



# Career Path of the Corporate Social Strategist

This emerging role must get ahead of  
business demands – or be relegated to  
*Social Media Help Desk*

November 10, 2010

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Includes input from 140 survey respondents and 51 ecosystem contributors



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## Executive Summary

**Corporations have anointed an Open Leader, the Social Strategist.** In our research, we found that this emerging role is critical in the adoption of new media for corporations. Over 41% of Social Strategists reported to the Marketing department. Primary responsibilities included leading the social program, participating in social media, and acting as a corporate resource for business units. Yet most Social Strategists and their programs lack maturity. Only 23% of Social Strategists had a formalized program with long-term direction. This market, and role, is nascent.

**They are overwhelmed with six major challenges – with little relief in sight.** Despite market excitement around this new role, Social Strategists are plagued with a variety of challenges. We uncovered six: 1) Resistance from internal culture, 2) Measuring ROI, 3) Lack of resources, 4) An ever-changing technology space, 5) Resentment and envy of the role, and 6) A looming increase in business demands. Depending on how these challenges were met, we discovered that the Social Strategist has two possible career paths.

**Be proactive – or be relegated to a Social Media Help Desk.** Social Strategists will encounter more demands from customers and internal business units as social media continues to become a mainstream technology. Social Strategists have one of two career paths: 1) Fall behind in requests from vocal customers and internal business units, thereby becoming *reactive*, or 2) Develop a *proactive* program that gets ahead of the demands, and operate from a strategic planning position.

**Senior management must be selective in hiring this role – then give full support as Social Strategists help evolve the corporation.** Senior managers must hire and foster a Social Strategist's career based on our 10 guidelines, including the following: find a candidate who comes from a strong digital or marketing background, seek those who focus on business objectives over the latest technologies, and give them the opportunity to take on risk safely. Furthermore, because these programs can cause internal strife, executives must provide air cover and clear roadblocks, and then appropriately reward their Strategist with challenges and compensation – or risk losing this key person to companies who can understand and leverage their skills.

## Open Research

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## Disclosure

Your trust is important to us. As such, we are open and transparent about our financial relationships. With their permission, we publish a list of our client base on our website. At the time of this report's publication, some of the companies we interviewed may be Altimeter Group clients. See our website to learn more: <http://www.altimetergroup.com/disclosure>.

## Methodology

Altimeter Group conducted research over several months, using a combination of quantitative, qualitative and heuristic research methodologies. Although we have data for small and medium sized businesses, we've focused the following research, analysis, and recommendations for companies with over 1000 employees, which we define as enterprise-class corporations.

To find out about this emerging role, we conducted research using the following sources:

- An online survey of 140 enterprise-class Social Strategists, across industries
- 51 interviews and interactions with corporate Social Strategists or topic authorities
- 50 job descriptions for equivalent positions on company and recruitment web sites
- 50 LinkedIn profiles of current Social Strategists
- Hundreds of Social Strategist hires catalogued on the *Web Strategy* blog's "On The Move" series and "List of Corporate Social Strategists for 2010"<sup>1</sup>

## Ecosystem Input

Altimeter Group interviewed a total of 51 experts: 39 Corporate Social Strategists and 12 topic authorities who work directly with them:

### Corporate Social Strategists (39):

Steve Bendt, *Director of Emerging Platforms, Best Buy*  
Richard Binhammer, *Senior Manager, Strategic Corporate Communications, Dell*  
LaSandra Brill, *Senior Manager, Global Social Media, Cisco Systems Inc.*  
Rebecca Brown, *Director, Social Media Strategy, Intel Corporation*  
Kelly Colbert, *Director, Marketing Strategy, Wellpoint*  
Marty Collins, *Director, Emerging Media, Microsoft*  
Florence Drakton, *Social Media Manager, Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A.*  
Kati Driscoll, *Community Specialist, Social Media, AAA*  
Bert DuMars, *Vice President, E-Business & Interactive Marketing, Newell Rubbermaid*  
Frank Eliason, *Senior Vice President, Social Media, Citi*  
Kimberley Gardiner, *Manager, Marketing, Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A.*  
Jeannette Gibson, *Director, Social Media Marketing, Cisco Systems Inc.*  
Jamie Grenney, *Senior Director, Social Media, Salesforce.com*  
Julie Haddon, *Senior Director, Global Social Media, eBay, Inc.*  
Gareth Hornberger, *Coordinator, Social Media, Levi's*  
Ken Kaplan, *Manager, New Media and Broadcast, Intel*  
Steven Lazarus, *Lead Strategist, Social Media & Interactive Marketing, IBM*  
Jason Long, *Community Manager, QlikTech*  
Dan Maloney, *Global Vice President, Ecosystem Business Development & Web Strategy, SAP*  
Manish Mehta, *Vice President, Social Media & Community, Dell*  
Scott Monty, *Manager, Global Digital & Multimedia Communications, Ford Motor Company*  
Petra Neiger, *Senior Manager, Global Social Media, Cisco Systems Inc.*  
Marcus Nelson, *Director, Social Media, Salesforce.com*  
Bowen Payson, *Manager, Online & Digital Marketing, Virgin America*  
Holly Potter, *Vice President, Public Relations, Kaiser Permanente*  
Maria Poveromo, *Director, Social Media, Adobe Systems*  
Toby Richards, *General Manager, Community & Online Support, Microsoft*  
Chip Rogers, *Vice President and COO, SAP Community Network and Ecosystem Events*  
Vanessa Sain-Diéguez, *Strategist, Social Media, Hilton Worldwide*  
Dan Schick, *Manager, Web Communications, TELUS Communications*  
Daniel Schmidt, *Senior Product Manager, CBS Interactive*  
Liya Sharif, *Director, Marketing, Qualcomm*  
Peter Simonsen, *Senior Director, Web, QlikTech*  
Ted Sindzinski, *Manager, Internet Marketing, Monster Cable Products*  
Shiv Singh, *Head of Digital, PepsiCo Beverages North America*  
Kim Snedaker, *Manager, Social Media, AAA*  
Ed Terpening, *Vice President, Social Media Marketing, Wells Fargo*  
Alexandra Wheeler, *Director, Digital Strategy, Starbucks*  
Mark Yolton, *Senior Vice President, SAP Community Network*

## **Topic Authorities (12):**

Tac Anderson, *Vice President, Digital Strategies, Waggener Edstrom*

David Armano, *Senior Vice President, Digital, Edelman*

Tom Bedecarre, *CEO, AKQA*

John Bell, *Managing Director & Executive Creative Director, Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide*

Andrea Harrison, *Vice President, Strategy, Razorfish*

Liza Hausman, *Vice President, Marketing, Gigya*

Shel Israel, *CEO, SI Associates*

Peter Kim, *Managing Director, North America, Dachis Group*

Jennifer Leggio, *Social Business Blogger, CBS Interactive (ZDNet)*

Steve Rubel, *Senior Vice President, Insights, Edelman Digital*

Andy Sernovitz, *CEO, SocialMedia.org / Social Media Business Council*

Dan Ziman, *Vice President, Marketing, Lithium Technologies Inc.*

## **Additional Contributors:**

Altimeter Group received feedback, direction, or information from the following industry experts and contributors:

Tarah Remington Brown, WOMMA; Susan Etlinger, Altimeter Group; Ann Handley, MarketingProfs; Asha Hossain Design, Inc.; Sonal Mehta, Student; Prathima Murphy, Altimeter Group; Jennifer McClure, Society for New Communications Research; Anita Wong, Student; and Gil Yehuda, GilYehuda.com.

