



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the mid 2000s, social media websites emerged as a swiftly growing and powerful form of communication. ictQATAR, as an advocate for new technologies that promise to enrich the lives of Qatar's citizens and drive economic development, was eager to learn more about social media on the internet, take advantage of it to reach its stakeholders, and promote its use where appropriate and beneficial.

By 2008 ictQATAR had established a presence on two major social media websites, Facebook and YouTube. At that time, the organization did not have a formal strategy in place for engaging in social media, and, as a result, it faced challenges and setbacks along the way. A year later, as social media use continued to record exponential gains around the world, ictQATAR took another step forward by creating a detailed, eight-point strategic plan, which it used as a blueprint to guide and bolster its social media efforts into the future.

With the development of a successful blog and the reestablishment of its presence on major social media sites, ictQATAR in less than two years has gained strong insight into the realm of social media. As a relatively new agency in Qatar (chartered in 2004), ictQATAR has used this new method of communication to increase its own responsiveness to and facilitate conversations with targeted users of this new media, particularly the residents of Qatar.

Perhaps most important and most pertinent to its role as the nation's technology custodian, ictQATAR's social media engagement can serve as a template for other agencies and businesses in Qatar and the region. ictQATAR's use of social media has helped it increase awareness of the organization in Qatar and beyond, reach citizens, and establish a platform to get feedback and engage in a dialogue with them. ictQATAR hopes that others can benefit from its climb up the social media learning curve so they too can enter successfully into this evolving realm of communications.



### ictQATAR's Social Media Presence as of mid 2010

Qatar Living  
Twitter  
Facebook  
Qatar Shares  
Wikipedia English  
Wikipedia Arabic  
WatWet  
Flickr  
YouTube  
Digg  
Delicious  
I Love Qatar  
QatarU  
Do7a  
Arab Crunch  
Technorati  
Qatar Speed  
Scribd  
Meedan

## The Rapid Emergence of Social Media

Social media expert Brian Solis defines social media as “any tool or service that uses the internet to facilitate conversation.” For some, that means only major social networking websites such as Facebook. However, the world of social media has evolved beyond that—especially among the people of Qatar, who have embraced forums and sharing websites. As a result, social media in this document refers not only to major social networking websites but also to micro-blogging websites such as Twitter, bookmarking and sharing websites such as Digg and Delicious, interactive photo or video sharing sites such as Flickr and YouTube, and online discussion forums such as the Arabic language Qatar Shares and the English language Qatar Living. All of these websites fit Solis’ definition well since they use the internet to help foster communication throughout society.

The growth of social media has been staggering and swift, both in terms of the number of sites themselves and the number of people who rely on them to communicate socially and professionally. In just six years, for example, Facebook has signed up more than 500 million users worldwide, and it continues to expand its presence around the world. Twitter, only four years old, now has 105 million registered users. Perhaps most astounding, people worldwide watch more than one billion videos every day on YouTube, which launched in 2005. Social media sites clearly are serving a need among users worldwide, enabling them to connect and communicate and share words and images at a capacity and speed that would have seemed unimaginable only a decade ago.

As regulators, advocates and information providers for all types of communications technology, ictQATAR could not ignore the explosive growth of social media. The organization effectively serves as the custodian for technology in Qatar and therefore felt an obligation to study and play a more active role by participating in this rapidly emerging communications technology.

ictQATAR’s foray into the world of social media began in 2008, when it set up a Facebook page and began to use YouTube. It also became the first government entity in Qatar to join Qatar Living, the leading Qatar-based website. Shortly thereafter, ictQATAR joined other major international sites—Twitter, Digg, Delicious, and Flickr—as well as the Arabic forums Qatar Shares and Do7a. By mid 2010, ictQATAR had a presence on 19 regional or international social media sites. In addition, in December 2009, ictQATAR launched its Digital Qatar blog both in Arabic and English, each version with its own unique content.



# CASE STUDY: FACEBOOK



Facebook is the social media site with the greatest strategic importance to ictQATAR. The most popular website in the world, Facebook also is the most popular social networking site in Qatar, has more than 400,000 accounts from registered users in Qatar. Many private businesses in Qatar use Facebook for brand marketing: the Qatar 2022 bid for the FIFA World Cup, Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, Vodafone, Qatar Airways, among others.

