

1. **ENTRANT'S NAME:** Karin Basaraba
2. **ENTRANT'S ORGANIZATION:** Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC)
3. **TITLE OF ENTRY:** Using Twitter to Build a Case For Social Media
4. **DIVISION AND CATEGORY:** Division 1: Communications Management | Category 17: Social Media
5. **TIME PERIOD OF PROJECT:** November 2009 to November 2010
6. **BRIEF DESCRIPTION:** Last year, ICBC dipped its toes into the social media world by starting a Twitter account in order to prove to the company's executive that ICBC's customers use social media tools. During the year, I listened to our customers, provided education and information, provided customer service and slowly started conversations about a company that everyone in British Columbia loves to hate.

1. NEED/OPPORTUNITY

A. Company Overview: The Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) is a provincial Crown (government-owned) corporation established in 1973 to provide universal auto insurance to British Columbia's (B.C.) motorists. Drivers in B.C. must buy their basic car insurance from ICBC, but we compete with other insurers for optional car insurance. We're also responsible for driver licensing and vehicle licensing and registration. We have 3.2 million customers and license and insure drivers and vehicles across the province through our service centres, plus a network of more than 900 independent brokers. Claims customers are served through local offices and our Dial-a-Claim call centre. Our road safety investments help create safer roads, lead to fewer crashes, and help keep our rates stable.

B. Need: ICBC customers generally feel that we are a big, faceless, slow, bureaucratic organization that doesn't care about the customer and is only out to make money. Our external research and customer feedback indicates that only four out of 10 customers speak positively about our company. ICBC would like to improve this score to seven out of 10 customers by 2014 and has made this a key corporate goal. If we don't get our relationship with customers right, we won't be in business. We have a monopoly for over half of our business and because of that, we must have a business that customers value and one that provides a top-notch experience every time they deal with us. If we are able to improve our customers' perceptions of us, we'll be able to be more competitive on the optional insurance side and continue to have the government's support to operate in B.C.

C. Opportunity: In 2009, we created a new strategic direction for the company which is focused on one corporate goal: to improve our customer's experiences and perceptions of us. Social media uses language that is casual and conversational, it forces companies to be transparent and timely, and allows companies to show their human side. By using social media tools, we would be able to show our customers that we are real people, respond quickly, and be open and transparent—basically the exact opposite of what they currently think of us.

D. Research: We suspected that our customers were already having conversations about us in social media, but didn't know to what extent. In order to show the vice presidents of Communications and Marketing how much and what was being said about us, I did an audit to see how many mentions of ICBC there were in social media. There were 102 comments in social media about ICBC in July 2009. Of those, 49 were neutral, 39 were negative, and 14 were positive. On Facebook, there were 63 ICBC-related groups with a total of 5,539 members. Of that, 57 of those groups were negative with a combined 5,309 members in those groups.

E. Proposal: Based on my research and social media best practices, I created a social media strategy that the Communications department would use to move forward with using these tools. When I presented it to the Vice President of Communications and the Vice President of Marketing, there was a preference to focus instead on traditional forms of communicating.

After the presentation, I talked about how Twitter might be a good way to dip our toes in the social media waters, as it was free, easy to manage through online tools, and could be done off the side of my desk. I suggested using the account for at least one year, setting goals and objectives, and assessing at the end. This way we could test our customers' appetite for using social media tools in a low-risk manner. I mentioned the direct relation to our corporate strategy and suggested that this was also a way to change customers' perceptions of us. Both vice presidents agreed to the revised proposal.

2. INTENDED AUDIENCE

A. Primary Audience: Our intended audience was all British Columbians who use Twitter.

B. Audience Characteristics: According to Josh Bernoff and Charlene Li's [Social Technographics](#), 33% of those who participate in social media are Conversationalists, meaning they post updates to Twitter. Conversationalists are 56% female, more than any other group. While they're among the youngest of the groups, 70% are still 30 and up. So I knew that in general, I would be dealing primarily with females over the age of 30.

C. Research: According to Comscore, approximately 542,000 visitors accessed Twitter in B.C. in November 2010, which is about 17% of our customers. But it's hard to gather solid data on exactly how many people are on Twitter in a given location, as users aren't required to fill in a location in their bio. And according to a November 2010 report by eMarketer, [Canada Social Media Marketing](#), Twitter is the third most used social media tool by Canadians. According to an Angus Reid poll commissioned by Bacardi, Vancouverites spend more time networking online than counterparts in other Canadian cities.

3. GOALS & OBJECTIVES

A. Goals

All of the goals for this project tie back to our corporate goal to improve our customer's experiences and perceptions of us.

1. Prove to the ICBC Executive Committee that our customers use social media and that it is a valid way to work on our corporate goal of improving our customer's experiences and perceptions of us
2. Provide an informal, human voice of the organization to engage our customers and promote the ICBC brand
3. Provide thought leadership and credibility, increasing our visibility as the experts in auto insurance, driver licensing and road safety within the online space
4. Provide an additional, low-barrier method for customers to interact with ICBC to provide feedback, seek help and suggest ideas
5. Monitor mentions on Twitter of ICBC and engage with our critics and key influencers to resolve problems/dissatisfaction and correct factual inaccuracies.