# The Career Path of the Corporate Social Strategist

New technologies have emerged, and consumers are adopting them. Social media is no longer the latest “shiny object,” as 79% of corporations have undertaken social media efforts<sup>2</sup>. Shel Israel of SI Associates tells us: “In the last five years, it has become a category that is viable, enduring and acceptable to modern business.”

As companies launch emerging media programs to engage with customers, they need program managers to be accountable for their investments. Yet the scope of this role is wide: every business unit is impacted, requiring coordination across the entire enterprise. To meet this challenge, the Corporate Social Strategist has emerged to fill this role, which we define as:

**Definition: The Corporate Social Strategist is the business decision maker for social media programs – who provides leadership, roadmap definition, and governance; and directly influences the spending on technology vendors and service agencies.**

While this position doesn’t exist officially by title in every corporation today, this role will become pervasive in the coming years, just as leaders who manage the corporate website have become essential.

## Early Career: Emergence of the Corporate Social Strategist

Throughout the 51 interviews we conducted with Corporate Social Strategists and those who work with them, a common theme emerged. Many who ascend to the role see an opportunity, take risks, and forge a new program. We define these early phases of their career path as:

- **The Awakening.** As customers rapidly adopt these tools, this internal champion rises to answer the call of duty – adopting new technologies on behalf of the corporation while meeting (often tremendous) internal resistance.
- **Ascension of the Corporate Social Strategist.** After mustering the courage to challenge the status quo, the evangelist launches pilot programs to connect with customers using social tools. The Social Strategist is successful in gathering initial resources and corralling some internal stakeholders. A program manager is anointed.
- **Storm of Cultural Conflict.** Having successfully piloted programs, the Social Strategist seeks to expand the program, yet loses altitude from internal resistance to corporate transparency, turf battles, legal and security issues, and the challenges of calculating return on investment.
- **Career Decision Point.** Gaining speed, the Social Strategist overcomes most major cultural challenges and expands the program. Shifting from evangelism to program management, they find the excess of customer voices— as well as the increase in program requests from internal stakeholders – unmanageable.

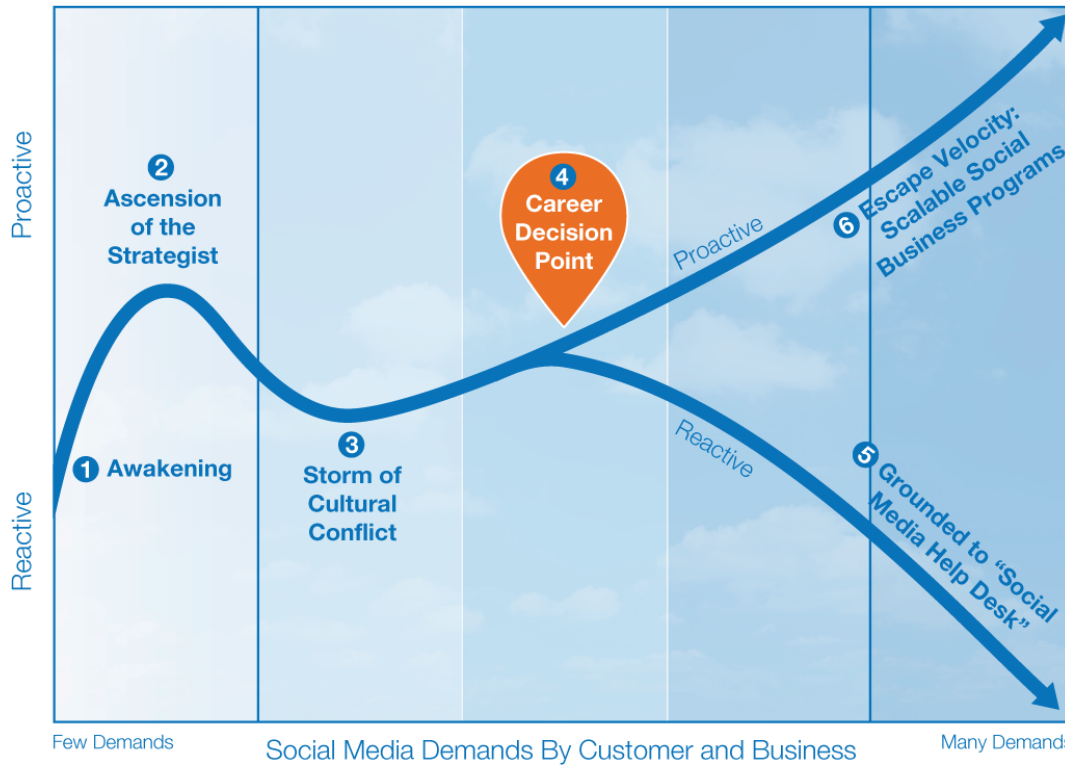
## Faced with Challenges, the Future Has One of Two Distinct Career Paths.

At this point, Social Strategists face two potential career paths as the demand from social media increases from customers and business units, regardless of industry, sophistication, or region. They are:

- **Path One: Social Media Help Desk.** Deluged with requests, some Social Strategists are already falling behind. We found that 41% of survey respondents said they were “reacting” to requests, rather than getting ahead of them. Yet the pressure is only mounting. As more business units adopt “social media religion,” they will start to demand their own Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. If the Social Strategist is unable to comply, business units will deploy on their own. The Social Strategist succumbs to mere order taking and clean up, relegating themselves to a *Social Media Help Desk*.
- **Path Two: Escape Velocity.** Savvy Social Strategists develop a proactive business program that gets ahead of business and customer requests. They rally internal stakeholders, define requirements in advance, and develop scalable programs that utilize the crowd for marketing, support, and product innovation. As these Social Strategists continue their career, they’ll grow to expand their scope – assisting the end customer along the entire customer journey. Eventually, some Social Strategists may evolve into new roles that transcend Marketing or Support.

