



Social Media Basics

**5 simple ways to start using social media
to grow your business**

INTRODUCTION

Step 1: Understand social media and how it can benefit business

The American Marketing Association defines marketing as follows, “Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.”

In the business to business world this process is carried out in a face-to-face manner in which one or more members (sometimes the sales or marketing team) from a business set up a meeting with one or more members of another business. This process can be quite lengthy and typically involves several meetings, price quotes, and several people making decisions. In today’s global marketplace, this type of industrial marketing has become quite antiquated. It is not possible to compete at the highest, most efficient level without utilizing some form of social media.

In the business to consumer world this process is carried out in bricks and mortar or online retail stores, offices, and within homes. Business to consumer based marketing is largely driven by advertising and, depending on the complexity of the offering, normally has a short buying cycle.

You may be familiar with social media as a form of communication between friends and family members. You may even know that much of the media uses this platform to quickly spread information and reach contacts. However, social media is becoming an increasingly important tool for businesses. Having a basic online presence, such as a general website, is no longer sufficient. Marketing professionals now need to be able to connect directly with prospective clients, gather data, and provide information in short order.

What exactly is social media?

Social media is an online platform, media outlet, or application that allows users to interact directly with each other, often in real time. This form of networking has been around for quite some time, and originally began with simple message boards and chat rooms, but has rapidly progressed into a much more complex form of interaction. Websites such as Twitter and LinkedIn have put a whole new spin on social media. These sites allow users of all degrees of technical expertise to easily communicate and conduct business with people and organizations all over the globe with very little effort.

How can social media benefit a company?

Social media is continuing to grow by leaps and bounds. This means that social media is an extremely valuable marketing tool that no business should be without. When customers are able to access information, and communicate directly with a company instantaneously, they are able to make much faster decisions. This can really boost sales and increase a business’s reach. Since the recent boom in popularity, there have been several professional studies focused around the issue of businesses using social media. One such study found that nearly fifty-five percent of buyers felt better served and more at ease about making a purchase when they were able to interact with a company through a social media outlet. This study also found that nearly ninety percent of buyers feel all companies should use some form of social media to compete in today’s market.

In addition to using social media to interact with potential buyers, this outlet also promotes your products and services on a much higher level, as well as enhances your overall business reputation. This allows marketing professionals to promote and build brand awareness more rapidly, and develops relationships with the target market, even potential investors. Most importantly your company will get feedback directly from customers. You can quickly learn of the positives and negatives, requests for improvement, and general opinions. This gives valuable information to other advertising executives as well as research and development. Marketing programs that use and act upon this information can perfect their offerings and get modified products or services on the market before the competition.

Step 2: Learn how Twitter can improve marketing

As an executive or business owner, you have probably found yourself at many industry functions where you network with other professionals. Whether you know the others at these functions or you do not, you inevitably find yourself striking up conversations on a wide variety of topics, and ultimately how your company can benefit that person or their company. You do this in an attempt to learn about other companies, as well as to educate yourself on market trends, and product requirements. You also do this so that others may learn about you and your company.

Twitter is, in effect, a large online (or virtual) networking event that people can take part in anywhere in the world. This outlet allows you to share your information, products, services, and expertise with millions of people, possibly markets you could have never reached before.

Twitter is a fantastic resource that can greatly benefit any marketing campaign. Twitter is exploding in popularity mainly due to the fact that users can access it any time, anywhere, from personal computers, mobile phones and devices, and even through other websites. Twitter has become a hotbed for marketing, as it currently has over 200,000 active weekly users, and over two hundred million (and growing) total members. Twitter recently reported its users “tweet” over one hundred and ten million (and growing) messages each day. These “tweets” can be no longer than 140 characters (letters, not words), and are often thought of as the best, fastest way to make a sales pitch.

While Twitter is a great marketing tool, you must remember that it should be treated much the same way a face-to-face interaction would be handled. Just as you would never walk into a crowded room and start yelling your pitch to a group of people, you should never bombard online contacts. Try to ease into conversations, and allow people to check out what you are saying about your company on their own. Do not forget your professional manners just because you are online.

