

SOCIAL MEDIA

FOR SMALL BUSINESS

*Creating strategies for
successful business marketing*



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A close-up, over-the-shoulder view of a person with a beard and glasses using a tablet computer. The person's hands are visible, with one hand holding the tablet and the other pointing at the screen. The screen displays a website with various elements like a video player, text, and images. The background is a blurred desk with a pen and a coffee cup.

INTRODUCTION

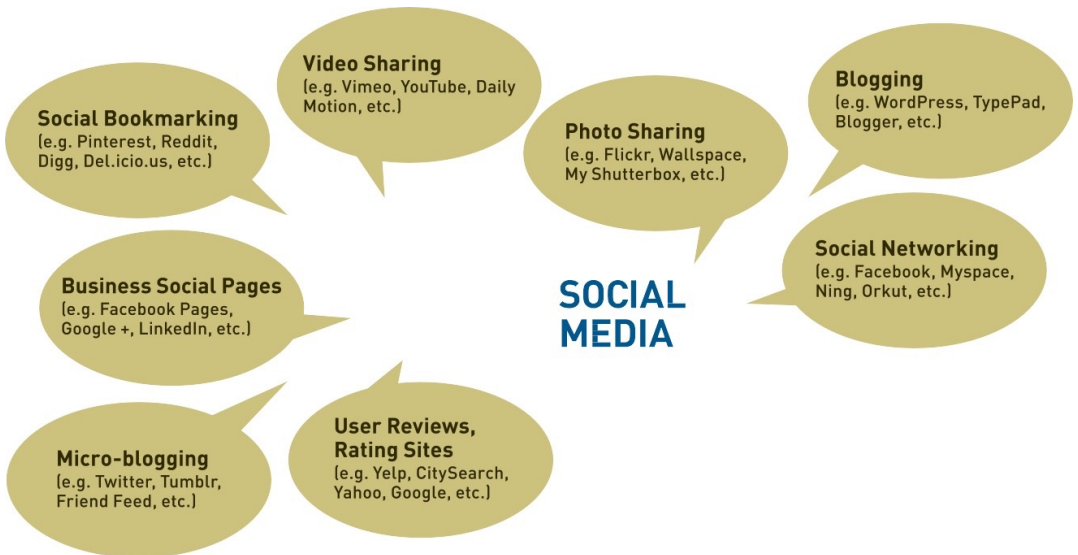
The rapid adoption of social media is becoming more apparent by the day and is changing the way we do business. It is no longer a matter of asking “should” you use social media to market your business, but “how” you should. This booklet will help you craft a social media strategy as part of your overall marketing mix.

Key Concepts

Social media is a broad term used to describe all the different online technology tools that enable people to communicate easily via the Internet through sharing information and resources. Methods used include posts on blogs or forums, sharing of photos, audio clips, videos and links, creating profiles on social networking sites, and posting status updates—usually with a feedback mechanism. Although social media started out as a medium for friends and family to share information, smart marketers quickly caught on to how they could leverage it.

Key Social Media Platforms and Tools

There are many different types of social media. The following graphic highlights these various types and some corresponding examples that are popular now. However, this is a rapidly changing landscape and new social media sites are popping up all the time. Be on the lookout for new and emerging resources.



Depending on the industry you are in, certain types of social media may be more relevant than others. For example, those in the travel industry will find a site like Trip Advisor a useful social media tool. In addition, the use of social media may be more prevalent in some industries than others and will work differently for businesses in different fields. It is important to do your research to find out if and how your customers and prospects are engaging with social media.

Benefits of Social Media

From a marketing perspective, social media tactics can help you:

- Extend your marketing reach affordably.
- Increase brand awareness.
- Drive traffic to your website.
- Personalize customer service.
- Create excitement for events.
- Promote product/service launches.
- Build a community of customers who, by virtue of membership, endorse your products/services.
- Test market ideas.
- Open up new markets.
- Complement other marketing efforts such as paid marketing campaigns.
- Integrate a social element in your business by personalizing your company.





Getting Started

PLANNING

If, like many small business owners, you find social media overwhelming, don't try to do it all at once. Take small steps when you are starting out and bear in mind that it will take time, because it's all about relationship building. Before using or expanding your use of social media, answer these questions:

Are You Ready for Social Media Marketing?

- Does your target audience use social media and, if so, do you know where your prospects congregate online?
- Do you know what goals you are trying to achieve by engaging in social media?
- Can you allocate time and budget?
- Is there someone well suited to be your voice in social media?
- Do your employees require training?
- Do you need to hire or outsource a social media manager?
- Do you have clear key messages and branding to disseminate in the social media realm?
- Can these various online tools integrate with your offline marketing methods?
- Do you have a plan in place to guide your use of social media marketing?