Figure 1: The Two Career Paths of the Corporate Social Strategist

## The Two Career Paths of the Corporate Social Strategist



Source: Altimeter Group

**Figure 2: Career Phases of the Social Strategist**

Career Phase:	What the Strategist Does:	Quotes from Strategists:	How the Business Reacts:	Skills Needed by the Strategist:
1) The Awakening	The soon-to-be Social Strategist begins as an evangelist, compelled to address vocal customers or convince internal stakeholders of the changes to come.	"I take big risks, that's why I'm in this role. This is a difficult and challenging space as our culture is not one of sharing. My organization has low risk tolerance. It requires the type of person who willing to think out of the box."	Fear or uncertainty causes companies to react defensively – or try to muffle social media efforts.	Evangelism, self-education, willingness to take risks and fortitude
2) Ascension of the Social Strategist	Despite friction and resistance from internal culture, the evangelist launches experimental programs. Rising into an official role, the Social Strategist is anointed with a change in title and new responsibilities.	"Denial, anger, fear, and acceptance. We've now entered the acceptance stage in rapid succession. We have frequently drawn a line in the sand in the age of disruption, and we are now in the longer and slower phase in the age of normalization."	While hesitant, the company experiences temporary alleviation as the Social Strategist emerges.	Program management skills: ability to craft a business plan, patience to rally internal support and executive buy in. Ability to speak in terms of business objectives, not technologies.
3) Storm of Cultural Conflict	After successful experiments, the Social Strategist seeks to launch a larger program. Yet they must overcome scrutiny, fear, and resistance to changing the status quo.	"We are instigators that bump up against culture. We tried three years ago, but there's still reluctance."	As internal stakeholders recognize the power shift, they push back to resist losing power.	Ability to demonstrate business value and work with multiple business units. Logic and a cool head prevail.
4) Career Decision Point	Overcoming most cultural resistance, the Social Strategist aims to integrate their programs with traditional marketing, support, and the overall business. Yet they are unprepared for the excessive demands that are starting to emerge.	"If stakeholders ask and don't get response, they go off and build pages themselves: 'I got this, my niece is all over it!'"	There is an exponential increase in demands from business units that now see social as vital to their programs. If the Social Strategist is unable to comply, business units will deploy on their own.	Ability to forecast, build tools to manage ongoing requests and prioritize. Evangelism skills are no longer needed as program manager duties become a priority.
5) Social Media Helpdesk	Unable to grow their program to fulfill requests, the Social Strategist falls into a tailspin. They must respond to both customers in social channels and multiple business units. They become order takers and are unable to plan.	Controlling Facebook pages [is challenging]. They're just springing up all over the place and I'm trying to kill them off. It's Whack-a-mole!"	After business units have deployed on their own and failed, they blame or ask the Social Strategist to fix their mistakes. This cycle repeats every few quarters.	Help desk experience is required to manage requests and issue tracking; and develop an effective process to shut down rogue social media programs.
6) Escape Velocity	The Social Strategist develops a strategy by being proactive and forward-thinking – launching a center of education, and developing a scalable program that enables business units to deploy in a safe and organized manner.	Regarding goals: "Customer success which includes revenue and incoming leads. How do we use social media optimization in a holistic way to drive traffic to marketplace?"	Having been properly trained, business units operate safely within known guardrails. They rely on the Social Strategist for core services, but can be flexible in their own deployments.	Foresight to build a scalable program, mindset to "let go" and conviction to guide business units while enabling and empowering them.

Source: Altimeter Group

## An Open Leader Emerges to Steer Social Efforts

In Phase 1 of the Career Path of the Social Strategist, *The Awakening*, an open leader emerges to answer the call of the duty. To best understand the backgrounds of those willing and able to assume such a large undertaking, we reviewed 50 LinkedIn profiles of current Corporate Social Strategists and 50 job descriptions for equivalent positions.

### ***Their Background: They have foundations in digital or marketing and possess the ability to lead a multi-disciplinary effort.***

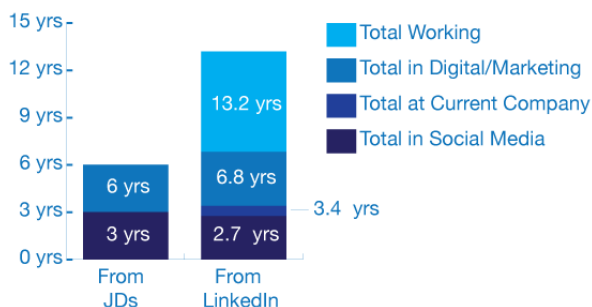
Most Corporate Social Strategists are forging new programs – tackling a host of business challenges with few defined best practices. What are the backgrounds and personalities required for taking on such a challenge? Our research discovered that:

- **Social Strategists come from a digital or marketing background.** While social media is an emerging technology set, most Social Strategists are already seasoned in digital technologies or marketing. Hiring managers sought 6 years in digital or marketing and 3 years experience in social media. Actual job experience aligned similarly, as current Social Strategists averaged nearly 7 years in the digital or marketing space and 2.75 in social media (Figure 3.1). For example, Manish Mehta led Dell Online efforts for years, before assuming his current role as Vice President, Social Media & Community. He told us: “[I] participated directly in the last great digital transformation known as the internet. There are many parallels that helped me to think longer term and avoid short term pitfalls.” Additionally, when we surveyed Social Strategists on what makes them successful at their job, only about one third attributed their success to having social media experience (Figure 3.7).
- **Social Strategists are educated, often with a communications, marketing or business degree.** We analyzed job descriptions to find out what hiring managers are seeking, and found that 14% of hiring managers prefer advanced degrees, mainly an MBA (Figure 3.3). Over three quarters seek a minimum Bachelor’s degree, with a preference for Communications, Marketing, Business or Technology majors (Figure 3.4). To see how actual Social Strategists stacked up, we analyzed 50 LinkedIn profiles of current Corporate Social Strategists and found that they exceeded the requirements. They were highly educated – all possessed a Bachelors degree and 20% had advanced degrees (Figure 3.3). Of these professionals, 34% studied Communications; the remainder obtained degrees in mostly Marketing, Business and Technology. (Figure 3.4)
- **Their success stems from being flexible in their roles, and having the ability to maneuver adeptly within their companies.** In our corresponding online survey, we asked 140 Social Strategists what makes them most successful. We found that 58% of Social Strategists see themselves as “multi-disciplinary,” 46% describe themselves as “willing to take risks,” and 45% believe they have the ability to “rally different stakeholders across the organizations” (Figure 3.7). The Social Strategist possesses unique social traits – required to lead a new business program with a multi-disciplinary and cross-department approach.

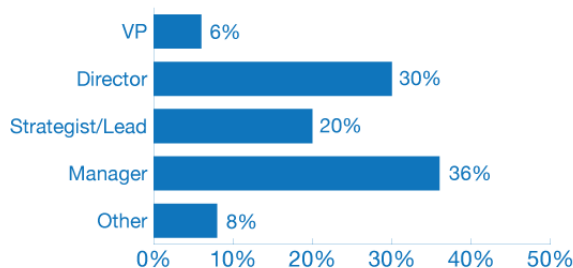
# Vitals: Profile of the Corporate Social Strategist

To create a profile of the Corporate Social Strategist, Altimeter Group reviewed 50 job descriptions for Social Strategist positions and 50 LinkedIn profiles of current Social Strategists, to compare *desired* with *actual* background and qualifications.