In 2008, ictQATAR established a personal account on Facebook called “The Promise of E,” the theme of an ictQATAR advertising campaign at the time. Content on the page consisted mostly of pictures and videos of ictQATAR events. Users searching for ictQATAR content under its brand name were confused by the use of the “Promise of E” as its page name. While the Facebook personal account grew to approximately 90 members, ictQATAR had little interaction with those users, and the page did little to promote ictQATAR’s brand identity.

With its new social media strategy in place, ictQATAR’s Facebook presence has grown from 40 fans in the first quarter of 2009 to 1000 fans in the second quarter of 2010, of which around 700 are actively visiting ictQATAR’s page every month. Page traffic continues to grow, with page views per week exceeding 1,000 for the first time in August of 2010. More important, the average number of “likes” that users leave on ictQATAR’s Facebook comments has grown from zero in the second quarter of 2009 to eight to ten per week in the second quarter of 2010.

A strong Facebook presence is helping ictQATAR achieve its goal of reaching Arabic-language users. Approximately 60 to 70 percent of the organization’s Facebook fans are Arab, although not necessarily Qatari. Facebook users are also visiting ictQATAR’s blog and website—another goal of the organization’s social media strategy. ictQATAR’s website gets an average of 50 referrals per month from Facebook, while its blog gets an average of 25 referrals per month.

New applications for the Facebook page allow ictQATAR to increase engagement with users and showcase content from other sites. ictQATAR added ten new applications to its page in June of 2010, including a “favorites” section, allowing ictQATAR to list its favorite brand pages on the site. The organization has also embedded a YouTube channel within its Facebook page. The channel allows users not only to watch all ictQATAR’s videos on Facebook, but to save the videos and post them on their own Facebook “walls.” Material from Flickr and Twitter are now gathered on the Facebook page as well, and users can read Digital Qatar blog posts from Facebook.

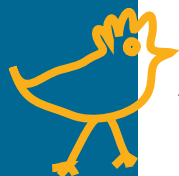
In effect, Facebook is becoming “one-stop shopping” for users wishing to engage with ictQATAR in all the ways social media can offer.



# CASE STUDY: TWITTER



**I**ctQATAR considers Twitter the site where it has achieved the greatest success in attaining many of its strategic social media goals: establishing the organization as a thought leader, increasing its share of voice, and achieving active message penetration with the target audience. In addition, the site has proved valuable in attracting registration for ictQATAR-sponsored events and drawing publicity and awareness to the featured topics and speakers at those events.



**I**ctQATAR joined Twitter early in 2009 and was the first Qatari governing body to “tweet”—create a post on the site of 140 characters or less. ictQATAR now has approximately 1,500 followers on Twitter and is the 6th most popular tweeter in Qatar. Al Jazeera English has the country’s top Twitter account, with more than 45,000 followers.

**T**witter has emerged as a very successful vehicle allowing ictQATAR to interact with social media users. More than 60% of ictQATAR’s social media friends come from Twitter, and those friends voice their views on ictQATAR-related news and events more frequently than those on any other social media sites.

**T**witter’s ability to enlarge the audience and enhance interaction during events was a key initial benefit. “Live-tweeting” has become a mainstay at ictQATAR-sponsored events. The live tweeting performed by ictQATAR at such events has resulted in an average of 30 and 40 brand mentions—including “re-tweets” by other users sending along ictQATAR’s information, and direct messages to ictQATAR.

**A**t ictQATAR’s Digitally Open Forum, held in October 2010, a new level of interaction through live tweeting was reached, with more than 110 unique

tweeters participating in a conversation about the event yielding more than 1700 live tweets during the forum.

**T**he organization has also live-tweeted during two non-sponsored events: the UnPlugged forum held by Al Jazeera Network, which took place in Qatar in May of 2010, and the 2010 ITU World Telecommunications Development Conference (WTDC) in India, where ictQATAR achieved record response and interaction with users.