Steps for Creating a Social Media Strategy

Having a solid social media strategy can really make a difference to the success of your marketing campaigns. Note that your plan will likely evolve and change accordingly as you learn what works for your business and what doesn't.



1. Conduct your research. Listen to the conversations and identify the industry thought leaders you want to follow so you will learn how to participate.



2. Define your goals and metrics. What is it you want to achieve and how will you measure its effectiveness? For example, are you trying to drive real targeted traffic to your site? For your Facebook metrics, the number of "Likes" to your Facebook page and the amount of shared posts or status updates will tell you if you are successful. Or perhaps you are trying to build a community of followers who will promote your products or services. If so, good measures of success will be the number of your followers within the social platforms.



3. Develop a strategic message and method. For each objective, you may need different methods and messaging to reach the target audience. For example, driving traffic to your site will require a campaign such as a contest or submitting a request form for a free white paper download. Or, if you're trying to build a community, you'll need to first build trust and credibility by being authentic in your dialogue and sharing valuable content.



4. When evaluating the success of your efforts, first review the goals you established in Step 2. Do the metrics show success? You might need to adjust some elements of your online activities to stay on course. Be sure to keep track of metric trends over time and don't be afraid to experiment.

Resources Needed to Implement

Contrary to popular belief, social media marketing is not free. The platforms may be free or inexpensive, but the following resources are needed to do social media marketing well:



1. Budget. Getting started with social media marketing is a very simple and inexpensive process, requiring only an email address. Most, if not all, of the applications are free to use but there are hidden costs such as your time or hiring someone to run your social media strategy. Some additional costs may include professional versions of plugins (small applications) that expand the functionality of the core application. For example, these plugins could include the ability to sell online or control spam.



2. Proper training and polices. Getting familiar with the workings of social media tools tends to be time consuming for most business owners and their employees. Proper training and social media policies should be put in place and key players assigned to manage your social activities. Even if you only select a few voices to represent the company, it is important that everyone from the top down is familiar with the policies, brand message and vision for the company.



3. Self-editing website. Having a self-editing website or blog is paramount in order to frequently change the content you share on social media sites. Facebook and Twitter offer posts and micro-blogging tweets that can support your in-depth articles. These can be teasers that lead traffic back to your site to not only to read the full article or participate in viewing a video, for example, but to showcase the full offerings on the site.

Other hidden costs include the time to monitor your reputation online, to track results and to expand customer service.

Do-It-Yourself Option

Getting involved in social media is easy. The do-it-yourself (DIY) option is viable because social media tools are the most affordable and easy-to-implement technical offerings available online, and can be totally controlled by you. (See details in Nuts and Bolts Section below).

Tips for Maximizing Success When You Start on Your Own



- Attend DIY workshops on online resources to find out how social media tools work and how they can be applied to your business.
- Consider your time involvement and whether you will incorporate a “social” business where everyone participates and has a role (for lead generation, customer service, peer-to-peer networking, etc.) or whether you will assign one person or a few select people to represent your company. The trend now is towards socializing the whole team.
- Offer social media training to your staff, and put a social media policy and schedule in place.
- Integrate ways to bring social media into all areas of your business—including customer service, sales, marketing and public relations.
- Ensure there is buy-in throughout your company.

Choosing a Specialist to Work With

Typically, small businesses do not hire a specialist initially, but eventually you may decide you need extra help if you lack the expertise and time in-house. Whether you are hiring a social media manager or outsourcing this work you will need to look for certain skills in order to represent your brand online powerfully.

What to Look for in a Specialist:

- Experience with these tools as a user.
- Strategic mindset and marketing smarts, with an understanding of how to effectively utilize the tools within the bigger marketing picture.
- Good leadership skills, with the ability to work with people in your company.
- Strong communication skills to create effective posts, tweets, interactive videos and campaigns to meet your objectives.
- Project management skills to integrate the various tools both online and offline.



Understanding Best Practices and Pitfalls

Do's

Listen to the conversations related to your type of business and industry on social media sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook. For example, if you have graphic design offerings, you should follow other graphic artists or marketing companies to see how they are conversing with their audience.

Whether you receive positive or negative comments, always respond in a professional manner and learn from the writer's input or comments.

- Participate—be authentic, transparent and consistent in all your communications.
- Have a content posting schedule in place.
- Create high quality content to share.
- Be consistent with your branding and messages on all social media platforms.
- Create comprehensive, keyword-rich profiles to share on social networking sites.
- Place calls to action within your posts—that is, include links back to your website so visitors can read something valuable like a good article.

Don'ts

- Refrain from blatant promotion and selling.
- Do not spam.
- Avoid being too personal or social rather than business-oriented.
- Don't react emotionally online to negative comments about your brand or product or service.