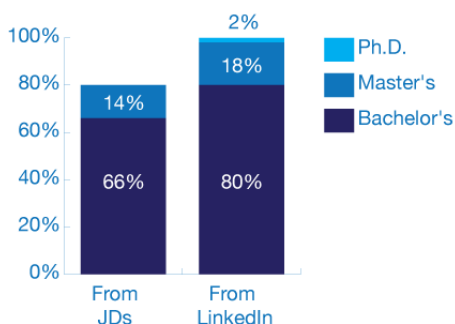
**Figure 3.1** Their Experience:



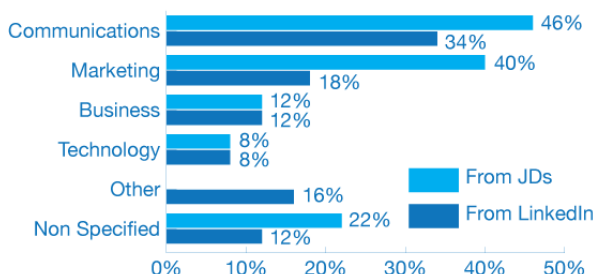
**Figure 3.2** Their Seniority (from LinkedIn):



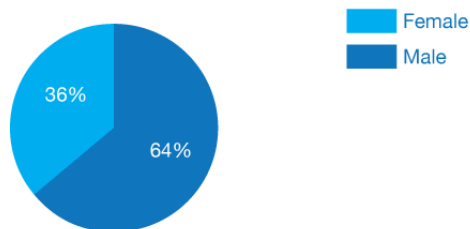
**Figure 3.3** Their Education Level:



**Figure 3.4** Their Degree:



**Figure 3.5** By Gender (from LinkedIn):



**Figure 3.7**

What Makes Them Successful at Their Job<sup>1</sup>:



**Figure 3.6** Their Twitter Presence (from LinkedIn):



1. Data from our survey of 140 Corporate Social Strategists.  
 2. Outliers are Scott Monty who has 44,918 followers and Collin Douma who has 30,666 followers as of October 25, 2010.

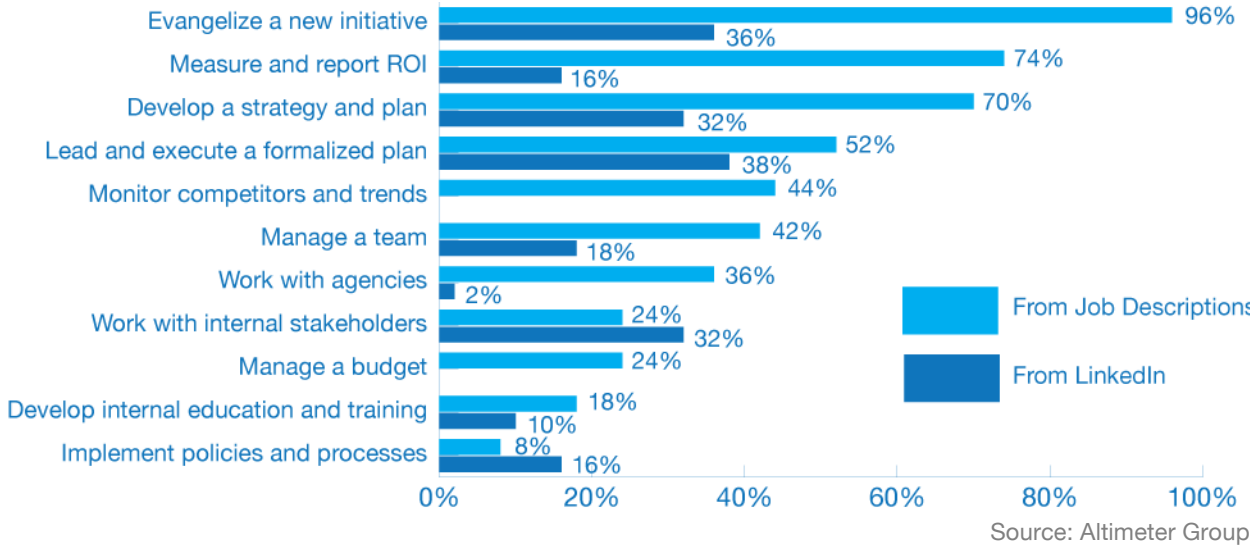
Source: Altimeter Group

In Phase 2, *Ascension of the Social Strategist*, the role of the Corporate Social Strategist crystallizes – job responsibilities become defined and efforts develop into a full-fledged program. To understand their responsibilities, we referred to LinkedIn profiles of current Social Strategists, job descriptions for equivalent roles, and our 51 interviews. Data on the current state of their programs is from our online survey 140 Social Strategists.

**Their Responsibilities: They act more like program managers and resources for the whole corporation.**

In our analysis of 50 LinkedIn profiles of current Social Strategists and job descriptions, we found these common job responsibilities:

Figure 4: Job Responsibilities for the Corporate Social Strategist



These decision makers have a wide range of responsibilities, some not as glamorous as their public social media personas may suggest. In fact, many of these duties are similar to those of program managers in any business unit. We discovered these common themes in both our analysis of job descriptions for Corporate Social Strategists, and our 51 interviews. Social Strategists are required to:

- Lead and manage ongoing business programs.** Like a program manager, these decision makers are focused on rolling out a series of projects on an ongoing basis. Unlike public facing community managers who are interacting with customers, we found that the Corporate Social Strategist is responsible for accountability – not always customer engagement. Their primary duties are: measuring and reporting return on investment (74%), developing strategy and planning (70%), leading the program forward (52%), monitoring competitors and trends (44%), and managing a team (42%).

- **Participate directly in social media efforts for the corporation.** Despite requirements to get the internal business moving forward, some Social Strategists straddle both the internal and external role. Nearly all job postings (96%) required the Social Strategist to participate directly in social media activities. However, while all 50 current Social Strategists we reviewed have Twitter accounts, only a few have achieved public notoriety: 56% have less than 1000 followers, or a median of 745 followers. While many do not use their personal accounts for corporate efforts, one notable exception is Ford's Scott Monty. He writes a career focused marketing blog (scottmonty.com), has nearly 45,000 Twitter followers, and responds directly to automotive-related queries from his personal social media accounts.
- **Serve business units as a corporate resource.** Most Social Strategists deal with multiple business units within the enterprise, for example, to educate internal stakeholders or fulfill internal requests. Twenty-four percent of job postings required the Social Strategist to work with internal stakeholders, 18% to lead internal education and training, and 8% to develop policies and processes. While these percentages aren't high, in our interviews we found that most Social Strategists see themselves as a "corporate resource."