**“H**ashtags” – pound signs preceding keywords within the Twitter text to facilitate searches – have been used during live-tweeting to leverage user interaction. The hashtags can then be promoted on Facebook and other ictQATAR publications and press releases. ictQATAR has found that hashtagging on Twitter and other social media sites is an important way to create context for its content and help organize users’ interaction streams.

**P**romoting interaction with users is a high priority for ictQATAR, and on Twitter, it is relatively simple to identify and reward active users. This can be done by “re-tweeting” users’ tweets about ictQATAR and related comments, and by linking to users’ Twitter profiles when they use ictQATAR-generated hashtags. Such attention to users and their comments should increase user sharing, participation, and bookmarking.

**I**n the future, ictQATAR plans to promote further user interaction on Twitter by promoting its hashtag feature and encouraging users to comment spontaneously on ictQATAR-sponsored events. ictQATAR could create question-and-answer sessions from hashtags, or announce exclusive news or “behind the scenes” coverage using hashtags. Twitter’s ability to enhance and amplify the impact of events that ictQATAR sponsors or participates in should only continue to grow.





## Developing a Social Media Strategy

With little experience in the new realm of social media, ictQATAR's initial foray onto Facebook proved unsuccessful. The organization did not use the ictQATAR name on its first Facebook page. Instead it chose to feature its new "Promise of E" campaign as the page owner, thus losing the chance to develop brand awareness among users. It did not interact with users and ran into trouble with the Facebook administration when it sent out mass invitations to join its page. This proved to be a valuable learning experience, and as ictQATAR expanded its presence on other social media sites and began devoting increased resources to adding content and engaging with site users, ictQATAR realized that it would benefit from devising a comprehensive strategy in order to avoid another reactionary, "scattershot" approach to social media engagement.

In March 2010, ictQATAR introduced an eight-stage strategy, creating a methodical, comprehensive plan of action to strengthen its social media presence in several key areas—content, delivery, results, and control. The strategy drew from ictQATAR's early experiences, both positive and negative, with social media sites. More critically, however, the plan was forward-looking, intended to guide ictQATAR's social media strategy into the future.

### ictQATAR's Eight-Stage Social Media Strategy:

1. Establish a Sizeable Share of Voice
2. Develop Clear Goals
3. Identify Key Sites – and Focus on Them
4. Set a Content Strategy
5. Select the Right Tools
6. Engage and Facilitate Conversation
7. Monitoring Progress
8. Establish a Growth Strategy

### Establish Share of Voice

The first step of the plan to enhance ictQATAR's social media presence involved understanding the concept – and elevating the percentage—of ictQATAR's "mentions" among specifically targeted groups of online users, amplifying its presence across social media outlets. Those "mentions" included actual terms such as "ictQATAR" as well as links (or "re-tweets" on Twitter) of ictQATAR-generated content and shared content through "digs" and bookmarks.

### Develop Clear Goals

Next, ictQATAR focused on establishing clear goals that it expected to attain from its social media engagement. Even though ictQATAR realized that it would need to adjust these goals regularly to keep pace with rapidly changing technology and user habits, it believed it was important to articulate specific targets so that it would have a coherent strategy. As a result, ictQATAR established goals that included increasing brand visibility and awareness, achieving greater message penetration and understanding of its programs among its key target audience, and boosting website traffic, e-newsletter readership and event registration.

Segmented geographically, this key audience consisted primarily of Qatari residents. However, an equally important segmentation method for social media was a "socialgraphic" one, where the audience was grouped according to how they interact socially on the web: creators, critics, collectors, joiners, spectators, and in-actives. ictQATAR targeted four of the six "socialgraphic" groups as its key audience: creators, who create their own blogs; critics who provide substantial feedback; collectors, who tag and organize content; and spectators, who are passive users but will still benefit from greater ictQATAR brand awareness on social media sites. ictQATAR also found out that different sites appeal to different groups. For example, Twitter users are highly interactive; Facebook, while encouraging interaction, appeals to more passive users.

### Identify Key Sites—and Focus on Them

With social media sites springing up almost daily, it was crucial for ictQATAR to identify the sites that offered the most potential for achieving the organization's social media goals. ictQATAR opted to devote most of its attention to generating content and activity on five sites: Facebook, Qatar Shares, Qatar Living, Twitter, and YouTube. These five sites were selected because they were deemed most likely to contribute to ictQATAR's social media objectives.