B. Objectives

The objectives were created after establishing a baseline based on data from October and November 2009.

1. Gain 100% executive approval to move forward with using social media tools
2. Increase number of followers by 200 per cent from 162 to 486
3. Increase average number of web traffic referrals¹ per month from Twitter to our website content by 50 per cent from 25 to 38
4. Increase average number of @ replies of us² per month by 50 per cent from 8 to 12
5. Increase average number of @ replies by us³ per month by 50 per cent from 13 to 20
6. Increase average number of re-tweets of us⁴ per month by 50 per cent from 9 to 14
7. Increase the average number of click-throughs⁵ by 50 per cent from 224 to 336

4. SOLUTION OVERVIEW

A. Resources: The strategic planning, management and execution of this project was done solely by me. I created a Twitter Strategy (*see Appendix A*) and in it described how I would use the [@icbc](#) account in four ways: proactive tweets, solving customer issues, live tweeting and crisis communications.

B. Strategy: In order to provide the best possible outcomes, I adopted several Twitter best practices. I ensured that I responded to individuals as quickly as possible. I limited myself to 24 hours, but in reality, I strove to respond either immediately or within a few hours. I created proactive tweets that were relevant to ICBC's core business, but was also of interest to my audience. I automatically followed anyone who followed me back (which is in the spirit of Twitter), but limited the amount of users who I would follow first, so I wasn't seen as "big brother" (which was already the perspective of some of our customers). In order to bring a human face to the organization, I used a picture of myself as the Twitter avatar instead of our corporate logo. I was also clear in our Twitter account bio that I was the one behind the account, which added to the human element. I used casual and non-bureaucratic language in order to seem trustworthy and friendly. This language was also the style that was recently adopted by our brand two years ago. I was sympathetic, honest and transparent, which those on Twitter expect from companies, but our customers don't typically associate those qualities with ICBC.

¹ **Web Traffic Referrals** are the number of times people have landed on our corporate website via one of my tweets.

² **@Replies Of Us** are incidences where people send me a message (but it's not private). It's a good indication of how many people realize that ICBC is on Twitter – and expect to hear back from us.

³ **@Replies By Us** are incidences where I respond to someone who has tweeted something that I feel I can respond to. It's a good indication of how responsive we are to people who don't necessarily expect an answer from us.

⁴ **Re-tweets Of Us** are tweets I have sent out and others have re-tweeted. It's a great indication of the fact that people find value in what we have to say.

⁵ **Click-Throughs** are the number of times people clicked a link in one of my tweets. It's a good indication of whether people find the content interesting or of value.

I decided the best (and cheapest) option for monitoring and scheduling my tweets would be using [Hootsuite](#), a free online tool that allows people to schedule tweets ahead of time and monitor search terms. I started tweeting two “proactive” tweets a day: one at 10 a.m. and the other at 1:15 p.m. which were [shown](#) to be times that more people clicked on links (it’s also right around coffee break time and right after lunch for most people in B.C.).

C. Proactive Tweets: At first I tried to tweet fairly evenly about our different lines of business: driver licensing, claims, insurance and road safety. But after monitoring our click-throughs, I noticed that not too many people were interested in reading my tweets about driver licensing—mostly road safety. So after a few months, I changed the tweets to focus more on road safety and those related to driving. I started using content from other driving-related sites to find content that would be not only relevant to our customers, but could tie back to ICBC as well. I would also tweet any new information on our website, news releases or campaigns that we wanted to highlight. On Mondays, I would tweet information about any new job postings that we wanted to highlight as well. Fridays were my anti-drinking and driving days and would only tweet things that were related to promoting getting home safely after drinking. About halfway through the year, I decided to start sending out tweets at closing time of the bars on weekend nights in order to engage a younger audience (*see Appendix B for specific proactive tweets examples*).

D. Solving Customer Issues: I set up a search stream on Twitter for any tweets that contained “ICBC” in order to respond to people directly. This proved to be a huge filtering job, as there is a Chinese bank with the same initials. The first step in my response process was to point people to information that already exists on our website and include a link to the webpage. If the information isn’t on the website, I use the same key messages that have been approved for media relations, but just condense it and use casual language. If I can’t find the information on the website or key messages, I’ll call the supervisor of the ICBC customer call centre responsible for that area. If she can’t help me, I’ll go to the subject matter expert. As everything can’t be explained in 140 characters or less—especially complex and potentially sensitive subjects—I may also include a toll free number for people to follow up with a real person if they want more information.

