

An Introduction to Social Media for Small Business



Community
Futures 

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An Introduction to Social Media
for Small Business

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Introduction

Just a few years ago I was telling new entrepreneurs attending a small business course I was delivering, that it was vital to have a website. I remember saying that the general public was beginning to expect that a “proper” business should have an online presence; that a business wasn’t a “real” business if it didn’t have at least a basic website. Many shook their heads and said that they really didn’t need a website, that it was too expensive, and anyway their target audience wouldn’t search for them online.



Today, that same public is more knowledgeable than we could ever have dreamed back in those halcyon days; now not only are our customers aware of our competition, they can buy online without even leaving their homes. Local shopping means a UPS delivery guy at the door, delivering what we ordered just a few days ago online.

My students back then talked about word-of-mouth marketing. If they provided a good product or service at a fair price, and offered great customer service, then the hope was that people would recommend them to their neighbours across the street, or at church. If someone wasn’t happy then it was unfortunate, but at least it was contained to the local area, and hey people have short memories.

Fast-forward less than a decade and few businesses don’t have a website, and those same customers are now searching out reviews online for everything from restaurants, hotels, cars, televisions and 1,001 other items. They’re searching out what people have said about your company - but do you know what they’re saying? Today there is nowhere to hide. It doesn’t matter if you don’t have a website, people can still talk about you for good or for bad. The problem is that if you don’t have a web presence, you won’t know it and you can’t handle the fall out.

Just recently I was on a business trip; I stayed in a small town for a week and ate at restaurants, drank coffee, good and bad, at coffee shops, visited a few museums and stayed in a hotel. When I returned home, I went to my TripAdvisor account and wrote seven reviews. Some were good, some were average and a few were scathing. It doesn’t matter where your business is, and it doesn’t matter how big or small it is, your customers have the ability to talk about you behind your back.

The question is, do you want to hear what they are saying? Do you want to be able to defend yourself if they slag you publicly? Do you want to carry out some damage control, by offering to deal with their complaint? Do you want to build a positive online reputation BEFORE they start complaining so that their negativity is outweighed one-hundred to one by those with positive experiences? If the

answer is yes, and I truly hope for the sake of your business it is, then this book will provide you with a fascinating and comprehensive introduction to the world of Tweets, LinkedIn, Facebook and many other social media sites that will enable you to communicate directly with your customers, wherever they are in the world.

Social media is not just about dealing with what people say about you online though, it's about communicating with your customers and future customers, it's about building a community, being part of other communities; it's about educating people, listening to them, and letting them know all about you, your company, the people that work for you, your products, your services, your business philosophy, your integrity and your organizational culture.

There is a saying that it takes a village to raise a child - perhaps today it takes a social media community to grow a business.

In the pages that follow, you will learn: how to develop a social media strategy; how to become your own community manager; avoid the rookie mistakes people make when starting out in social media; understand how Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, Twitter and more can help grow your business; how to build your social media network; manage you reputation; save time through social media; and a little about the new kid on the block, location-based social media.

*I'd like to thank the several social media writers who have contributed material to this publication, and in particular social media guru, Chris Burdge of bWEST Interactive who wrote the chapters, *Developing Your Social Media Strategy* and *Grow Your Business With LinkedIn*. I'd also like to thank him for all the guidance he gave me in compiling, and editing, this small business guide to the world of social media.*

Mike Wicks

(Publisher: Blue Beetle Books Inc.)

Developing Your Social Media Strategy



This opening chapter was written by Chris Burdge, a social media guru who runs bWEST Interactive. bWEST is a marketing services firm that helps companies create genuine and lasting relationships with their target audience and customers using Social Media, Email and emerging online media.

Chris first got involved with online marketing in 1993, just prior to the launch of Netscape the world’s first web browser. Since that time Chris has been leveraging Internet based communications to build brands and move products for Fortune 1,000 companies such as BMW Japan, HP, Kia and

Nestlé Purina. Chris also wrote chapter three: Grow Your Business with LinkedIn.

Developing Your Social Media Strategy

The surest way to fail at social media marketing is to rush into it without a plan or strategy. Unfortunately we see it happen all too often. Maybe you’ve done it yourself; set up a Twitter account or Facebook page without really knowing why, what you’re going to do with it or how to measure whether it’s successful or not.

The best place to start is to understand what social media is, and what it isn’t. Social media is not like traditional marketing or advertising. Social media is the integration of technology, with social interaction and the sharing of words, images, video and audio. In a word it’s “conversations” made richer and more convenient.



Conversations

Social media conversations are consumer-driven, transparent, inclusive and often very engaging and sincere. They are not controlled, exclusive, formal or one-sided. The same can't be said about traditional advertising.

The challenge, and a key reason for having a strategy, is that there are so many conversations, so many channels to have them on, and not enough time to effectively participate in all of them.

Developing a strategy will enable you to think through questions like:

- Why are we doing this?
- What do we want to achieve?
- Who are we talking to?
- What are the best channels to use?
- Which conversations should we join, or start ourselves?

Listening

Like all conversations the key to social media is listening. Start by listening to yourself. What have you been saying to customers and prospects in your current marketing channels?

- Who are you talking to?
- What channels are you using (website, email, newsletters, phone)?
- What is the tone of the message?
- Do those channels reflect your company's mission?
- What does your messaging say about your brand?

Then listen to your customers, prospects, competitors and others in your category. What are they talking about and with whom? There are a number of tools available to automate the process of gathering and analyzing conversations, from the high-end and very expensive; Radian6 and Lithium to the basic and free; SocialMention and GoogleAlerts.

Because social media is about conversations, you can look at messaging on a much deeper level. What attitudes define your company and brand? What social networks are the most activity related to your business? What kinds of people do most of the posting? What other organizations are these people connected to?

The answers to these questions will help you determine which networks to focus your energy on, who you should engage, which values you should promote and attitudes you should change.

Define Your Audience

A great way to ensure you hit your target, and focus communications on the right people is to create personas. These are short descriptions of fictional individuals that represent your target. They're not real people, but rather they are archetypes that represent real people. They will help you identify the potential character traits, personalities, habits and attitudes of your customers

Create rich personas that are representative of your audience by listening both online (as discussed above) and offline by conducting one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders and finding out:

- Which networks they use and how much time they spend there
- If they initiate conversations, or comment on them
- If they would be comfortable engaging with your company online

Map Your Assets

A common myth about social media is that it's free, or at least very cheap. While it may be free to

set-up a Twitter or Facebook account, it requires time, and usually lots of it, to effectively manage how those accounts are used. How many people, and how much time, are you able to devote to your social media plan? What technical experience do they need? What tools do they need? What content do you already have or create on a regular basis that can be used? For example you may produce a monthly newsletter in print form that could be used to create four or five blog posts.