## Set a Content Strategy

Another key priority was ensuring the quality of content, so that the items posted on social media sites were always relevant and applicable to the informational needs or interests of social media users. ictQATAR creates a significant amount of original content, including web features, press releases, blog posts, e-newsletters stories, and formal policies and decisions.

While ictQATAR already was creating diverse content, the organization decided to omit from social media sites certain self-focused materials that would not be relevant to the social media audience. Content format and length also needed to be tailored to the type of site and its users. Notices of upcoming events, for instance, might be posted as bilingual, action-oriented short phrases on sites with links to the event's website. Content also needed to avoid complexity and technical jargon, and contain links and actionable phrases. Most important, content needed to be accurate.

## Select the Right Tools

Selecting the right tools to promote ictQATAR's content emerged as another key stage of developing a social media strategy. Tools include "widgets" (a stand-alone application that can be embedded into third party sites by any user), cross-publishing and real-time updates, in terms of live tweeting. YouTube videos, for example, can be embedded on ictQATAR's Facebook page, and then shared with users. It was important to recognize that content has little value when placed on social media sites unless it is placed in proper context. Some of the best methods to contextualize content included making sure titles and descriptions contain keywords, and writing high-quality descriptions to accompany videos, photos, and other content on sites such as YouTube. Contextualization was a major part of the social media optimization (SMO) plan. This plan developed from ictQATAR's realization that it must change its understanding of content in order to leverage the effectiveness of its social media presence on search engines. Instead of viewing media such as a website or e-newsletter as products to be promoted in their entirety, each discrete story, status update, tweet, announcement, image or video featured within that media needed to be treated as a separate "social object", to be distributed and promoted separately on social media.

## Engage and Facilitate Conversation

Engagement with social media users can simply mean attracting comments and feedback. However, ictQATAR opted to focus on the quality of those comments, in order to help build stronger and more

lasting relationships with its users. For this to happen, the agency had to do more than simply post content on social media; it had to ensure that the content was interactive. ictQATAR recognized that this could be done by adopting such tactics as adding interactive questions to the body of the post, performing live-tweeting of events and actively responding to user comments and inquiries in a timely manner in addition to selecting the right content in the first place which would trigger conversations.

## Monitor Progress

ictQATAR realized the importance of monitoring the progress of its social media strategy. This involved monitoring results, measuring impact, and then assessing the impact to discover whether that impact matched its stated goals. Monitoring results on social media sites was a straightforward but time-consuming exercise, which included such tasks as conducting Twitter searches to monitor tweets by users, scanning forum posts for comments following ictQATAR's posts and other technology-related posts, and utilizing Google Readers to monitor websites mentioning ictQATAR.

The organization's impact on social media sites could be measured in a number of different ways, such as counting the number of comments posted by users on forums such as Qatar Shares, the number and quality of user-generated threads about ictQATAR on forums, the number of event RSVPs driven by social media, social media traffic statistics, accessing Facebook Demographics to identify the interest curve of various age groups and countries, and counting the number of "diggings" and bookmarks placed by users of Digg and Delicious for ictQATAR content.

Once ictQATAR's impact was measured, specific measurements could be matched with the organization's stated goals. For example, success in achieving the goal of increasing ictQATAR's share of voice could be measured by the quantity and quality of comments posted by users on forums and tweets on Twitter.

## Establish a Growth Strategy

The final strategic step involved formulating a growth strategy. One option to grow involved expanding ictQATAR's social media presence by engaging in a number of new social media sites. ictQATAR decided against this approach and chose to pursue growth by focusing more attention on the current social media sites in which it had established a presence, deepening its penetration and elevating the level of user engagement on these sites.



# CASE STUDY: YOUTUBE

**G**oogle-owned YouTube is by far the world's largest video-sharing internet website. Users upload, share and view videos on YouTube at a rate that has exceeded more than one billion per day. As a way to distribute video content efficiently to a wide audience, ictQATAR recognized early on the value of uploading video to YouTube. However, before 2009 the videos consisted of footage from ictQATAR events—the same footage it provided to traditional news organizations for public relations purposes. ictQATAR's YouTube channel was also branded as the "Promise of E," and not ictQATAR, creating the same brand confusion it had experienced with its first Facebook page. In March of 2009, as part of its social media strategy, ictQATAR decided to transform its multimedia content on YouTube, with an emphasis on exclusivity, serving the interests of its targeted users, and clarifying its brand.