Twitter is even more attractive to companies working to improve marketing efforts since it is absolutely free to join. All you need to do is log on to the website, set up a profile, and in a few short minutes, you are online and ready to go. After you have registered and set up your profile, you can search the site to find out what topics are being discussed (or tweeted about), and narrow down the topics that relate to your business, and your marketing purposes. When you have located these people, or other businesses, you can access their profiles and begin following their posts. If you find one conversation to be especially interesting, or if you feel you have something to offer or contribute, you can simply reply and send along your comment. Make sure you go about this in a professional manner that encourages them to check out your

company profile, and encourage them to follow your posts. Just as in the “real world”, your goal for this type of networking is to get as many potential leads to follow you. The more you are able to attract followers, the more you will be able to showcase your company’s value, promote your services, and steer these new leads back to your company website.

Step 3: Learn how LinkedIn can improve marketing

LinkedIn is another social media outlet that is gaining popularity in the business world. This site is often referred to as “prime real estate in the social networking marketplace. LinkedIn can really do wonders for a marketing campaign due to the fact that it is home to a large number of wealthy decision makers looking for deals and solutions for their business (and other) needs. This makes the outlet an excellent resource for companies that want to get the most out of using social media for marketing purposes.

In addition to the above-mentioned benefit, LinkedIn can improve marketing in the following ways:

Manages Contacts: LinkedIn takes a basic marketing theory (establish contacts) and uses it to build a database that can be used for a strong marketing strategy. LinkedIn allows members to import any digital address book and match it with members already using the social media site. This works to get your campaign up and running almost immediately. You can then use the features of LinkedIn to track your progress, manage your contacts, communicate with buyers, and locate future sales opportunities.

Research: LinkedIn is a wonderful way to research sales opportunities. You can use the network to search and categorize members, industries, companies, and niche markets that will give your company the best chance at reaching its marketing goals.

Social Networking: You cannot properly utilize the leads you will generate with this site if you do not partake in social networking. LinkedIn allows your company to communicate with new contacts, and encourages more in-depth communication with existing contacts. The network keeps you up to date with changes in the status of your contacts, and notifies you when new members wish to be added to your contact list or link to your profile. All of these unique features allow you to stay right on track with your target markets and expand your business presence.

Social Marketing: In addition to social networking, LinkedIn allows you to build your brand image. Other members in the LinkedIn community can follow your activities, and your posts. This helps to attract attention for your business, and allows you to publicly address specific questions, request a meeting, make a referral, and even leave behind information for targeted profiles on the site.

Lead Management: Since not every contact or connection you make will be ready to take action immediately, LinkedIn allows you to keep buyer information, and track their activity. This allows you to find out what will motivate the buyer to make a deal, or what your product, service, or company may be lacking. The service propels your marketing strategy to the next level because it allows to you monitor contacts to determine the best time to swoop in, contact them, make them an offer, and close the deal.

LinkedIn keeps all of your data private and does not overwhelm your contacts with hundreds of offers or incentives as is common with other forms of Internet marketing. This network lets you keep all of your information sorted, current, and slowly builds your social marketing presence so that you can get the most out of your efforts.

Step 4: Set up a social media marketing presence

Just as you need to take time and plan a traditional marketing campaign, you need to do the same when establishing your social media presence. It is not uncommon for businesses to jump into social media marketing too quickly, which leads to poor outcome. You have the best chance at having a successful outcome by following a few simple guidelines to set up your social media presence.

Link Back To Your Company Website: Believe it or not, many people forget the number one social media rule: link back to your own website. You need to post your company's site everywhere! You also need to ensure your company's website is chockfull of useful information that will provide many great benefits for visitors. Your site should have some or all of the following: resource pages where buyers can easily access information they need immediately, free downloads that provide useful tools, videos buyers can watch to learn more about your business, blog posts to read through, a calendar of upcoming events, and plenty of contact methods. Keeping this content updated and fresh will also help with SEO, which will further drive potential sales traffic your way. Your marketing goal for social media methods is the same as in person; get their attention, get them to seek more information, and keep them coming back for more.