Define Your Goals

At this point you're ready to set your goals. The best goals are quantifiable, so everyone is clear on what you want your social media plan to achieve. It is also important to identify what metrics you are going to track, and how you're going to measure them. Potential goals include:

1. **Sales:** using social media to create first-time customers, or introduce them to the brand.
2. **Leads:** incoming calls, contact from submission forms, email subscribers.
3. **Marketing:** You may simply want to improve

your relationship with existing customers and prospects.

4. **Loyalty/Brand Enthusiasm:** increase retention and/or improve customer service.
5. **HR:** attract and retain quality employees. Define Your Message

How do you define your company in a single, simple phrase. Starbucks' mission is "to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighbourhood at a time."

What's your message? Ensure your social media team is intimately familiar with that message and have all of your social media content reflect it. Doing so will help you and your staff stay focussed with a cohesive unifying theme.

Sales Cycle

Segments of your customers and prospects have different relationships with the brand. Some have never heard of you. Others are raving fans. Which are you trying to reach with social media? What your target audience already knows about you, will dictate what you can credibly have a conversation about in social media.

1. **Awareness.** They may have heard of you, vaguely.
2. **Interest.** They've heard of you and may have visited the website, but are not customers.
3. **Action.** They've made a single purchase.
4. **Advocacy.** They are fans of the brand. Frequent purchasers, they tell their friends.

Choose Your Channels

There are thousands of channels to choose from. Which ones are the best fit with your brand, customers, resources, and goals? Do you need to create regular blog posts to demonstrate your expertise? Perhaps your target audience is women who might be found on Pinterest, which is a pinboard-styled social photo sharing website allowing users to create and manage theme-based image collections (see www.pinterest.com). Maybe you're a professional with lots of contacts on

LinkedIn. Do you have the resources to monitor and update more than one platform?

Prioritize your channels, start slow, and get comfortable even if it means starting with just one platform. Spend time getting accustomed to posting content, answering questions and comments, and the overall level of engagement required. Once you're comfortable, add another platform and slowly build your network.


Join the Conversation

Start tweeting, pinning, posting and liking. There are no hard and fast rules, but there are some best practices you should follow:

- **Mind your etiquette.** Each of the various social networks has its own unique nuances. For example #hashtags are popular on Twitter and can be used on Google+, but mean nothing to Facebook or LinkedIn users.
- **Be transparent.** Let people know who they are talking to. Use a name and where appropriate a picture. People like to talk to people, not brands, icons or logos.
- **Keep it conversational.** Lose the corporate speak. Write like you're talking to a friend or a customer in the store. Ask questions and look for feedback.
- **Stick to your knitting.** Talk about what you know and what's relevant to your brand and company. Don't get pulled into conversations about politics, religion or other potentially controversial issues.
- **Admit mistakes – they happen.** Be the first to admit when you make a mistake and do your best to make it right. It's better than being called out on Twitter and having thousands of people retweet something before you see it and 'react'.

Test, Track and Tweak

Once you're up and running for a while you'll start to gain an understanding of what works, what resonates with customers, how and when they prefer to engage. It's a process. One of the advantages of digital media is your ability to track and measure results in near real-time. This enables you to test various tactics, offers, headlines, calls-to-action or messages, and tweak them based on fairly immediate results.

With a solid, well thought out strategy in place, you're on the right track to successfully leveraging social media to grow your business. 

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10 Common Mistakes Businesses Make When Starting Out

Incorporating social media into your business operation is important, so that your business is not left out in the cold while everyone else is tweeting away, updating their Facebook pages and having a grand time. If you don't have a presence in that world, get one. Sure, today's customers can find your website and might email or call, but many regard Facebook as a part of their everyday life. However, as you take the plunge, beware of pitfalls along the way. Here are 10 common mistakes to avoid.

1. Not planning. Don't just rush in make some noise and assume it will all be good. You need to have a specific social media plan and incorporate it into your larger business strategies. Dust off your business plan and figure out how social media can fit into your overall goals, tasks and benchmarks. Then study how social media works, how it can help businesses, which media are available, and which are most popular with your particular clientele. Consider surveying your customers to see how many use which outlets. Write down which media you will use, who will be in charge

of your social media campaign, how often you will interact with customers this way, and how you will measure the success of your campaign.

- 2. Going overboard.** Once you start learning about all the options, you may want to grab them all and go, but slow down. Just like other facets of business, it's better to do one or two things well, rather a whole bunch of things poorly. If your customers are heavily into Facebook, start there. If you offer job-related services, such as career placement or resume building, consider starting with LinkedIn. If you can spin off some educational material related to your business, such as how-to videos on whatever it is you sell, look into YouTube. Pick one or two outlets and develop your use of them as professionally as you would develop any other part of your business. After you have a successful campaign, consider gradually adding other outlets.
- 3. Not keeping it up.** Using social media can be fun, but it's also work. One of the biggest changes social media has brought is the immediacy of interaction. It's a far cry from




sending out a monthly printed newsletter. Your customers will expect regular updates on your Facebook page. They will expect a same-day response, perhaps even same-hour response, to a message they send you. Too many businesses create a Facebook page, create a flurry of excited activity in the first month, have fewer postings the second, only a handful the third, and then try to find someone else in the office to deal with it the fourth. If you are going to use social media, commit to it being a part of your daily routine, just like answering the phone.

4. **Assuming it's all about the sale.** People don't want to be hit over the head with sales pitches when they see your postings or Tweets. Think of them like a customer in a brick-and-mortar store who likes a pleasant greeting at the door, but doesn't want to be followed around the store by your salesman encouraging them to buy something.
5. **Not mingling with the neighbors.** There's a reason the first word in social media is "social." It's all about community building. So join the discussion, keep up to date with what your contacts are talking about and make your business an in-touch and caring member of the community.
6. **Missing the value of content.** Customers are more likely to stay in touch with you if you offer them something of value. Generate a blog filled with advice related to your business. Do you sell fishing gear? Blog about techniques, fishing holes and tournaments. Do you offer website design services? Blog about how to take payments over the Internet, how to write an e-newsletter, or how to pick a font for your home page. One of the most popular social media vehicles today is the video. Shoot short videos of yourself giving quick tips on something related to your business. Post the videos on your website, or on YouTube.
7. **Expecting immediate payback.** Building a network of customers with social media, like building any relationship, takes time. The more time someone follows you, the stronger the bond and the more likely that person will introduce you to others. The results will be slow

and gradual, but can pay off in a big way a few years, or months down the road.

8. **Getting defensive.** One of the biggest challenges with social media is the fact that when a customer complains about something online, any of your other customers might hear about it too. More importantly, your customers can witness how you respond. So take a breath, remember the mantra that "the customer is always right" and respond quickly, carefully and tactfully. Even if you feel the complaint is unfounded, offer a replacement, free service or some other way to make amends and move on. Think of it as an opportunity to show your company is a good member of the community, one on whom others can count to make things right.
9. **Being too casual.** Find the fine line between neighbourliness and professionalism. Spelling, grammar and facts should be impeccable. Develop an online personality that's friendly, but not too personal. And remember that when you post or Tweet, or shoot a video, it can be copied and forwarded to many, many other people before you have a chance to fix it.
10. **Not measuring results.** When you use traditional media, you can measure how effective an advertising campaign is with techniques such as having customers present a coupon coded to a particular advertising order. If the weekly newspaper coupon brings in 100 people a week and the daily brings in 40, you know which one to continue. It's important to do the same assessment with social media. Take the time to track your number of Facebook friends, Twitter followers, blog subscribers and website commenters. There are several tools available on the Internet to help, such as TweetStats, Google Analytics, Twitalyzer and more.