**I**ctQATAR created a channel on YouTube which focused on offering videos containing exclusive interviews with key ICT experts worldwide. These experts included the president of WIPO and ISOC, the executive director of G3ict, the chief executive of Cyber Smart, the chief security officer of BEBO, and a former commissioner of the FCC. As the quality of its videos improved, ictQATAR was granted a rare exception from YouTube, allowing it to upload videos lasting more than 10 minutes.

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**O**nce ictQATAR had improved the quality and exclusivity of its YouTube content, it then focused on placing this content in other media. For example, ictQATAR began embedding YouTube videos on its website. The organization upgraded its methods of video "tagging" and keyword entry on YouTube, in order to improve the likelihood that videos would appear as the result of a keyword search. ictQATAR also improved its YouTube titles and video descriptions to integrate required keywords and to inform potential viewers of pertinent topics within the videos. Cross-links to other social media helped raise awareness of ictQATAR's YouTube presence across all major social media. Photo images of an ictQATAR event on the social media site Flickr, for instance, were linked to YouTube videos of the same event.

**T**he 150 videos ictQATAR now has on its YouTube channel have been viewed more than 80,000 times. By the summer of 2010, ictQATAR had placed all 150 videos "in context". Several new keywords or "tags" in the applicable language of each video were added to descriptions of each video, increasing the chance that each video would appear in more than one search result. For example, a 2009 interview with Al Jazeera's Tony Burman can now be found as a search result for "Al Jazeera," "Doha," "Qatar" and "ictQATAR," among other keywords.







## CASE STUDY: QATAR LIVING AND QATAR SHARES

In 2009, ictQATAR became the first Qatari government entity to join Qatar Living, an English-language online forum. Qatar Living is the country's most popular website, with approximately half a million Qatari users. Since its launch in 2005, almost 1.5 million posts have been made on Qatar Living and the site continues to grow at a rapid pace. Because Qatar Living's local popularity should help ictQATAR build brand awareness and increase traffic on its own website, ictQATAR places a high priority on strengthening its relationship with Qatar Living.

ictQATAR has posted on Qatar Living approximately 150 times and now posts on average between two and three times a week. The relationship has proved valuable in reaching English-speaking residents of Qatar. Qatar Living administrators have regularly highlighted ictQATAR content on the Qatar Living homepage. The posts generating the most interaction with users are related to regulatory news, such as ictQATAR's phone numbering change plan and a notice on password security.

Qatar Shares is the most popular Arabic language forum in Qatar in terms of number of threads created by users. Other popular Arabic-language sites include Qatar University Forum (QatarU) with the largest membership of all Qatari forums, and Do7a. Qatar Shares was launched to serve primarily as a forum for economic and finan-

cial discussions, but its most popular section is the "general discussion" section, where Qatar users have discussed almost 50,000 diverse topics as of October 2010, creating close to 1.2 million replies and comments on those threads.

ictQATAR's participation in these forums is crucial for building a Qatari audience. Participation on forum sites requires that ictQATAR respond to comments and queries in a timely, substantive manner. This means that ictQATAR posts on Qatar Shares two to three times a week although it monitors the site on average five times per day.

The large investment in time and labor required to remain an active presence on the Qatar Shares forums has reaped large dividends in developing an interactive relationship with members of ictQATAR's target audience of Qataris. For every "thread" started by ictQATAR on the Qatar Shares forum, the number of user comments has risen from an average of three to five in 2009 to ten in 2010. The forum also has become the social media site where users generate "threads" about ictQATAR that do not originate with ictQATAR itself.

ictQATAR understands that feedback will not always be positive; in fact, approximately 70 percent of the time that ictQATAR is mentioned on Qatar Shares, the comments are negative. However, all substantive feedback is useful as it improves communication and can strengthen the organization's relationship with users if handled promptly and correctly.

