compelling story to the largest, yet most precise, audience possible.

He and his current and past teams have created award-winning content programs for leading associations such as NFIB and the American Optometric Association, major medical centers such as Cleveland Clinic, and Fortune 500 companies such as Lowe’s. When not working on content strategy, he makes music and climbs mountains.

Courtney Fishman
Manager, Social Strategy
cfishman@imaginepub.com

Courtney manages Imagination’s social media content strategies and social journalism efforts. Her bachelor’s degree in magazine journalism and public relations complements Imagination’s content-first approach to strategic social programs.

Beyond the feed, Courtney’s writing has appeared in Better Homes & Gardens, Advertising Age and USA Today. She’s a firm believer that there’s always a story to be told and loves sharing that story on social—or over dinner at her latest Chicago restaurant conquest.

imaginepub.com

Contact:
Erin Slater
SVP Business Development
312-382-7815
eslater@imaginepub.com

Imagination Chicago
600 W. Fulton, Suite 600
Chicago, Ill. 60661
312.887.1000

Imagination D.C.
1146 19th St. NW, Suite 850
Washington, D.C. 20036
202.899.4765

© 2018 Imagination