A little reading, a little visiting other company's social media activities and perhaps attending a social media camp (these are cropping up in most towns and cities) or local seminar, will go a long way to taking some of the mystery out of this new marketing genre. It might also remove the trepidation you may feel about taking the plunge and putting your company out there for all to see and talk about. 

Grow Your Business With LinkedIn

Professionals and small businesses ignore the power of social networking at their peril. Sites like LinkedIn have become critical in building a network and connecting with customers, generating leads and screening new employees.

As social networks go, LinkedIn which launched in May 2003, is the social media site of choice for professionals and is the world's largest professional network with over 120 million registered members. Of the big three social networks; LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter – LinkedIn is the oldest and the only business-oriented social network.

LinkedIn gives you the tools to control your professional identity online. Have you Googled your business lately? If you have a completed LinkedIn profile, chances are it will appear in the top 10 search results. This allows you to control the first impression people get when searching for you online, an important aspect of the sales process.

LinkedIn helps professionals connect with customers, partners and business prospects, and is the one social network you can continually use to enhance profile and generate leads. The best way to do that is to make sure you are using the full power of LinkedIn to maximize your marketing potential.

Here are ten ways to grow your network, build your brand and find new prospects on LinkedIn:

1. Complete your profile. Your profile is how you get found on LinkedIn and the first thing prospective customers, or clients, may read

about you. The more detailed and up-to-date your profile is, the better the chance you will be found and contacted.



Complete your profile as carefully as you can and provide detailed information on your skills, experience and any awards you may have received. Be sure to add a photo (a head shot is best) to your profile. Make sure your photo is professional in nature and representative of your industry. Remember this could be the first impression you make on a prospective customer.

Tip: Users with complete and up-to-date profiles are 40 times more likely to generate leads through LinkedIn.

- 2. Basic Information and Summary.** Don't forget the headline appears at the top of the page when someone views your profile and shows up in Google searches – it's your first chance to make a good impression. The "Summary" section of your profile is where you can highlight your skills, services and accomplishments. Grab the reader's attention and get them thinking by letting your creativity and passion come through.
- 3. Contact Settings.** Your contact settings let your connections (customers and prospects) know what types of opportunities you are open to. Options include: consulting offers, new ventures, business deals, expertise requests and reference requests.
- 4. Website and Twitter Links.** The "Links" section of your profile is a good way to provide even more information to potential customers

and your contacts. If you have a blog, Twitter account, or a website, include those links in the Links section of your profile. Be sure to name the websites accordingly (e.g. “Company Name” Blog) rather than using the default “company website.” This small detail will help you stand out from the majority of LinkedIn users.

- 5. LinkedIn Applications.** LinkedIn Applications are an excellent way to stand out from the crowd and share even more information in your profile. The blog application enables you to feed your blog directly to your profile, so other LinkedIn users can see the most recent posts.

Other useful applications include embedding your Slideshare presentations and Twitter feed. There are a variety of applications to choose from, so think carefully about which apps make the most sense for you and don't overdo it.

- 6. Your Public Profile and URL.** Don't forget to make your profile public – that's how the world can find it. You can customize which portions of your profile are displayed to the public. You can also customize your URL to give you a link that's easy to share and shows up well in searches.
- 7. Grow Your Network.** The more connections you have, the more opportunities you open yourself up to, be careful not to connect with people you don't know. Connect with colleagues from current and previous employers, clients and people you've done business with, people you went to school with, or have had some sort of business or academic affiliation.

Tip: Use the email contacts importer tool to import your address book directly from web-based email clients such as Yahoo!, or Gmail, or use the desktop email tool to import contacts from email applications such as Outlook and Apple Mail.

- 8. Give and Get Recommendations.** Prospective clients and customers view LinkedIn recommendations as references or testimonials. Having strong recommendations can be a big advantage if you are shortlisted for a project, or contacted by a prospect. One of the best


ways to get recommendations is to give them. Take the time to write recommendations for select clients and they will often reciprocate. Be careful not to give and receive too many recommendations at the same time.

- 9. LinkedIn Groups.** LinkedIn groups can be especially beneficial if you are a professional (lawyer, engineer, realtor, architect, etc). They allow you to:
 - Discover the most popular discussions in your professional groups.
 - Play an active part in the top discussions and demonstrate your expertise by strategically liking and commenting.
 - Follow the most influential people in your groups by checking the Top Influencers board or clicking their profile image to see all their group activity.
 - Quickly browse previews of the comments in a discussion to scan for opportunities to engage with prospects in your category.

Tip: Hosting a LinkedIn Group is a great way to build a community, connect with potential new clients and drive traffic to your website or blog. LinkedIn Groups can also be a great source of new subscribers for your email list.

- 10. Answers.** LinkedIn Answers is one of the best places on the Internet to get answers to business questions and share knowledge. You can ask and answer questions on specific subject matter or scan existing questions for answers to everything from “where do you go to find the best [structural engineer]” to “what is the best time of year to sell my home.”

Tip: By answering questions and demonstrating your expertise on LinkedIn, you earn recognition that helps you build your company brand and credibility. The more points of expertise you gain, the higher you appear on the lists of experts.

Remember, LinkedIn is a tool. Your investment in understanding how to best use it will determine the value you get out of it. 

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The top half of the page features a dark blue background with a network of white icons. The icons include profile pictures, thumbs-up (likes), and speech bubbles, all interconnected by a web of white lines, some solid and some dashed, representing social connections.

Facebook Marketing

By now everyone has heard of Facebook. The social media platform that initially started as networking between college students (and in fact required a college domain email to register) has spread to all corners of the globe. With one single platform reaching millions upon millions of people, it's no surprise that it's become an excellent platform for business marketing as well.

What is Facebook Marketing?

Facebook marketing is simple in concept, but quite difficult in execution. The idea is to use the social connections presented to you by the platform to reach out to customers and promote your company. That's harder than it sounds. While at one time it might have been easy to purchase ads on the sidebar and let it do its thing, the atmosphere has changed. Nowadays, Facebook marketing means creating a business page, keeping in touch with your current customers and clients, connecting with other related businesses and opening up to new customers. All of this while navigating the social minefield that is unbridled social access.

Facebook is an excellent tool for marketing because of how direct the connection between business and customer is. However, therein lies

the risk. One wrong move, one offensive post or misstep can cost your business its reputation and consumer base. There are rules that should be followed. A business page on Facebook shouldn't be treated like a personal page, but it still needs to have a personal connection. After all, if people didn't care about the personal, social touch a Facebook page offers, they'd bookmark your company site or blog and read that instead.