## Social Media, Qatar-Style

Within Qatar, the youngest adults are the top consumers of online media, according to “Digital Media in Qatar” a 2010 report by IDC, a global market research and advisory firm. Among Qatar’s 25 to 29 year old age group participation on social media sites and use of search engine sites are the most popular online activities. Notably, social media sites such as Facebook rank among the most popular search engines in Qatar, which suggests that these sites are increasing their share of online activity by expanding beyond their original function—perhaps, with younger users, at the expense of traditional search engine sites. English is the most commonly used language by Qataris on social network sites; 71% of social media activity is conducted in English versus 31% conducted in Arabic.

Among Qataris, the youngest of these young adults (ages 20 to 24) not only prefer social networking to other online functions, they are also very frequent users, with 83% of Qataris in this age group gaining access to their social networking accounts at least once a day. That compares to 68% of 25–29 year old users who access social media sites once a day or more, although they are just as heavy users of digital media overall as their younger counterparts. Females are somewhat more likely to check their social media accounts once a day than are males. A variety of reasons for visiting social media sites are now reported, including exchange of ideas and experiences, entertainment, access to local news and searching for old friends.

## Implementation—Turning the strategic plan into reality

For any organization, implementation of a social media strategy begins by obtaining support from its leadership. That buy-in is needed in order to garner backing for the commitment of time and resources to what is still a young, relatively untested and rapidly evolving communications medium. Engaging with users on social media is time consuming and requires constant monitoring of sites and the ability to provide rapid, high quality interaction with users.

ictQATAR recognized that it needed to have in place a designated overseer of social media with experience not only in its technical aspects but also a developed understanding of content requirements as well. Thus, ictQATAR created a dedicated position—a Social Media Specialist—within its Communications Office. It decided that the skills necessary for this job included a background in communications and marketing, strong writing ability, the motivation to keep up with new technologies, as well as language proficiency both in English and Arabic. ictQATAR’s Social Media Specialist was given responsibility for handling all social media postings and activity. A Multimedia Specialist assisted with the handling of video content.

At ictQATAR content for social media sites now is provided by a “Content Team” headed up by the Publications Manager with the Communications Office. However, the Social Media Specialist is responsible for posting and tracking the various sites. Having one person in charge of posting on all sites is preferable in that it helps reduce the posting of contradictory or redundant information and also focuses one person on providing ample links and consistent tags and titles across all social media.

ictQATAR has learned that while dedicated staff and constant updating and response to user comments is crucial for social media success, mistakes can also be made—especially by reacting to users too rapidly, and not having a well-crafted and thought-out response. The Social Media Specialist monitoring social media sites, therefore, has created a system for response. Important user comments or complaints are referred to management before a detailed response is posted. Swift but noncommittal feedback such as “good point” or “we’ll get back to you” can buy time while substantive answers are crafted.

A key area of focus for ictQATAR’s Social Media Specialist is content. Because one of ictQATAR’s primary social media goals is to promote interactivity with its users, the Social Media Specialist sifts through all content to determine what will be interesting or relevant to users. In ictQATAR’s experience, its Digital Qatar blog has proven to be a great source of content for social media sites. Covering a range of topics that include web strategy and technology trends, the blog is integrated with Facebook and Twitter for easy sharing of information. Digital Qatar’s English-language blog now averages 7,500 visits per month, while the Arabic-language blog averages 400 visits per month, but most interaction occurs on other sites such as Qatar Living, Qatar Shares and even Facebook, where the posts are shared. Blog posts are also a popular source of “tweets” on Twitter.

## Results: Measurement and Insight

Attendance figures from ictQATAR's Speakers' series provided the first confirmation that ictQATAR's presence in social media was reaching a desirable audience. One in five attendees at ictQATAR's first Speakers' series in May 2009 either signed up or learned about the conference through social media sites. This indicated that ictQATAR had achieved more than just a static presence on sites such as Facebook; the organization was engaging its users, creating interest in its programs and facilitating attendance at its events.

