

# Is Your Social Media Strategy Global?

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North America is no longer the center of the social universe

As the worldwide social network audience soars well past 1 billion people, marketers are tackling the difficult task of coordinating their social media marketing efforts on a global scale.

A grassroots, organic approach may have worked in the early days, but many marketers now have dozens or even hundreds of social media profiles to manage worldwide. This requires a delicate combination of corporate oversight, to keep brand messaging consistent, and flexibility, to empower local managers who know their markets best.

“Multinational marketers have cobbled together their global social media footprint mainly by allowing regional offices to set up their own pages and accounts,” said Debra Aho Williamson, eMarketer principal analyst and author of the new report, “Social Media in the Marketing Mix: Managing Global Expansion.” “But now many are finding that they need a more organized approach to gain control of a bulging portfolio. As marketers work toward a social strategy, a plan for global management should be a key part of the discussion.”

With social network usage rising rapidly worldwide, its center of gravity is shifting away from North America and Western Europe, where usage patterns are now mature. The markets to watch over the next few years will be in regions such as Asia-Pacific, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa, and Eastern Europe.

For example, the Middle East and Africa together experienced a 33.9% increase in social network users in 2011, while Asia-Pacific’s user population grew 27.5%. Both regions will continue to see double-digit percentage gains through 2014. By contrast, North America’s growth rate was just 9.5% in 2011 and is expected to fall to 4% by 2014.

The fastest-growing social networking countries—India and Indonesia—are also experiencing rapid economic transformation. In these developing markets, brands have an opportunity to use what they have learned in their home region to create smarter and more effective social media marketing programs that can be tailored to local usage patterns, such as accessing social networks via smartphones or feature phones.

“Social media marketing initiatives that capture widespread attention in the US do not necessarily resonate in other parts of the world,” noted Williamson. “But sometimes there are similarities that marketers will only know about if they have a coordinated social media marketing strategy that funnels insights across regional offices.”

The full report, “Social Media in the Marketing Mix: Managing Global Expansion,” also answers these key questions:

- Why do businesses need a global strategy to effectively reach the growing social network audience?  
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- How does Facebook’s growth factor into marketers’ plans?  
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- What are the benefits of taking a global approach?  
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- How are major marketers managing their social media presence around the world?

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