Why use Facebook for Marketing?

Facebook marketing opens up broad new avenues for your business, no matter what it is. Whether you're selling a product or service, your potential customers are almost guaranteed to be on Facebook. Through the power of social networking you can encourage your customers to recommend you to their friends, and help broaden your network and influence. Done right, a Facebook page for your business can drastically increase revenues, productivity and success.

Of course, all this means navigating the sometimes turbulent waters of social trends, avoiding faux pas posts, and generally using the tool properly. It's a lot to take in, when one mistake can have long-lasting consequences. Thankfully, Facebook

marketing responds to many of the same tactics used in other forms of marketing.

Tips for Facebook Marketing

Expand your network. You can create a Facebook page and let it sit, but that won't do you much good. It's better to reach out to people and network with them. Actively seek out new potential customers and clients. Ask for likes and support. Your fans are your lifeline, so always seek out ways to entice more of them to become Facebook friends.

Don't forget about media. Your wall is an excellent place to post short bits of text and links, but it's better to use Facebook's own system for pictures and video rather than posting them on your own wall. Don't forget to fill out all the extra info tabs either! Your profile needs to be fleshed out with keyword-rich but non-spammy information, both for search indexing and for an atmosphere of effort and competence.

Reward your fans. Whether it's as simple as a special landing page, or as valuable as prize offerings, giving your customers a reason to 'like' your page and support your site is invaluable. Many people will do nothing without incentive, so give them that incentive.

Encourage community interaction. Ask questions, and invite your customers to share their answers. Give prizes or don't, the important part is that you're asking. Just don't stray too far. Keep your posts at least somewhat related to your brand, product or service.

Celebrate when you reach certain milestones. Again, you can offer rewards if they help, but at least acknowledge your fans when you reach a thousand, or ten thousand of them. Make them feel appreciated and they will in turn appreciate you. Even if it's just a message thanking them for their support, it's better than nothing.



Don't just rack up your fans, put them to use. Once you have your audience you need to do something with them. Encourage them to purchase products or services. Invite them to events you host. The applications are endless, once you have your fans gathered together.

Common Mistakes in Facebook Marketing

The first major mistake you need to avoid is what professionals call 'broadcasting.' Broadcasting is when your posts tend to be more advertisement than social connection. The benefit of Facebook is the direct connection to your customers. It's an opportunity to interact with them. If all you ever do is post impersonal advertisements and links to your products/blog/site/whatever, you're wasting the benefit of the platform.

Secondly, you need to take your time. As with any project, effective use of time can make or break your success. Facebook is not a platform where you can throw up a short post once a week and forget about it. Again, it's all about the social interaction. If you don't spend the time interacting with your customers, you'll find your page losing support. No one likes to feel ignored.

Violating Facebook's terms of service is also a quick way to get your page shut down, and your customer base ruined.

Facebook has rules about tagging people, running contests, and even the type of page you use to network. Make sure you use a business page rather

than a personal page, don't tag people without their permission, and keep an eye on the terms of service.

Put Facebook to Work for You

With all of that in mind, it's much easier to use Facebook to bolster your success. Facebook

marketing is a powerful tool when used correctly. As long as you avoid the common pitfalls, it can be an amazing asset. Just put the time into it and reap the rewards.

What's New in Facebook?

In March 2012, Facebook overhauled its pages, these are the pages that feature information about your company, or organization. The new look allows you to add a unique cover photograph to brand your page. This is, in effect, a banner image that lies behind your profile photograph. Although it cannot be used as an advertisement, it can be used to give a look and feel to your page that plays to your branding.

The new look follows a timeline, which runs from top to bottom of your page. This works especially well on the Ford car page as you can click on 1908 and be taken directly to photographs of the first Model T Ford (www.facebook.com/ford).

When there is a post you want to highlight, for instance when someone is saying something wonderful about your company, you can now star it, making it expand across the page. This will draw attention to it.

You can also "pin" new posts to the top of your page each week. This will allow you to highlight

important things you want your "friends" to take note of.

Milestones allow you to point people to major events in the history of your company and

highlight them in a similar way to starring them.

The new Facebook pages offer a great way to connect with your customers, and potential customers, check them out at

www.facebook.com/about/pages. SBS



Twitter for Business

Are you looking for ways to expand your business reach? Have you heard of the social network Twitter, but you're a little intimidated by all of the hype surrounding it? If so, you're definitely not alone. Twitter has taken on a life of its own in recent years and spawned the everyday use of terms such as "Tweet" in normal conversation. While it might seem like a challenge to get started using Twitter for your business, in reality it's pretty user-friendly and easy to learn. If you'd like to find a way to communicate with your customers, build relationships and grow brand awareness, Twitter is well worth considering.

What is Twitter and How Does it Work?

Twitter is a social network similar to Facebook and Google+. While Twitter shares some common features with other social networking sites, it is unlike the other networks in many ways. Twitter users can post short statements with a maximum of 140 characters. This makes it a form of micro-blogging that allows users to focus

only on the most important points when disseminating information.

Twitter users have the option to "follow" other users on Twitter. When you follow someone, you can read all of that user's messages, or Tweets, that they publicly share. Following someone does not give you the ability to send direct messages to that person, however. Users must follow you in order to receive direct messages. These are messages which are out of view of the public.

Twitter allows anyone to share their thoughts with many other people, at any given time. You can also read the messages that other users have posted. Some people never post any "Tweets" and instead prefer to just read the messages of the accounts that they follow.

Terms

If you plan on using Twitter for your business, you may run across terms that you don't understand.



For example, you know that a “Tweet” is a message that is sent out publicly by a Twitter account, but what about a “Retweet”? This is when a user copies a Tweet from another user and then sends it out to all of their followers. Messages can sometimes spread rapidly throughout the network by multiple users retweeting them.

The “timeline” is the list of Tweets that have been generated by the people you follow. When you log in to your Twitter account, you will see the timeline complete with messages from all of the people that you follow.

Developing Relationships

When it comes to using Twitter for business purposes, one of the best things that it can do is help you develop relationships with your customers. Once you set up an official Twitter account for your business, your customers will hopefully start following it. When they do, those customers will be able to read the tweets that you post. This gives you the chance to communicate with your customers and start developing relationships with them. If you post tweets that have valuable, or interesting, information your followers will start to value your tweets. They can also ask you questions publicly, or make comments about your products and services. This gives you a chance to answer common questions from your customers, and develop some goodwill.

Promotion

When using Twitter for business purposes, you can also use it to promote your products and services. There are many different ways you can do this: for example, you could Tweet information about a sale, or a coupon code to encourage your customers to make a direct purchase from your website.

Some businesses use Twitter to give customers a sneak peek at new products. For example, you could send out advance images of a new product (for your followers only) - sneak peeks like this can generate an online buzz.