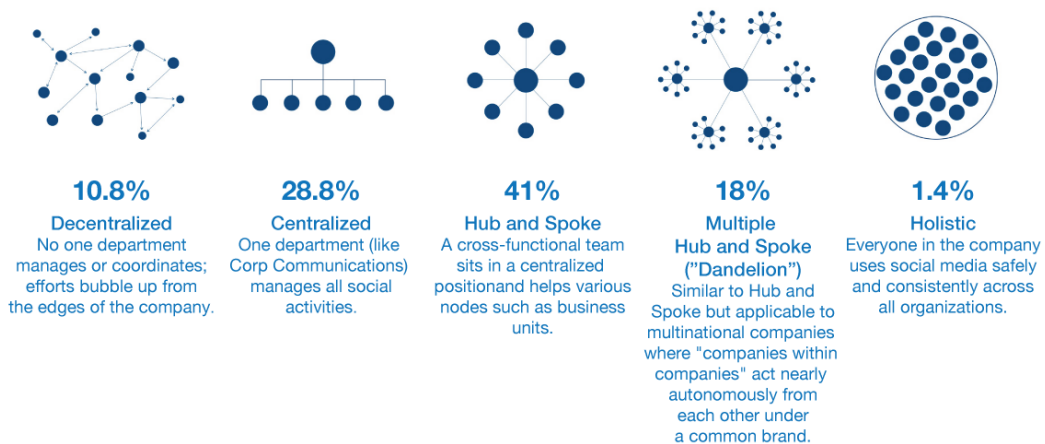
### ***Their Program: Most programs are nascent, with limited resources and headcount.***

As the Social Strategist ascends to steer internal efforts and mobilize resources, a formal program begins to emerge. In our online survey of 140 Social Strategists, we found that programs are mostly immature, with limited resources and headcount – though a handful of mature programs have reached formalized and long-term direction across the enterprise. Our findings show that:

- **A few years in, their programs are nascent with no long-term direction.** Having just assembled teams, Social Strategists are unable to develop long-term plans. A majority of programs, 82%, have existed for less than 3 years, and 62% for less than 2 years (Figure 6.1). We found that only 23% have formalized programs with long-term direction across most (Mature) or all of the enterprise (Advanced). The remainder are Beginner, Experimental, or have Formalized programs with only short-term direction (Figure 6.2).
- **Their programs report under Marketing or Corporate Communications.** Most programs fall under one of these two functions – 41% under Marketing and 30% under Corporate Communications (which could be a subset of the overall marketing function). Another 11% reports under Web/Digital, and only 6% report under a separate Social Media function (Figure 6.3). Of Social Strategists who report under a dedicated Social Media group, six out of eight work at companies with more than 10,000 employees. In the future, we expect this number to shift away from Marketing or Corporate Communications. Just as companies have Marketing Managers for regional areas, or Product Marketers, we expect Social Strategists to emerge from multiple business units, with many coming from Support organizations.

- Most programs have limited budgets, although some large enterprises fare better.** Compared to budgets in advertising or direct marketing, the social media budget is miniscule. Of those who responded in our online survey, 43% had annual program budgets of less than \$100,000, including 15% that had less than \$10,000 (Figure 6.4). Of those that reported budgets more than \$1 million, 12 out of 13 had more than 10,000 employees. Expect social media budgets to remain small relative to other marketing programs. Primarily labor intensive, these teams will use inexpensive third party tools, and the truly savvy will leverage the crowd do to the work for them.
- Their programs are woefully understaffed to serve an entire enterprise.** These programs are operating with very lean teams: the average team was only 3.1 for companies with between 1,000 to under 5,000 employees (Figure 6.5). Larger companies fared better, though ratio-wise they were stretched thinner – at 20 staff on average for companies with more than 100,000 employees. Those with more than 10 staff were concentrated at companies with more than 10,000 employees (33 out of 40 companies). The only companies with more than 50 staff were technology giants Cisco Systems, Dell, IBM, Intel, SAP and Microsoft.
- Their programs are organized into a “Hub and Spoke” formation.** The culture of a company directly influences how they develop their organizational formation. We identified five models for how companies organize for social media, and asked Social Strategists how they’re currently formed. Nearly 60% of surveyed Social Strategists classified their organizational model as “Hub and Spoke” or “Multiple Hub and Spoke” (also known as “Dandelion”), in which a central hub provides guidance, resources and coordination to business units (See Figure 5). We found that 82% of those in these organizational models had reached sophistication, self-identifying their programs as Formalized, Mature, or Advanced. Expect more companies to model in either “Hub and Spoke” or “Multiple Hub and Spoke,” as these formations are best equipped to scale to meet demands from both internal and external stakeholders<sup>4</sup>.

Figure 5: Five Ways Companies Organize for Social Media

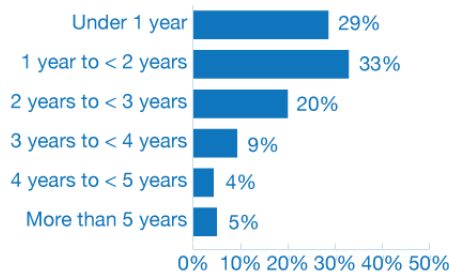


Source: Altimeter Group

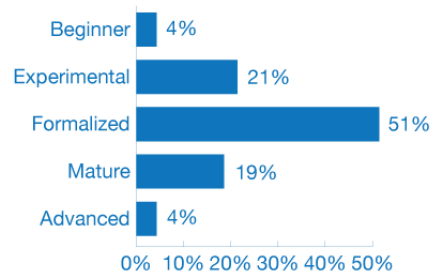
# Current State: The Corporate Social Media Program

Altimeter Group surveyed 140 Corporate Social Strategists to learn more about the programs they're leading. We're sharing initial findings in this report; additional findings will be shared in a follow up report.

**Figure 6.1**  
How long has the social media program existed at your organization?:



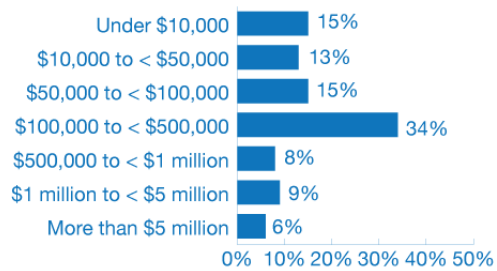
**Figure 6.2**  
What is your organization's social media maturity level?:



**Figure 6.3**  
What department does your social media program report under?:



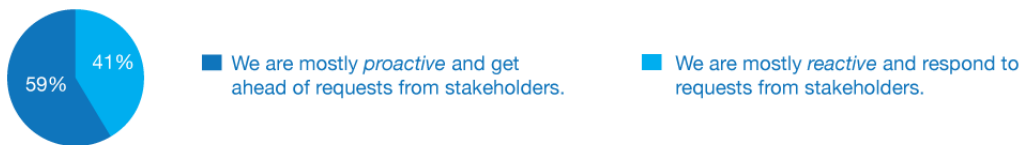
**Figure 6.4**  
What is your total budget for social media this year<sup>1</sup>:



**Figure 6.5**  
How many full-time equivalent staff do you have dedicated to the social media program?:

By # of Employees in Company	Average # of Staff	By Length of Program	Average # of Staff	By Program Maturity	Average # of Staff
1,000 to < 5,000	3.1	Under 1 year	3.9	Beginner	1.0
5,000 to < 10,000	5.2	1 year to < 2 years	7.0	Experimental	3.6
10,000 to < 50,000	5.4	2 years to < 3 years	12.1	Formalized	8.2
50,000 to < 100,000	23.8	3 years to < 4 years	10.0	Mature	20
More than 100,000	20.4	4 years to < 5 years	34.3	Advanced	24.3
		More than 5 years	31.1		

**Figure 6.6**  
Which of the following statements best describes your program?



1. Figures calculated from 87 out of 130 respondents who disclosed budget information.

Source: Altimeter Group

## Saddled by Internal and External Challenges, the Corporate Strategist Reaches a Crossroads.

After ascending to their role and successfully piloting initial efforts, the Social Strategist begins to realize both the internal and external demands on their programs. In the next two phases of the Career Path, *The Storm of Cultural Conflict* and *Career Decision Point*, the Social Strategist is plagued by internal conflicts, constrained by a lack of resources, and saddled with increasing customer demands.