There are many other quantitative affirmations of ictQATAR's successful implementation of social media. ictQATAR's Facebook presence has increased from 40 fans in the first quarter of 2009 to more than 1000 fans in the third quarter of 2010. About one quarter of those fans are active users and weekly page views topped 1,000 for the first time in the summer of 2010. Important to its goal of reaching Arabic-language users, about two in three Facebook users are Arab.

ictQATAR has approximately 1,800 Twitter followers, ranking it the 6th most popular tweeter in Qatar. Twitter also plays a pivotal role in amplifying ictQATAR's content, benefiting from users "re-tweeting" information at its organized events. ictQATAR's YouTube channel has more than 150 videos that have been viewed more than 80 000 times. The channel is one of the select few YouTube channels in the GCC that has been granted the exception to upload videos longer than 10 minutes.

### Quality, not Quantity

ictQATAR's most significant insight in beginning to evaluate the results of its social media strategy was that the pursuit and realization of many of its quantitative goals, including greater penetration, more traffic, and additional Facebook friends, did not directly translate into achievement of its larger goals: gaining greater user understanding of ictQATAR's mission, message and thought leadership and increased interaction with its target audience of Qataris. ictQATAR initially began measuring its social media experience by focusing on metrics that counted numbers of responses and interactions, rather than paying attention to the quality of those interactions. For example, ictQATAR's first Facebook page did not include the organizational name in its title, and while the page gained numbers of "friends", it failed to increase brand awareness measurably. The measurement of "quality" mandates that interactions on social media sites be

judged according to whether they are furthering ictQATAR's social media goals. That, however, is a far more complex and subjective process than undertaking a quantitative analysis.

### Is Criticism Success?

ictQATAR found that "quality" of social media interaction should not be measured by the amount of feedback which is positive rather than negative. For example, negative "tweets" on the Twitter site emanating from an ictQATAR-sponsored forum, pointing out that sound quality was poor, or that the speaker made a specific, factually incorrect statement, proved to be valuable feedback—constructive criticism. Although the comments were negative, this feedback should be counted as a much higher-quality interaction than the far more positive but less useful "thank you," or "I enjoyed that very much." This makes measurement of social media impact and success far different from measurement of traditional advertising success, where the aim is to leave viewers or readers with a positive impression of the organization and its activities. True engagement with users, whether positive or negative, is ictQATAR's goal with social media, and constructive feedback, whether or not it points out negative qualities of the content or product, is particularly useful.

A prime example of successful engagement with social media users occurred during ictQATAR's cyber-safety campaign. The campaign urged Qatari parents to monitor actively their children's use of the internet. Arabic-speaking users responded often, creating a lengthy thread of discussion on Qatar Shares noting that ictQATAR was urging active oversight while at the same time offering Qataris free internet service via Internet Parks (iParks)—a service that makes active parental monitoring difficult. The conversation was generated by users, not by ictQATAR, and while the nature of the feedback was critical, the users were actively engaged in the issue of cyber-safety and participating in highlighting the issue and contributing solutions to problems that new and ever-evolving technologies present to the Qatari community.

ictQATAR's use of social media continues to strengthen its relationship with end-users. This is particularly beneficial to its regulatory department, which now receives far more consumer feedback on various ictQATAR policies that impact their lives. For example, in late 2010, ictQATAR received substantial feedback on the local forums Qatar Shares and Qatar Living after it changed the numbering system on all mobile and fixed line telephones.

## Conclusion: What's Next for ictQATAR in Social Media?

In just 24 months ictQATAR built a successful presence on some of the largest social media sites in the region and world, becoming more focused over time on targeting and engaging the constituents the organization wanted most to reach. However, because the world of social media changes rapidly, ictQATAR recognizes that its social media strategy must continually evolve.

Looking ahead, ictQATAR will benefit from increasing the quantity and quality of its interaction with social media users. In order to increase its outreach to Qatari users, the organization began devoting more time to monitoring daily activity on Arab forums such as Qatar Shares. ictQATAR can continue to solicit feedback on its social media operations and the content of its sites from users, and continue to work to engage its audience and raise the quality of interaction.

By the end of 2010 ictQATAR had a presence on nineteen social media sites. Its current strategy is to only work with sites that offer something new or highly targeted to the organization's key audience. A major goal, as a champion on technology in the Pan-Arab world, is to increase Arabic content on the web. Meedan is one such site with which ictQATAR recently engaged. The social media site is aimed at Arabic-speaking users, where ictQATAR can share blog posts and other content.