Twitter also makes it possible to issue sponsored Tweets. With this approach, you pay a certain amount of money to have your Tweet featured on Twitter. This makes your Tweet appear at the top of timelines for searches that are related to your subject. This has the potential to get your message out to a large number of customers at once.


On Twitter, you may also notice that it shows you which topics are trending on the network. When a topic is trending, it means that large numbers of people are talking about it on Twitter. If you can get a lot of people talking about your new product or service, it could eventually turn into a trend. This can then lead to many users Tweeting and re-tweeting information about your company - when this happens the numbers can get extremely high.

Getting Started

If you’ve decided that you want to give Twitter a try for your business, getting started is easy. Go to Twitter.com and then click on the sign-up form on the main page. You’ll have to fill in your name, your email address and a password and then click “Sign up for Twitter.”

At that point, you’ll be prompted to choose some people to follow. This helps you get started in the network and gives you an idea of how the system works. After choosing a few people to follow, you will also be asked some basic information for your profile. In this part of the process, you can include information about the name of your business, your location and your business website. On your profile, you can also include a picture so that your followers will be able to see who they’re dealing with. Some users also choose a background image for their profile as well.

Using the Service

Once you’re signed up, you are ready to start using Twitter to build your business. Make it a priority to respond to as many customers as possible and answer their questions in a timely manner. Do your best to contribute to the community with quality information, and do not simply send out spam to promote your sales or offers. If you are willing to do your part, Twitter can be a powerful tool in promoting your business and building your brand image. 

How to Use Google+ for Business



It's no secret that establishing an online presence can help a business attract customers, generate sales, and achieve profitability. Consumers increasingly look to online resources to develop opinions about businesses and make purchasing decisions.

Simply launching a company website is no longer enough to build an online presence though. The level of competition in almost every niche can make reaching your potential customers difficult. For this reason, many businesses have begun using social media tools, including Google+, to find and engage targeted buyers.

Google+ is a social media site that offers individuals and business owners the opportunity to engage with others in a variety of ways. As with other social media sites, such as Facebook, users can post status updates that subscribers, and friends of subscribers, can immediately read. However, there are many more tools on Google+ that you can take advantage of.

In 2011, Google expanded the Google+ platform to include dedicated pages for businesses. This expansion gave business owners greater flexibility

to create pages that accurately reflected their branding and marketing messages. Business owners can customize their pages to draw in, and keep, visitors and to lead them to websites, blogs, and other resources to learn more about their company's products.

Several simple strategies can help you get the most out of Google+ for your business. Using this social media website correctly can give you an edge over your competition, and help propel your business to success.

Post Interesting Information About Your Business or Industry

One effective way to engage Google+ visitors is to post interesting information that provides value for your visitors. Some online marketers make the mistake of only posting promotional content designed solely to sell products. Although an occasional promotional post is fine, readers will quickly lose interest if you use Google+ solely as an advertising medium.

Provide visitors with background information about your company, and don't be afraid to highlight key employees to add a personal touch to your Google+ page. You can also post industry information, including links to resources that will be of interest to your readers.

Provide Readers with News Stories

Offering news to your Google+ readers can be an effective way to retain their attention and keep your company in front of targeted prospects. Scour online and offline resources to find breaking news that is relevant to your audience. If you are among the first to post news stories, you can position yourself as an authority in your industry. This makes visitors more likely to trust you and want to buy from you.

Engage Visitors with Polls and Surveys

Your Google+ page should not be all about your business. Posting polls and surveys on your page will encourage visitors to actively participate in discussions. This helps your visitors feel that you care about them as individuals, rather than simply as prospects.

Posting polls and surveys also gives you another advantage over your competition. It gives you the opportunity to learn more about what your visitors need and want. This allows you to tailor your products, services, and marketing messages to your potential customers' needs and desires. It also allows you to find out about problems your visitors experience, so you can develop innovative solutions to solve their problems.

Engage Visitors with Live Video Chat

One feature that sets Google+ apart from other social media websites is live video chat. With this feature, you can chat in real time with up to 10 visitors at once. This helps increase the personal aspect of your business, because visitors can put a face to your company, instead of seeing your business as just another faceless entity.

The spontaneous nature of Google+ live video chat encourages visitors to discuss how they feel about your products and services. It also allows them to discuss what they would like to see from you in the future, and make suggestions about how you can improve your offerings. You can use this information to adjust aspects of your business to make it even more valuable to existing and potential clients.

You can also use live video chat to offer exclusive deals. For example, during a chat, you can tell other participants about a special promotional code they can use to save money when ordering a product online. You can also use promotional codes to offer bonus products for participants who order your products or services within a certain timeframe.

Segment Your Visitors into Circles

Another unique feature of Google+ is the ability to segment visitors into circles. You can create

custom circles for different types of visitors to customize your interactions with them. For example, you can put people who have expressed interest in a particular service or product into a custom circle. If you want to post promotional content that would be of interest to those visitors, but might not interest another segment of your subscriber base, you can make your post available only to members of that circle.


Promote Content on Other Sites

Although Google+ can be a powerful tool for business owners, it is not a standalone promotional vehicle. You can use Google+ along with your company website, blog, and other sites to build visibility for your business. Integrate the +1 button into content on these sites, so that visitors can share links to your content on their Google+ pages.

Social Analytics: The Future of Google+ for Business

Google+ is planning to launch a social analytics tool to help online business owners measure the impact of their social media efforts. This tool will allow you to see how "+1's" and "shares" affect user participation on your Google+ page, as well as on your other blogs and websites.

Through the social analytics tool, you will also have access to anonymous demographic information about people who have shared or +1'ed your content. This can help you determine which posts have the greatest impact on certain demographic segments. It can also help you understand the buying habits of people of particular education levels, ages, and socio-economic groups.

Building a business online requires a multifaceted strategy. Traditional methods, such as search engine optimization and banner advertising, can still be powerful in the online business world. When you add Google+ to your strategies, however, you have the opportunity to build your business more quickly and efficiently than if you were using traditional online strategies by themselves. 

Community Management



Social media continues to consume larger chunks of small business marketing dollars as companies realize its growing potential. Managing communities on social media is vital in maintaining a healthy promotional campaign and in achieving high return on investment (ROI).

In order to achieve success in the social networking world, you must do more than simply set up profile pages on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and YouTube. An effective marketing campaign involves continual interaction with your online “communities” and in larger companies this is the responsibility of a community manager. In smaller companies, a member of the marketing team might take this responsibility, or even the owner themselves may decide that this role is important enough for them to handle it. This chapter will take a look at the responsibilities of a community manager, whomever that might be in your company.

Community management involves maintaining the networks, or communities, on all your social media accounts. The manager has the main responsibility

of ensuring that these accounts are still “live” and actively engaging with other community members. Inactive profile pages are of little or no advantage to small businesses, so you must keep providing content to keep people interested.