### ***Their Challenges: Internal and External Demands Strain the Strategist.***

Through our online survey and interviews, we found the following common challenges that beleaguer Social Strategists of all industries and maturity:

The Six Challenges for the Social Strategist are:

- 1. Friction from internal culture and a lack of education thwart progress.** Repeatedly, we heard from Social Strategists that social media forces companies to be “open,” whether they like it or not. In order to combat this challenge, Strategists indicated that internal education was a core component of their internal programs. Thirty-seven percent of survey respondents said that educating internal stakeholders will be their top priority in 2010; 32% said it will be to get initial buy-in or support (Figure 7).

**“Right now, the social media professional has been a visionary pioneer willing to endure frustration and criticism by a great many senior corporate people who were set in their ways.” (Shel Israel, CEO at SI Associates)**

- 2. Proving real ROI difficult beyond engagement metrics.** Social Strategists have difficulty measuring social media due to the distributed nature of social networks, unproven metrics, and the inability to tie most programs to conversions. In fact, 66% of surveyed Social Strategists relied on engagement metrics like fans, likes, and follows – while only 22% could actually measure a change in revenue (Figure 8). Unsatisfied, they expressed a desire for more effective ROI measurements: 48% of Social Strategists have made measurement a primary objective for their 2011 program (Figure 7). Expect this focus on measurement to continue over the next few years, as investments in new media will continue to be challenged from the status quo.

**“Different business units have different KPIs - but metrics are measured differently by each group. One group’s metrics might not matter to another.” (Senior Director, Social Media)**

**“I spend A LOT of time considering ROI, especially before committing resources.” (General Manager, Community)**

- 3. Serving the entire enterprise difficult with few resources.** There's a significant parallel between ERP programs of the late 90s and today's social business programs – both require deployment across the entire enterprise. However, ERP rollouts were well funded and staffed, with dedicated project management teams and, often, an army of embedded consultants. While social business programs similarly touch every business unit, the difference in resources and headcount is stark. Previously, we reported that most social media teams are lean and operate on shoestring budgets. Getting resources for a group that serves the entire enterprise will be key: 25% of Social Strategists said getting additional resources or headcount was one of their top priorities for 2011 (Figure 7).

**“Number ONE challenge: budget and resources. It's not well understood, so it's not well funded.” (Senior Vice President, Community)**

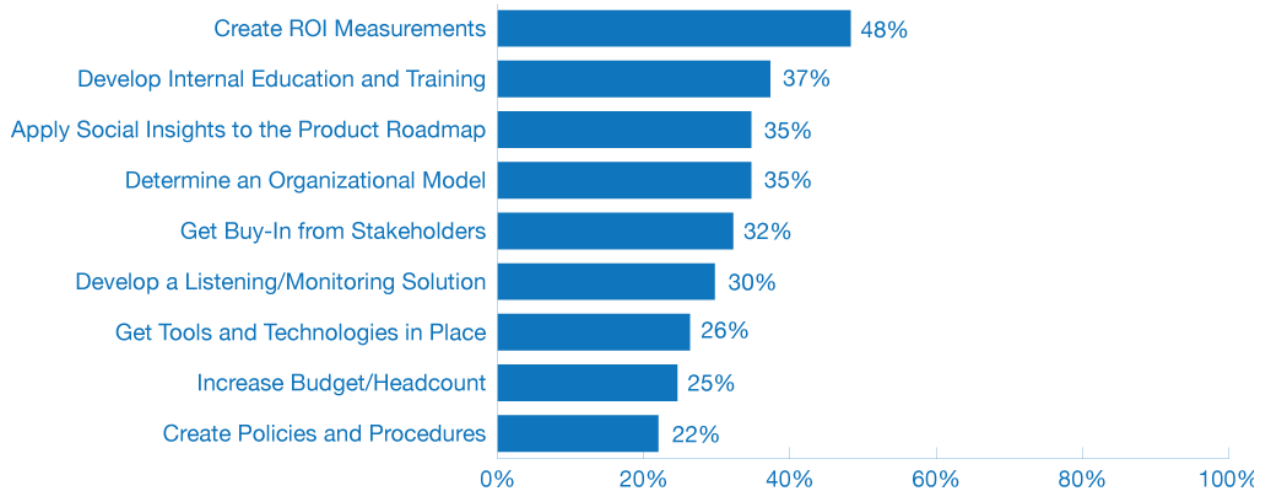
- 4. Ever-changing technology space leaves Strategists playing catch-up.** The influx of new technology leaves the Social Strategist with their “head spinning,” as we heard from one Director of Social Strategy. Venture capital funding, open source technology, innovation in a down economy, and low barriers to entry result in a saturation of market vendors, agencies, and consultants. The choices are daunting. In our recent count, there are 145 brand monitoring firms<sup>5</sup>, 125 community platforms<sup>6</sup>, and thousands of social media agencies<sup>7</sup> and of out-of-work professionals who turn to social media careers. In addition to the rapid pace of change and overwhelming choices, each social network has a different API and data schema, and can make API or UI changes “on a whim.” This market confusion may be slowing deployment. We found that a quarter of Social Strategists (26%) intend to focus on getting the right tools and development resources in place in 2011 (Figure 7).
- 5. Initially perceived as a threat, success breeds jealousy.** As Social Strategists emerge on the scene, they threaten the traditional power structure within business units such as Marketing or Corporate Communications. Yet, as their programs become successful, incumbent groups with diminished power begin to show interest in social media – and attempt internal acquisitions. In the next few years, expect groups that first shunned social media to seek direct involvement – or attempt to run their own programs to regain power.

**“[Social Strategists] will get slings and arrows in the front (from customers) and the back (from colleagues), as social challenges the status quo and existing positions.” (Director, Corporate Communications and Social Media)**

- 6. Internal and external demands are rapidly compounding.** Some Social Strategists we talked to expressed major concerns about scale. As more business units get wind of social media, the demands on the Social Strategist will rapidly rise. We heard from one Social Strategist that the number of internal demands will increase “from 4 to 5 times more requests this year from last.” Another Social Strategist abruptly ended our call because “there are two people standing in front of my office demanding Facebook pages.” At the same time, external demands will increase as social media becomes