By jumping into the social media arena at such an early stage, ictQATAR climbed a steep learning curve, and now has a clearer understanding of how social media sites can help it better engage the population it serves. At the same time, exploding use of social media sites, particularly among young people, brings with it a host of risks and concerns. ictQATAR held a series of focus groups with Qatari youth ranging from 14 to 29 years old—the demographic group that is by far the most engaged and familiar with social media sites. Those sessions revealed that use of pseudonyms to hide identities, cross-gender interactions via private messaging and disclosure of private information on social networking websites are major concerns. ictQATAR has taken the lead in publicly discussing these concerns and proposing solutions through its recent cyber safety campaign.

While social media will not replace conventional communications and traditional media campaigns, use of this medium is having a strong impact on ictQATAR's brand image, particularly with younger members of the population. ictQATAR already is seen as a more active, savvy, and responsive organization. As it continues to focus upon improving the quality and focus of its content and engaging its users on social media sites, the image and awareness of ictQATAR as a reachable, responsive, and service-oriented organization should continue to grow.

As the advocate for technologies that can enrich the lives of Qataris and increase economic development, ictQATAR enthusiastically endorses adoption and implementation of a social media strategy by other government agencies. This relatively new, increasingly popular and powerful communications technology enables organizations to enhance brand awareness and will position them to reach existing and new end-users. Perhaps most important, it will open a dialogue with end-users, providing not only the avenue to disseminate information, but also creating a path to hear from them, to receive feedback and learn what interests and concerns them. A comprehensive social media strategy may seem relatively difficult and time-consuming to implement, but the long-term benefits to the organization from forging a stronger identity and a closer link with end-users will make the effort worthwhile.



# Twelve Tips for Social Media Success

1. **Get Buy-In.** Obtain support from senior leadership to commit time and resources. Make sure that management understands the implications of investment in a new and rapidly evolving medium.
2. **Develop a Strategy.** Avoid a reactionary, “scattershot” approach to social media engagement by developing a comprehensive social media strategy.
3. **Establish clear goals.** Set targeted outcomes. These might include increasing brand visibility and awareness, greater message penetration and promoting interest in events and in conventional media such as websites and e-newsletters.
4. **Identify key social media sites.** Don’t rush into joining new social media sites; consider first whether that medium will add value and allow your organization to achieve its social media goals. Build a relationship with local social media sites to ensure more brand visibility over time, and make sure you understand the policies of each social media account.
5. **Create a social media overseer.** Appoint a single, dedicated employee to oversee social media. Ideally that employee should have experience not only in the technical aspects of social media but also will possess a developed understanding of content requirements. If a team works on social media, make sure its style is consistent. Maintain only one voice on each social medium.
6. **Develop a response system.** Create a system for handling non-routine comments and complaints in a timely manner. Don’t respond to complaints with a single, generic reply; personalize responses to increase impact.
7. **Tailor content.** Monitor closely the length of social media content to match that content to the type of site and its users. Be selective in posting content. Don’t post overly promotional material. Don’t post or tweet the same content multiple times a day to avoid clutter.
8. **Promote interaction.** Take steps to ensure that social media content promotes interaction with your targeted audience. Adopt interactive tactics such as adding questions to the body of the post, utilizing the “discussions” feature on Facebook, and live-tweeting from events. Respond swiftly to user comments and inquiries.
9. **Prepare for criticism.** Prepare to be criticized by users. True engagement can be both positive and negative. Constructive feedback can be particularly useful to an organization or agency.
10. **Analyze traffic and user demographics.** Use social media analytics to analyze traffic and demographics. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter provide these statistics free of charge.
11. **Be patient.** Don’t expect sudden increases in sales, site traffic or user feedback. Social media success builds over time. Remember that the quality of user interactions is more important than the quantity. Don’t depend too heavily on numbers to measure success.
12. **Anticipate change.** Prepare to re-evaluate strategy constantly to adapt to changes. The world of social media is very young, and the relative value of specific sites or strategies will evolve over time.