Tasks of a community manager

The daily routine of a community manager will involve checking all the company’s social networking pages and blogs. Many managers compile all comments from their various accounts using email notifications, which filter into special folders. In this way, they can easily scan all community interaction in one place.

While it may not always be possible to respond to all comments and postings by community members, a good community manager will interact regularly if not daily by providing at least some select responses. Your friends, fans and other community members will appreciate a responsive account much more than an impersonal page that simply posts articles and other content.

Common daily tasks of the community manager include:

- Searching for interesting and relevant content to post on the company's social networking pages. They may have news feeds or email news alerts focused on keywords that pertain to their business. Posting fresh content keeps other community members coming back to the profile for useful and engaging information. Once you develop a reputation for posting quality content on a regular basis, people will come to depend on you as a news source.
- Sharing content – Another way to update your profile pages is to share other community members' content. This is also a way of interacting and building relationships with those in your network. On Twitter, for example, you can retweet the updates of other followers. On Facebook, you can like, or directly share, your friends' or fans' postings.
- Check and update blogs – Maintaining a blog is a good way of keeping your clients informed of news about your company, or industry. An interactive blog will allow users to comment, and it is a good idea to reply to these comments frequently. You must also continuously update the blog with new postings to keep the attention of your audience.
- Customer service on social media – Many small businesses use social platforms like Twitter as customer support sites. They allow community members to ask questions related to their products and services. Businesses can save significant money with this approach, but they must check their account frequently for this setup to work effectively. Depending on the amount of traffic, you may have to check the social media platform multiple times each day to keep customers satisfied.
- Using social media as a monitoring tool – One great aspect of social media is that it allows small businesses to ascertain what the public thinks about them and their products and services. A community manager can use various tools that scour the social web looking for

particular mentions of their company or product names, or the sharing of specific content. Another way to gauge opinion is to conduct a survey on your social media accounts. Facebook, for example, provides an application for surveys that allows you to conduct free polling of your online community.

- Check email and personal messages – Social media sites also allow other community members to contact you privately through email or personal messaging. A good community manager will try to respond to all these messages in a timely fashion.



Tools for community management

A great variety of tools, many of them offered free of charge, are available to help social community managers do their job. These software applications may work over the web, or they may require installation on your computer or mobile device.

Some tools allow you to monitor for example, all your social media accounts from a single mobile application. In this way, you can check your sites easily even when traveling away from your desktop.

There are also applications that allow you to post content, or to update your blog from mobile devices. Some of these apps come from the social media platform itself, while others are from third party software developers.

A good place to search for such software is at comparison websites like CNET (www.cnet.com). However, on Facebook you can easily find apps right on the site itself. For mobile devices, you can search the App Store for iOS devices and at the Android Market for devices using the Android operating system.


Analytics

Another community manager job is to check tracking statistics that measure the effectiveness of the company's social campaign, and the areas that might need further work.

Websites like Klout (www.klout.com) allow managers to measure the company's influence on specific social networking sites. If you have a fan page on Facebook, you can use the Facebook analytics app to check traffic and other useful page stats.

Analyzing performance will provide community managers with the information they need to make adjustments in their social media campaigns. For example, what types of content are community members viewing and sharing?

Such knowledge allows you to post the articles, and other content that will keep people coming back for more. As you build relationships with your community members, you engender trust in your company, and you will have opportunities to provide links to your website and to post information about your products and services.

The community manager, though, never tries to sell directly over social media. Instead they use the platforms as a tool to foster relationships. 



9 Ways to Build Your Social Media Network



In this world of Like and Share, social media networking is more important than ever for small business owners. Consumers these days respond less to traditional marketing, such as television or print ads, and more on the opinions and recommendations of those on media-sharing and social-networking sites like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. As a small business owner, you must now evolve with social media trends to remain competitive in the marketplace. Here are nine strategies you can employ to build and widen a social network to promote your business.

Blog and Micro-blog

Widen your network through creating a blog, and micro-blogging, on Twitter. Both of these strategies can promote web visibility with real-time updates about you and your business to followers. Blogger.com provides free web-hosting with user-friendly page design and application interfaces. Creating a blog page can be accomplished quickly, with little to no html-code knowledge required, and can serve as the hub of your social network in a way that a business or eCommerce sites cannot.

Find Friends

Community and social-networking sites, including Facebook and LinkedIn, build communities of friends, business contacts and like-minded individuals. Apart from your personal account - as the use of a personal page for business purposes is not allowed by Facebook policy - create a business page. There are also several applications and resources within Facebook, such as Branch Out, that you can utilize to promote your brand and make contacts. Also, look for and join communities specific to your industry, both online and in your local area.

Link Together and Link Out

Once you have created a blog and added accounts on social-networking sites, it's time to make those outlets work for you by linking together all the accounts in your network and creating external links to other blogs, online directories and communities. Links are crucial to network building because they not only ease navigation through various parts of your network, but also help crawler, or spider-driven, search engines find and index

your site. Share your blog posts, YouTube videos and pictures on your Facebook wall, while posting updated announcements, such as upcoming promotional events, on Twitter. You can then post and archive YouTube videos on your blog and add links to a business or eCommerce site.

Be Social

Remember that one of the words in 'social networking' is social; and no one will shake your hand if you never extend it. Create a link list on your blog of other sites or blogs that you like to read, making sure to click the Like and Share buttons on their sites to recommend their content to others in your network. Not only does this foster fellowship among your peers, but also creates links back to your network. Your blog will then be visible to every site or blog on your link list, giving them the opportunity to read your blog and hopefully recommend your content to others in their network in return.

Keyword Usage

When building and expanding your network, it is important that the written content on your blog and business site makes use of keyword phrasing. Spiders and web crawlers scan text on your site, determine what it's about and rank its relevance in comparison to commonly searched keyword phrases. Using keywords within your text boosts the ranking and pushes your site closer to the top of search engine results. That being said, avoid cramming or forcing keywords into text just to gain a higher ranking. Your text is a conversation between you and your customers and keyword-stuffing can read like ad copy and turn off readers.

Quality Content

No amount of linking or keyword phrasing will boost poor content. Misspelled and grammatically incorrect text will miss the mark with readers and halt your progress up the search engine ladder. Not to mention the fact that spelling and grammar errors are very easy to avoid with spell checking, and posting these errors will look like laziness. Provide readers with well-written text that is informative and friendly, breaking up blocks of text into short, easy-to-read paragraphs.

Customer Service


Whether face-to-face, over the phone, or on the internet, quality customer service helps promote your brand and build a positive reputation. Enable comment boxes on your blog, allowing your followers to ask questions or make suggestions. Unless it's vulgar, or uses bad language, don't delete or ignore comments and try to answer questions as soon as possible. Even negative comments, if addressed promptly and in a consolatory manner, can improve your reputation. Dissatisfied customers do not click Like and Share, making them dead ends on your network.