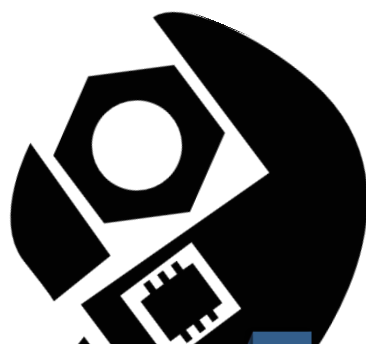
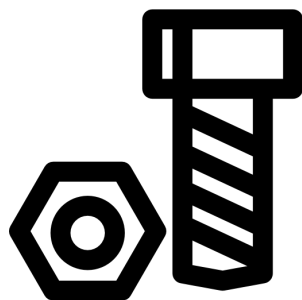
Nuts & Bolts

Becoming Social Online

There are many players and platforms to choose from in the rapidly evolving social media landscape. Each is unique and presents a different opportunity to engage with your target audience. Keep in mind though that company comes and go as they jostle for position and what is popular today may fall by the wayside tomorrow. You need to track emerging trends and be ready to adapt quickly.

Currently popular social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube and LinkedIn all contribute to helping businesses with their branding, positioning, networking and collaboration efforts. Check them out to see what they offer and if your customers and prospects are there. Each has its particular use and effectiveness based on the type of audience and how that audience engages with them. For example, Twitter is a one-to-one customer and prospect engagement tool, excellent for real-time customer service, Facebook is a powerful community manager and LinkedIn is good for creating professional alliances and for recruiting employees.

So where do you start? The process itself is quite straightforward. To start along the path, all you need is an Internet connection. Start by setting up a profile on any of the various platforms. Your success will depend on your ability to develop new relationships by following and engaging with those you make connections with. Always try to share quality information, and be transparent, honest and authentic. Here are some tips to get you going.





- Sign up to the various social media platforms such as LinkedIn www.linkedin.com, Twitter www.twitter.com, Facebook www.facebook.com,



- Google Plus, <https://plus.google.com>. When you create your company profile, briefly explain what you do and incorporate keyword phrases. Include a link back to your website or a specific landing page on your site.



- Research using keyword phrases to find the conversations in your subject areas, to listen carefully and to identify thought leaders to follow by signing up for RSS feeds.



- Once you feel ready to participate in conversations, start introducing yourself by sharing quality content and building relationships. Participate in Yahoo Answers, LinkedIn QA and discussions, comment on other people's blogs and be a guest blogger.



- Write your own quality blog and share articles on ezine directories, incorporating “share” or “like” buttons on your blog.



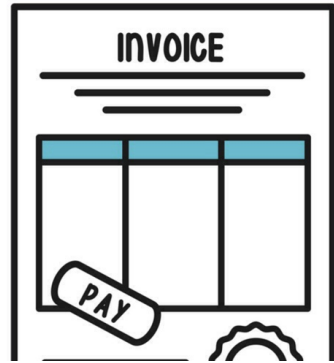
- Share video content on YouTube www.youtube.com, Vimeo www.vimeo.com or Viddler www.viddler.com and share images on Flickr www.flickr.com, 500px www.500px.com, SmugMug www.smugmug.com.



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Social Media and Networking Platforms

The tables below provide information about various social channels, including micro-blogging, social networking, business social networking, video sharing and photo sharing. Review the details provided to determine which channels would work best in order for you to achieve your goals.

1.1 Social Networking

Social networking refers to websites that individuals use to socially engage through chatting, status updates and meet up. Within these virtual communities, users create home profile pages and share comments and links directly with other users. Examples include facebook.com, myspace.com, ning.com, orkut.com, cafemom.com, badoo.com.

Description



- Allows users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues.
- Enables users to engage through status updates and instant messaging.
- Businesses can reach their target audiences by identifying particular profiles likes/dislikes and target their ads accordingly.

To Do's



- Set up your profile and customize your account page.
- Set up "like" button to post on site, for users to share content.
- Build custom Facebook page for specialized content and branding.
- Optimize Facebook for search (e.g. keyword-rich phrases in page name, vanity URLs, wall and profile).
- Post regular status updates with valuable content to share with fans/friends.

Uses



- Embed pages from your website so that selling online can be brought into Facebook environment.
- Promote business through Facebook Advertising or Sponsored Stories that are tied into target audience location, age, likes and needs.
- Build reach by leveraging contests and campaigns.

Benefits



- Networking
- Customer engagement
- Driving web traffic
- Reputation management
- Customer retention
- Another commerce outlet
- Viral marketing
- Personalizing of your business
- Collection of more detailed analytic and demographic information through FacebookAnalytics

Best Practices



- Build a strategy that is social by design.
- Create an authentic personalized brand voice.
- Make your page interactive.
- Nurture your relationships.
- Respond to feedback and continue to monitor what others are saying about you.
- Schedule your status updates through content schedulers like hootsuite.com, ping.fm.



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