It was when I replied to negative comments that I tended to get the best response. People were usually shocked that ICBC was using Twitter in the first place and thankful for providing them with information or help—even if it didn’t change their opinion or the outcome of their situation. I found that a lot of people who were complaining on Twitter were young and not the type of person who would complain in person to a manager, never mind write an e-mail or call in a complaint. These are the type of people who would leave a transaction with us confused and then end up angry with the decision. Often I ended up finding out who the real person was that they dealt with and had that person call the tweeter back to explain things in plain language (*See Appendix C for examples of solving customer issues*).

E. Live Tweeting: I would live tweet from all ICBC events. Live tweeting is where someone attends an event in person and tweets relevant content (quotes, observations, pictures). It is essentially a play-by-play of the event and a great way to engage an audience without needing to be there in person. Being able to live tweet from events was a good way to not only highlight the different aspects of work that we are doing, but also start a different thread of conversation (*see Appendix D for live tweeting examples*).

F. Crisis Communications: Thankfully, in the first year of using the @icbc account, we have not had a crisis at ICBC. However, there were a few power outages at our head office in the summer. I was able to use Twitter to send out tweets to our customers and media outlets letting them know about the outages and when we expected the power to be back on. I anticipate that our Twitter account would be one of the main ways to get information to our customers and the media in the event of a real crisis (*see Appendix E for crisis communications examples*).

G. Staff Compliments: An unexpected outcome was the compliments I received about our staff. After doing some research to find out who the ICBC staff member was, I used our internal recognition system to send the staff member and their manager an e-card. They were delighted to receive the compliments, as most of the call centre staff never know what kind of impact they have on the phone customers. This proved to be a huge morale boost to the employees and helped with our corporate objective of improving the employee experience (*see Appendix F for examples of staff compliments*).

5. IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES

A. Budget: We had no budget for this project. The idea was to try to do things as cheaply (ideally, free) as possible in order to build case for a social media budget. There wasn’t any need to spend any money, as Twitter is free. Any photos that I took and posted to Twitter were done on my Blackberry.

B. Time Frames: We set goals and objectives based on one year of tweeting from December 2009 to December 2010.

C. Challenges:

i. Approvals: The typical approval process for any type of communication at ICBC is long and involves many people. Many different levels of management usually need to see something before it goes out and each level is given a few days to review. With social media, I don't have time for days—things needed to be responded to within hours. Thankfully, most of the queries that came into the Twitter account were questions that have been asked before, so by using the response process I outlined above, I was able to answer the questions without creating any new messages and therefore fast-tracking the process. In the cases where something new came up, I would find the information and ensure that it didn't go through the regular approval process.

ii. Sole Responsibility: Another challenge was being a one-woman Twitter show. When I went on vacation, I needed to ensure that all the tweets were scheduled ahead of time, and my colleague in media relations had the necessary access to the account to monitor and respond. As this was also not my full-time job, I still needed to balance being responsive with my other projects and meetings.

iii. Privacy: Being a Crown corporation, we also need to be very aware of privacy laws and ensure we guarantee our customers' privacy. We added some copy to our website [Terms and Conditions](#) to include our stance on privacy on Twitter. If I needed to find out more information from a customer to assist them with their issue, I would get them to either send me a direct message through Twitter or to my regular e-mail address to ensure their personal information isn't shared on Twitter.

iv. Measurement: As we didn't have a budget for a paid measurement system, all my measurement was done by copying and pasting analytics from Hootsuite into an Excel file. Also, most social media tools don't count things like re-tweets or @replies, so this all needed to be done manually on a weekly basis by me.

6. MEASUREMENT/EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES

In the summer of 2010, our CEO asked my vice president (Communications) if I would present to the Executive Committee about how we use Twitter and how we see social media being used in the company going forward. Having solid numbers and examples behind how social media is able to change customer perception (our main corporate goal and objective) was a huge enabler to move us forward.

Objective	Result
1. Gain 100% executive approval to move forward with using social media tools	Achieved Presentation to executive resulted in a request to create a corporate social media strategy
2. Increase number of followers by 200 per cent from 162 to 486	Number of followers: 1,083 Increase from baseline: 569% Exceeded by 369%
3. Increase average number of @ replies of us per month by 50 per cent from 8 to 12	Average number of @ replies of us: 28 Increase from baseline: 175% Exceeded by 125%
4. Increase average number of @ replies by us per month by 50 per cent from 13 to 20	Average number of @ replies by us: 36 Increase or Decrease from baseline: 177% Exceeded by 127%
5. Increase average number of web traffic referrals per month from Twitter to our website content by 50 per cent from 25 to 38	Average number of web traffic referrals per month: 143 Increase from baseline: 472% Exceeded by 422%
6. Increase average number of re-tweets of us per month by 50 per cent from 9 to 14	Average number of re-tweets of us: 28 Increase from baseline: 211% Exceeded by 161%
7. Increase the average number of click-throughs by 50 per cent from 224 to 336	Average number of click-throughs: 364 Increase from baseline: 63% Exceeded by 13%