Visual Content

Whether you are a retailer, craftsman, or own a pest control business posting visual content, such as pictures, videos and slideshows on YouTube, your blog and other social-networking sites can showcase the products and services you provide, while proving to your customers that you can fulfill their needs. If you are a craft, or tradesman such as a painter or landscaper, you can use videos or slideshows to show the progression of a job from start to finish, rather than simple before and after photos. If you are a retailer, these tools are great for introducing new merchandise or new features to your store.

Keep Content and Links Current

It is crucial when building your network that you keep it running smoothly with up-to-date content. Web viewers and consumers have low-attention spans and short memories, and maintaining a flow of new information will keep them interested. Also, it is just as important to maintain links, even to old content. Sending consumers to dead links, such as sites that have been shut down, or moved to another location, is frustrating to readers and can turn them away from your site. Take a few minutes once or twice a month to test your own links.

By consistently employing these strategies, you can attract new customers to your small business, build your brand and keep your company on the cutting-edge of today's social-driven marketplace. 

Reputation Management and Social Media

As you incorporate social media into your business operations, tread carefully. It is true that you need to have a presence in the social media world, and launching a social media campaign will open doors to further growth. However, there are also risks involved, and they are much different from the risks you face with traditional media. For one thing, the viral nature of social media can take a small incident and quickly blow it out of proportion with countless other users. For another, the democratic nature of social media means anybody with an Internet hookup, or a smartphone, or other Web-enabled mobile device, can publish whatever he wants whenever he wants. And what you and your employees post should be closely monitored too, since it could be grabbed and sent around the Worldwide Web in the blink of an eye, or more importantly, before you've had a chance to fix it or delete it. Therefore, it's important to educate yourself about the impact social media could have on your businesses reputation, and plan how to keep that impact positive and follow it. Here are seven tips to get you started.

1. Develop a social media reputation plan.

Traditionally, anyone starting a business is advised to spend plenty of time and resources on an overall business plan to cover things such as finances, human resources, legal issues, traditional marketing/advertising strategies and the like. Now, that traditional business plan should include both a social media plan (how the company will use social media) and a social media reputation plan. The latter should cover who is in charge of managing the company's reputation on social media, who will represent the company by posting and engaging with the community, how the company will promote a good reputation, how it will monitor its reputation and what it will do to respond to crises that could threaten its reputation.

2. Designate a social media manager (or community manager).

Whoever is chosen needs training and a policy manual for this specialized form of media. See the earlier chapter on Community Management for more




information. Alternatively, consider contracting with an outside firm to handle your social media needs. There are many small companies that solely offer social media management and reputation protection services, making their expertise valuable. With time, an outside firm could train your staff to take over this responsibility.

- 3. Designate a crisis team.** Just like any public relations gone bad, if your company's name is suddenly sullied in the social media world you need to respond quickly and thoughtfully. You can only do that if you have a plan for how to respond, and you designate trained people, who can drop what they are doing, to handle the crisis. These team members will need training on how social media works, what the company's plans and policies are, what specific steps should be followed in a crisis, and how to turn the crisis around. Because social media operates in real time, it's crucial that this team responds immediately, within the hour, to prevent a small problem from becoming a huge one tweeted to thousands of people.
- 4. Constantly monitor your company's reputation.** This is one of the most important jobs of your social media manager and it can seem an unwieldy one. Not only should he be monitoring comments posted on your company's website, Facebook and other pages, but he needs to be alerted when your company's reputation is in the crosshairs anywhere. Fortunately, there are tools to help. For example, Google Alerts can let you know when your company's name or brand is mentioned by bloggers or traditional media websites. Set up an alert by entering keywords (such as your business name) and have an email sent to you whenever Google finds those words. MonitorThis lets you know when keywords show up on any of 22 search engines. Hootsuite does the same for content on Twitter, Facebook and elsewhere. There are many other tools available on the Internet.
- 5. Build the positive.** Think of an individual who's well-liked in his local community. He's an upstanding citizen, pays his taxes, volunteers

and follows the rules. If a rumor is started about him, people may, at least at first, give him the benefit of the doubt. This also holds true with businesses. Build your company's positive brand in social media outlets and this will help in a crisis. A positive image is built over time by delivering consistently responsible customer service. It is built by apologizing and making things right when necessary. Then, if your brand is ever under attack in the social media, customers who've had a positive experience with you might give you the benefit of the doubt and even say so publicly. If you have an overall positive image, you also have a little more leeway when dealing with a crisis.

- 6. Respond immediately.** Communication is lighting fast with social media. If a customer posts a complaint on your Facebook page, or your social media manager lets you know a complaint is making the rounds of blogs, or other channels, respond immediately through these various media outlets. If the complaint balloons into a crisis, activate your crisis management team. Post a response on your company website. Consider making a video explaining the situation, apologizing if necessary and describing how you've taken care of it. Admitting you've made a mistake goes a long way; fighting back or hiding a mistake does the opposite. Transparency is crucial because it doesn't take much for someone to dig out the facts and blast them all over the Internet.
- 7. Take legal action if needed.** In extreme cases, such as someone maliciously continuing to badmouth or lie about your company, it's important to seek the advice of a lawyer. Sometimes a simple legal letter telling the offending party to cease and desist will be enough. But, be prepared to take further action if necessary.

Follow these steps and you'll create a positive reputation for your business on social media outlets. You will also empower your company to swiftly turn around any potential crisis, so it continues its good standing in the social media community. 

Location Based Strategies

Location based marketing strategies are a relatively new concept in the mobile marketing arena. Applications such as Foursquare and Facebook Places lend themselves to promoting brick and mortar businesses and supporting location-based mobile marketing campaigns. Getting started with location-based strategies is not complicated. Simply become familiar with the location-based tool, set up an account and create a campaign.

What is Foursquare?

Foursquare is a social networking platform for mobile devices. Users check in at certain venues or businesses. When a user checks in at a local business or network, their location is published to let their friends know where they are and what they are doing. By checking in at local businesses and venues, users earn points and prize badges. With enough visits to a local venue or business, users may earn coupons to use for specials, and

money saving offers at the businesses and venues they frequently visit. The most frequent visitor to a locale, with regards to number of days (with only one check-in allowed per day in a 60 day period) is named the “mayor” of that business or venue.

Users may check in via text message, or an application downloaded to their smartphone. The smartphone application utilizes GPS technology to pinpoint the user’s location. In June, 2011, Foursquare boasted approximately 10 million users.

Foursquare check-ins may be integrated with the user’s Facebook or Twitter account, and the social networking site is updated whenever they check in using their Foursquare account.

How Businesses Market with Foursquare

Foursquare is built upon the concept of geo-location. Businesses may utilize Foursquare as a



location-based marketing strategy to capitalize on this geo-location technique. The use of Foursquare by businesses is very straightforward. First, the business “finds” their location on the Foursquare map. Next, the business “claims” the location. After claiming the location, the business may post specials and incentives for users and their friends to physically “check in” at the business. When users and their friends check in, they receive points on the Foursquare application, as well as any special prize that is advertised by the company.