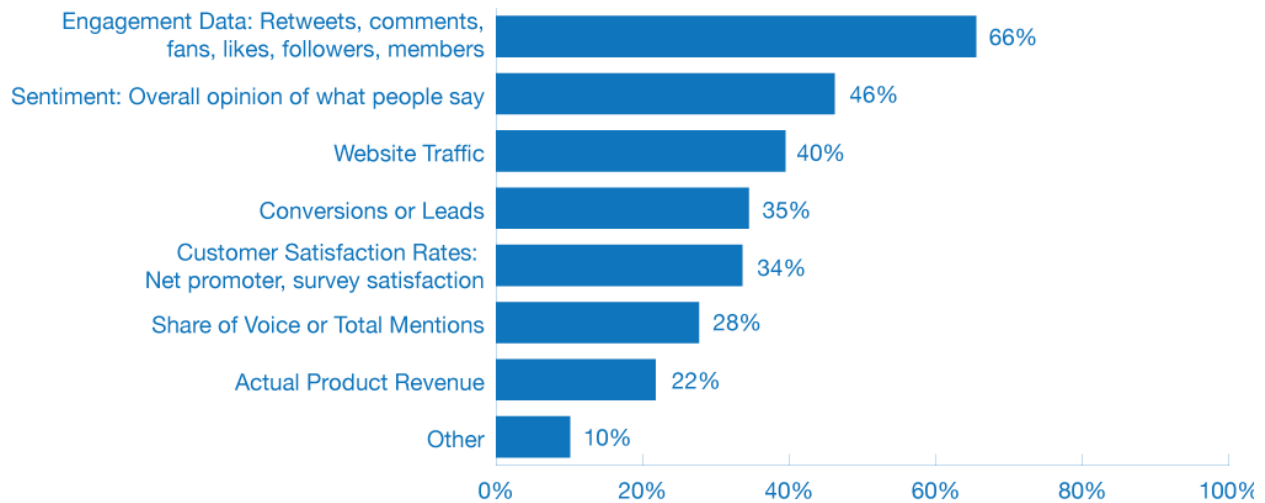
mainstream and customers learn to voice their complaints publicly. Already, a large percentage of surveyed Social Strategists (41%) admitted that their programs were reactive, rather than proactive (Figure 6.6).

**Figure 7: Top Internal Objectives for the Corporate Social Strategist in 2011**



Source: Altimeter Group

**Figure 8: Top Measurement Strategies for Corporate Social Media Programs**



Source: Altimeter Group

## Social Strategists Aspire to Transcend Business Units

With demands mounting, the Social Strategist risks spiraling down Path One of the Career Path for Social Strategists, relegating themselves to a *Social Media Help Desk*. Those that successfully overcome these challenges through proactive business programs will ascend towards Path Two, *Escape Velocity*. Beyond the Career Paths we've defined in this paper, the Social Strategists we interviewed had a long-term vision of their role and their program.

***Their Vision: In the distant future, prepare for this role and program to span the entire customer journey – beyond a single business unit.***

Today, most Social Strategists report under Marketing or Corporate Communications. Yet when asked about the future of this role, most agreed that it will fade into the background as social technologies become a ubiquitous communication channel among consumers and companies. Three common themes emerged in these forward-looking discussions:

- **The program will transcend Marketing and Support functions – to span the entire customer journey.** While these technologies are disruptive today, they will eventually become the norm. The technologies will integrate across the enterprise to span the entire customer life cycle, beyond pre-sales. As we heard from one Social Strategist: “The need for a dedicated staff will diminish, social will be a part of the fabric – marketing, PR, IT.” All functions, from sales, support, product development and beyond, will undertake social activities – making a separate social media program redundant.
- **The Social Strategist role as we know it today will become obsolete.** As other business units weave social technologies into their strategy and operations, leadership from a Social Strategist may become unnecessary. Some Strategists said that success would mean being out of a job in the coming years. One Strategist said: “In five years, this role doesn't exist. The role will be subsumed into every part of the company.” Another agency executive said: “We don't have a ‘verbal communication strategist’ or an ‘email planner’ now.” We expect these corporate entrepreneurs to move on to the next wave of emerging technologies.
- **Some will use success as a springboard into an executive position – beyond program management.** The Social Strategists of today will propel themselves into upper management. In the coming years, Social Strategists will prove their multi-functional, cross-disciplinary, and customer-centric mettle. As their role becomes obsolete, they will be well positioned to assume new roles as executives focused on customer experience – spanning awareness, purchase, support, and innovation of new products. John Bell, Global Managing Director at Ogilvy's 360 Digital Influence team, said: “In two years, Social Strategists are involved in every marketing operation at the table. In five years, they are at the head of the table.” Thus, today's Social Strategist may become tomorrow's VP of Customer Experience; a few may achieve the Chief Customer Officer role.

## EXECUTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

# Open Leadership Guide: 10 Standards for Hiring and Managing Your Social Strategist

Aim high when hiring – this role is critical to your brand and customer relationships. Qualified candidates for the Social Strategist role are unique and will be hard to come by. Yet companies that hire transactional technologists will have programs that inevitably resemble *Social Media Help Desks*. Those that hire and empower Open Leaders will build long-lasting customer relationships, and bolster their brands along the way.

To help the hiring executive find, manage, and support this new role, use the following checklist:

- 1. Hire a program manager rather than a social media “hot shot.”** Our research has proven that companies are rolling out social media as business programs that span the entire enterprise. As demands increase, the Social Strategist must be able to develop scalable programs and juggle multiple projects. For this key decision-maker role, hire a program manager over a social media zealot. “Avoid candidates who proclaim ‘I’ve been on Twitter for X years.’ Instead focus on business goals and challenges,” advised ZDNet’s resident expert on social business, Jennifer Leggio. Candidates who understand and emphasize business needs first – before exuberating over the latest tool – are more likely to help your company succeed.
- 2. Seek candidates with a track record of early technology adoption in their careers.** These individuals have a penchant for working on “what’s new.” They are very likely to have led early web initiatives, digital or mobile programs, or spearheaded communications departments within their corporation. Look for candidates who have successfully embraced and implemented new technology in the context of their careers.
- 3. Scrutinize how they have used social media in the past.** Candidates for Social Strategists should demonstrate authority, the ability to communicate well, and professionalism in their social media activities. Evaluate their social media programs at previous companies, a career focused blog, thoughtful Twitter conversations, or other professional content they’ve shared on websites like Slideshare or YouTube. John Bell, at Ogilvy’s 360 Digital Influence team, advised: “They have to have applied social towards a marketing objective, not just in their personal lives or in support of their ‘personal brand.’” Use their previous behaviors to unlock clues on how they will apply new technologies to advance the company.
- 4. Seek backgrounds that demonstrate the ability to manage dotted-line resources and agency partners.** Thin on internal resources, the Social Strategist role will seek external resources from agency partners, consultants, and technology vendors. While digital agencies can help develop strategy, Edelman’s Steve Rubel advises that

management of agencies and services should resemble that of a Baseball Manager. Know the strengths of each agency and “play to their strengths.” Your Social Strategist should know how to find, utilize, and harness a variety of external vendors in an organized method.