Do Not Use Hard Sell Tactics: It is always best to "entice" potential buyers into a transaction, rather than pressuring them with a hard sell. You would not badger a customer in a face-to-face deal, so your online marketing strategy should be no different. Take the same amount of time with these leads; educate them on your company, your products, and your services. Work to make a connection that puts your company in the best possible light for being a credible source with a good deal of knowledge and information. Provide plenty of supporting evidence, return all questions or requests for information promptly, and get these potential clients to view you as the foremost expert in your field. This extra effort will put the buyer at ease and will make them feel more comfortable with you and your company, thus encouraging them to complete the deal.

Keep In Touch: Nothing makes a buyer more comfortable than receiving status reports, company updates, and information regarding new product developments. This extra communication increases your company reputation, and keeps people interested. Do not get too carried away with these updates, as you do not want to bombard contacts with too much information that they may not really need; this will essentially ruin your marketing efforts.

Self-Promote: One of the most important components to any successful marketing campaign is self-promotion, and social media marketing is no exception. Keep this promotion under control, and make sure to incorporate it into the above-mentioned guidelines. It is perfectly acceptable to advertise your company, your practices, your accomplishments, your products and your services, however no one wants to hear a pushy salesman talking about "me, me, me". Promote in a constructive way that educates and motivates potential buyers.

Step 5: Avoid common social media mistakes

With the growing popularity of social media outlets, and the increasing number of companies using these sites for marketing purposes, it is inevitable that some problems have started to develop. These forums have gone from a place where people can go to interact, to being a place that is being overrun with bad marketing practices. Unfortunately, this issue makes it even more difficult for reputable businesses to establish a presence.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to compete in today's global marketplace without being visible on social media sites. You run the risk of losing branding, becoming less visible in your field, and drastically reducing customer service potential. However, making some common social media marketing mistakes can completely destroy your reputation and label you as a spammer. Not all is lost, however. There are plenty of ways to introduce your company to the online world, and not make matters worse in the process. One of the best ways to do this is to become aware of the most common errors, and avoid them at all costs. Below are the three most common mistakes companies make in regard to social marketing.

1. Old Fashioned Sales Pitches: You are seeking to expand your marketing campaign by moving your company to the Web. This means that you cannot use old-fashioned sales pitches to attract customers. Consumers no longer fall for, or care to hear antiquated tactics. E-commerce has never been larger, which means people have endless purchase options. No one wants to hear the same old song and dance with so many available choices. Instead, people now enjoy the thrill of finding things for themselves, rather than being told what they need. Many newcomers to social media, such as Twitter and LinkedIn, get caught up in old sales methods that might have worked in a more traditional marketplace, where the customer had no other option but to learn from the salesperson. This is most definitely not true today. Marketing strategies need to be adjusted to be friendlier, and more like a relationship. Focus attention on wanting to meet the exact needs of the customer, and view them as a person and not a potential sale.

2. Aggressive Tweeting: While you want to post enough, and post things that will get "re-tweeted", you should not do so to the point of being obnoxious. This will trash your company's reputation and make you appear desperate. Not only will you lose credibility, you may also lose a good number of your followers, and keep others from signing on through to your profile.

3. Out Of Control Following: Refrain from following large lists of people. The people being followed can easily tell that they were selected just because they were on a large list. Instead of randomly selecting lists of people, and trying to get them to follow you in return, perform targeted searches. Make use of many of the specific search features that social media sites offer to find people who are interested in your types of services, products, or those that are experiencing a particular type of problem your company can remedy. For example, if you manufacture bicycle parts, look for members that have tweeted "bike parts", or "bicycle repair parts". This will give you the best chance at reaching serious potential buyers.

Remember that Twitter, LinkedIn and other forms of social media are communities where people go to interact and learn, not a commercial marketplace. You can use these outlets to effectively direct people to your company, however, you must first gain their trust and interest.

Best social media marketing practices means understanding *and* building the value in relationships.

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1-800-353-4447 or I can be reached at:

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Thanks,

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