Businesses may offer users specials upon their first, or “nth” check-in. For example, some businesses offer a tee shirt or other incentive when users check in for the first time at their location. Other businesses offer specials for a user’s 10th or 20th check-in. Many businesses offer specials to the mayor of the location. For example, one Whole Foods market offers free coffee anytime to the mayor of their location. Other business offer the mayor of their locations gift cards, freebies and coupons.

Foursquare Analytic Tools

One of the best features of Foursquare for businesses is the ability to track users via the Foursquare analytical tools. Businesses may track the most frequent visitors, as well as the most recent visitors. Business may also track the time of day that the most visitors check in and the total number of visitors.

Foursquare is a unique and useful tool for businesses to use a location-based strategy to drive customers to their locations. Configuring Foursquare for your business, as well as downloading the application, is free. Check and see how other businesses are using Foursquare to promote their products and services, and then try Foursquare as a location-based marketing strategy for your brick and mortar business.

Facebook Places


Facebook Places operates in much the same way as Foursquare. Users’ locations are displayed to their friends in a Facebook feed, as well as their Facebook Places page. Users also check in at brick and mortar locations to earn points and specials.

A web-enabled smartphone with access to Facebook Mobile is required to use Facebook Places. Not all platforms support Facebook Mobile. For example, Blackberries and Android-based phones are currently working to develop Facebook Mobile apps.

PlacePunch

PlacePunch is a newer version of a geo-location social network, hoping to soon become the main competitor for Foursquare and to siphon off some of the accolades that the Foursquare application has received. In addition, the developers of PlacePunch hope users will switch from the Foursquare application to PlacePunch because PlacePunch supports Foursquare accounts and Facebook Places accounts, and integrates with other social networks, such as Twitter. PlacePunch expands the idea of specials and badges, popularized by Foursquare, with more elaborate features to create and offer such specials and reward visitor loyalty to businesses. PlacePunch also supports easy configuration of user contests, a feature that is not included in Foursquare. One of the unique features of PlacePunch is the ability to run scavenger hunts for users.

PlacePunch also intends to market this service to businesses by making use of their product easier for businesses. PlacePunch states on their site that, because of the integrated nature of this platform, business may launch their location-based strategies in minutes instead of days.

Geo-location marketing strategies are relatively easy to create once you understand how these new social networking applications work and how to use them to market your product or business. Even though online businesses may not benefit from the geo-location features of such social networks, these companies may still utilize the networking features of such applications. Because users often integrate their Foursquare accounts with Facebook and Twitter, online businesses may still offer specials, using the social network, that may be shared with friends and followers by users of geo-location applications. 

Time Management: Social Media Management Tools

You have become an entrepreneur, and you have decided to utilize the multitude of social media resources on the Internet. There is the excitement of being your own boss, the passion for promoting the product you believe in and having your dreams of success at your fingertips. One of the keys for an entrepreneur's success is time management. Mastering this skill by developing a communication strategy is important when utilizing social media to promote your business. You should have established your business plan by now, which includes a vision and mission statement as well as your marketing and financial plans. The steps, discussed below, will assist you with managing your greatest commodity - your time.

When partnering with social media, you are building a community. Your first step in time management is to identify what type of social media will increase your business success.

All businesses can grow when actively networking. So, by building a community, you attract an audience that becomes a link to your market. Popular community networking sites include Twitter, Facebook, and

LinkedIn. If your business revolves around research, utilize news sites, blogs, and podcasts. If your business focuses on sales and marketing, it is all about getting your product and brand to your customer base. This can be accomplished through blogging, videos, and social networking

Simplify, Automate, Consolidate (SAC)

SAC, are the three social media management tool traits required for success when using social media as a time management tool.

Your social media partnership will require you to simplify your business practices through organization. This in turn, offers more time. Incorporating user-friendly systems into your business will allow your business to run smoother. Using automation technology will streamline your business and increase your avenues of communication with your customers as well as your team members. Once you start partnering with several social media networks, it will be time to consolidate. When you use social media management tools for time management you are using communication to your advantage.



Strategy to Simplify

Establishing an organizational strategy that relates to your social media environment will assist you in staying on track for completing your daily goals. Working in an environment that is cluttered with personal emails, videos, and blogging causes our mind to become distracted with interruptions. Remember to live in the moment, with your view on the big picture. This state of staying in the moment will help to reduce your stress level, stay organized, and complete tasks in a quality manner.

Start by designating certain time periods for business related communications. This business scheduling system will increase your productivity and clear the unnecessary. Use after business hours for non-business related activities on social networking sites, tweeting, and creating videos or blogging.

Prioritize your communication with social media tools like HootSuite and TweetDeck as well as Radian6 and mobile device apps such as UberSocial. These will enhance your scheduling system, and allow you to determine not only who receives your communications, but also the dates and times you want your communications to be delivered. Initiate email filters to receive communications from key contacts, as well as alerts regarding pertinent content.

Maintenance of Automation

As a business owner, you should have already solidified your commitment to your plan by putting both your short and long-term goals in writing. The division of these goals into short and long-term categories will allow prioritizing of your social media activities. With focused priorities you can maximize your productivity by considering a company like Spredfast as an organizing tool, which can be used for identifying tasks as well as assigning tasks to your team members.

Automation technology will offer you mass resource opportunities, and managing all of these resources will consume yours and your team's valuable time. However, managing your social media networks can be as easy as selecting one social media manager, such as HootSuite. This will assist you with establishing a central message board, known

as a dashboard that helps to coordinate all your social media accounts. Having a central location for your social media networks will ensure that you do not miss that pertinent message, customer request, or business opportunity. Since part of your time management is coordination of communication, having a social media manager will allow you to post product updates and customer reviews.


Consistency by Consolidating

Once you have developed multiple social media accounts, consistency in coordinating tasks with those accounts, in a timesaving fashion, can become a full time job. However, by consolidating your communications, the outcome is a higher quality product. Utilizing social media management tools like TweetDeck, HootSuite, FriendFeed, Ping.fm, RSS, or TubeMogul will allow you to multi-task by coordinating the social media interface with the management of multiple accounts. This will ensure consistency by updating several social media sites all at once.

Finish by Analyzing and Tracking

Now that you have identified your community, established your communication board, and partnered with a social media manager, your social media activities can remain at a high professional standard when you utilize analyzing and tracking tools. Consider BufferApp, Raven Tools, WhenToTweet, and Tweriod to help you track when your communities are actively online. Also comparisons in your industry are a key analytical tool. The management site, Wilfire, will help gauge your success within your industry's community. And HowSociable will offer you a way to track the visibility of your brand.

And finally, do not be afraid to accept that something may not be working. Analyzing your business progress is a vital part of maintaining your success. Customer, community, and networking feedback is an important identifying tool that is also offered through social media sites like Seismic, Lithium, and Google.

Identifying and implementing change will help you to achieve the three traits: Simplify, Automate, Consolidate - (SAC), which will ensure the success of your social media business partnership. 

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