- 5. Look for a corporate entrepreneur, comfortable with “calculated risks.”** Social Strategists are entrepreneurial in spirit and take ownership for their risky business programs. One Social Strategist shared: “I thrive on calculated risk. If I see an opportunity, I will take on the challenge, even if risk is involved.” Julie Haddon, Senior Director, Global Social Media at eBay, Inc. said: “I’m willing to try and fail. I’d rather have failed trying than watching.” These professionals don’t want to just sit by the sidelines – they want to make a difference in the business.
- 6. Ensure a cultural fit, as the Social Strategist will tackle change management.** Candidates for Social Strategists must understand the internal rhythm, culture, and organization of your company in order to effectively navigate and negotiate across multiple stakeholders and business units. As a result, don’t discount internal hires who already know the company. Citibank’s Frank Eliason (formerly of Comcast Cares) adds: “Companies do best looking at their biggest fans, probably inside the organization.” For external candidates, spend the extra time to ensure they are a good cultural fit by investing in many face-to-face meetings with a variety of stakeholders. The Social Strategist doesn’t just manage disruptive technologies, but disruption in your organization’s culture.
- 7. Find a natural born connector – both internally and externally.** Your Social Strategist must exhibit abilities to connect people and disparate groups. This trait is necessary in order to advance multiple business units and build cross-functional teams. A relative newcomer to Ford, Scott Monty told us that the ability to “connect others” was critical to his role, especially at the start. See how candidates connect with others using social media tools online – it’s a clue to how they may also behave internally.
- 8. Celebrate those risks by enabling them to “fail forward,” while clearing their obstacles.** To properly manage, executives should give the Social Strategist a degree of flexibility and foster an environment that allows “failing forward,” which we heard from lead Social Strategist, Manish Mehta at Dell. Management guidelines should explicitly encourage experimentation, which we refer to as a “Sandbox Covenant,” or a dedicated area sanctioned for risk<sup>8</sup>. Undoubtedly, your Social Strategist will encounter seemingly immovable internal barriers. As their sponsor, enable them to get their job done by clearing obstacles that they cannot conquer. One tip: Ensure the Strategist’s plans are aligned with corporate business objectives, and obtain approval from the highest possible executive.
- 9. Enable them to connect to peers and invest in their knowledge and career growth.** Your Social Strategist is breaking new ground, and is unable to draw from existing best practices. Blazing trails, this new role may find themselves “alone in the wilderness.” Support your Social Strategist by encouraging them to join professional communities like GasPedal’s Social Media Business Council, MarketingProfs, WOMMA, and

NewComm. Give them budget and set aside time to attend conferences on these topics. Yet be selective – look for conferences that focus on business goals first and technologies second.

**10. Protect your investment by providing new challenges, and compensate well – they are highly coveted.** Social Strategists are in high demand – very few are qualified. Rather than go through the arduous task of replacing your Strategist when they depart, invest in them now. Remember that their personalities are attuned towards new challenges and “moving the needle.” Be sure to give them constant opportunities with measured risk, and reward them for meeting business objectives. Compensate your Social Strategist like other new marketing professionals in your organization with comparable titles. In our review of 50 LinkedIn profiles: 36% held Manager roles; 32% held Director roles; 20% had Lead or Strategist Title, and only 6% had a VP title. Give them opportunities for promotion – before an outside recruiter does.

## Conclusion

The Corporate Social Strategist is a unique role that spans duties across nearly every department. Despite early successes, these programs are nascent and plagued with challenges. However, expect a handful of exceptional professionals to shine through, building programs that use social technologies to connect with customers along the entire customer journey.

### **Avoid the *Social Media Help Desk*: Subscribe To Receive Upcoming Reports**

Social Strategists must build scalable business programs to avoid being relegated to a *Social Media Help Desk*. In a follow up report, we will present our recommendations on how to deploy scalable business programs.

Subscribe to our mailing list, at <http://bit.ly/subscribe-altimeter>, to receive this and future offerings.

## Sources

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah Owyang, Industry Analyst and Partner at Altimeter Group, has been tracking the Social Strategist role for a number of years. See “List of Social Computing Strategists in 2010” on his *Web Strategy* blog, at <http://www.web-strategist.com/blog/2010/01/30/list-of-corporate-social-media-strategists-in-2010>.

Secondly, learn about new hires in the social media space, which is broader than the Strategist role, from the ongoing series “On the Move.” Over the last few months, there has been an increase in submissions from professionals who are launching careers in the social media field. See: <http://www.web-strategist.com/blog/category/on-the-move>.

<sup>2</sup> “Burson-Marsteller Fortune Global 100 Social Media Study.” *The Burson-Marsteller Blog*. February 23, 2010 ([http://www.burson-marsteller.com/Innovation\\_and\\_insights/blogs\\_and\\_podcasts/BM\\_Blog/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?ID=160](http://www.burson-marsteller.com/Innovation_and_insights/blogs_and_podcasts/BM_Blog/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?ID=160)).

“Following in the footsteps of consumers, large international companies are now becoming active participants in social media. A recent Burson-Marsteller study found that 79 percent of the largest 100 companies in the Fortune Global 500 index are using at least one of the most popular social media platforms: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or corporate blog.”

<sup>3</sup> Altimeter Group conducted 51 interviews with Social Strategists and topic authorities. We selected quotes from our notes that best illustrate each career phase. These are actual quotes from our interviews.

<sup>4</sup> Another 28% of programs are “Centralized,” meaning social media efforts are tightly deployed by a central social media team. Of these companies, 60% existed at companies with less than 10,000 employees, though 68% at Formalized, Mature, or Advanced programs.

Only two companies organized into a “Holistic Model,” where every employee is empowered to use social media safely and in a consistent fashion. Both of these companies had more than 10,000 employees and classified their programs as “Advanced.”

<sup>5</sup> Burbary, Ken and Cohen, Adam. *A Wiki of Social Media Monitoring Solutions*. Retrieved November 4, 2010 (<http://wiki.kenburbary.com/social-media-monitoring-wiki>).

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<sup>7</sup> “Social Media Resources.” *The Altimeter*. Retrieved November 4, 2010 (<http://wiki.altimetergroup.com>)

<sup>8</sup> To help scope and manage risk, use a “sandbox covenant” to define how much risk and failure can be tolerated by the organization. Then put in place agreements and commitments to support activities in the sandbox – and lay out the consequences of what happens if someone steps out of the sandbox. See *Open Leadership*, by Charlene Li.

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## About Us

Altimeter Group is a research-based advisory firm that helps companies and industries leverage disruption to their advantage.

### About Jeremiah Owyang, Industry Analyst, Partner



Jeremiah Owyang (@jowyang) is a founding Partner with Altimeter Group, and formerly launched the Social Media Program at Hitachi Data Systems in 2005-2007. Currently, he focuses on social business and disruptive technologies for customer strategies. Previously, Jeremiah was a Senior Analyst at Forrester Research, Director of Corporate Media Strategy at PodTech Network and Manager of Global Web Marketing. He writes the *Web Strategy* blog (<http://www.web-strategist.com>) and is a columnist at *Forbes CMO Network*. He's often amazed about what mischief his small white dog gets into, who is also on Twitter (@goodboyrumba)

### About Charlene Li, Partner



Charlene Li (@charleneli) is founder of the Altimeter Group and the author of the New York Times bestseller, *Open Leadership*. She is also the coauthor of the critically acclaimed, bestselling book *Groundswell*, which was named one of the best business books in 2008. Charlene blogs at <http://charleneli.com>.

### About Christine Tran, Researcher



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