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GET LIKED!

PROMOTING YOUR
BUSINESS ONLINE WITH
SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING



Get Liked! Promoting Your Business Online with Social Media Marketing

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Preface

Social media is not a fad, a here today and gone tomorrow obsession that burns brightly for a while and then fades into obscurity. Make no mistake about it, social media is here to stay and it is completely transforming the business landscape.

There are some who say it's the biggest shift since the industrial revolution. Whether that's hyperbole or not is actually neither here nor there. You only have to look around you to see how much social media is changing the way companies communicate with their customers, suppliers and each other.

For the small to medium business owner or the freelance worker social networking is a godsend. It's a way of increasing exposure, generating leads and increasing profits with minimal financial outlay. Used well social media can help you to reach previously untapped clients and customers and strengthen your links with existing ones.

Traditional forms of marketing have not gone away, and social media isn't a replacement for them. But your prospective customers are spending increasing amounts of time online and so it makes sense to go where they are.

Social Media Is For Everyone

Whether you are a fully established company, a kitchen table start-up or a freelance professional, it's vital that you have a strong social media presence. The *2012 Social Media Report* by Michael A. Stelzner (CEO and founder of Social Media Examiner) surveyed nearly 4,000 marketers and found that increased exposure was the number one benefit according to 85% of respondents. And 58% of marketers who had been using social media for more than three years reported an increase in sales.

The key advantages of social media are:

- Improved sales
- Reduction of marketing costs
- More leads
- Better business partnerships
- Competitive edge
- Gives your company a human face
- Helps you to stand out in an increasingly noisy marketplace

Instead of asking yourself should I or should I not embrace social media, the question must be, "How can Facebook or YouTube or Twitter help me to achieve my goals?"

Don't Be Afraid to Dive In

In the last few years the social media landscape has grown at an enormous pace and its sheer size and volume are breathtaking. To the newbie it can seem overwhelming, but the good news is it's easy to get started. If you can send an email you can use social media.

You do not have to be on every single social media network and you should not try them all at once. Start gently with one platform, experiment with how you are going to use it and when you are comfortable move onto some of the others.

In this eBook we will help you dip your toe into the social media waters and set you safely on your way. There are a number of first-class tips, strategies, and approaches to help you take advantage of the most popular social media platforms out there including Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of strategies as there are as many of those as stars in the sky. But we have included the most salient and important ones.

So what are you waiting for? Your journey of discovery into the world of possibilities that social media can create for you starts right here. Have fun and enjoy the ride!

Facebook

Facebook is currently the most powerful social media network on the planet with close to a billion users. With such a huge audience it is not surprising that an ever increasing number of companies are turning to it to find new customers and clients.

If you want to grow your business the opportunities to promote your products, services and expertise are extensive. By investing the time and energy into Facebook you will be able to connect and build relationships with thousands of users who will help to spread the word about you by liking your messages and sharing them with others. They may also talk about you to their networks.

Facebook may have started as a way for college students to keep in touch with their pals, and it is still of course primarily a medium for entertainment, but it's also developed into an extremely powerful business tool.

There are a number of reasons why you shouldn't ignore it any longer:

- Facebook is popular with all age groups
- It's an easy way to communicate with your customers
- It can provide more robust audience research
- Facebook pages appear in Google searches
- It can increase sales and exposure
- Facebook can extend your reach to customers that don't typically respond to traditional forms of advertising

Here are some of the most effective methods that you should adopt to engage fans and make Facebook work for you and your company:

Create a strong profile page

Be big, bold, and bright to attract as many people as possible. It's the identity of your brand, and remember first impressions count. A good profile should contain a great picture, website address, contact details, and professional interests.

Post more than once in a blue moon

Regular posts and updates ensure that you don't fade into the background. This doesn't

mean that you have to be on Facebook 24/7 but if you want to attract high quality and loyal fans you need to post excellent content on a regular basis.

Provide stimulating content related to your brand and industry

Always provide your audience with material that is going to inform, educate, and empower them. The old cliché of content is king never rings truer than with social media, and the information you push out must be something of value, don't just pump out stuff about your business all day long.

You could write about current events in your field, share funny and/or intriguing videos and pictures, and invite your users to pose questions. You can even post links to third party content, articles that are relevant to your industry that you feel your followers will find stimulating.

This also helps to establish your authority in your field. If you consistently post great content you will stand a much better chance of success.

Be real

The most successful companies on Facebook are those that show the human side of their business. Social media offers a less formal but more genuine way to talk to customers and fans. One approach is to occasionally step away from your niche and share some details about something unique that happened to you, or post an interesting snap with a witty caption.

Share exclusive content

We all like to feel part of an exclusive club, receiving privileged information that others are not party to. So reward your fans with content that acknowledges their support and that they can't get anywhere else. This could be in the form of exclusive deals, special behind-the-scenes-videos, or information about your company that isn't available on your website.

Ask questions

An engaged fan doesn't just read your updates, they actively respond and comment on them. To get that response all you have to do is ask for it. Encourage your audience to get involved. The trick is to ask entertaining and interesting questions that are easy and require a short response.

Have a dialogue

If someone calls your business you answer the phone. It's the same with Facebook.

When you post an update stick around for a while and get involved in the conversation.

Post pictures

Hands down they are the most popular forms of content on Facebook and are worth far more than a mere thousand words. Instead of writing a few blocks of text you can post some catchy images from time to time. That doesn't mean you should include glossy catalogue photos of your products as these will drive people away. It's too sales-like for social media. But an excellent tactic is to invite your customers to post photographs of them using your products.

Run a contest

Many people come to Facebook to be entertained, network with friends and generally have a good time, so your Facebook page doesn't always have to be about business. Periodically excite your crowd with a contest. It will raise interest amongst your community, and if it's really noteworthy your fans will talk to their networks about it. The prize doesn't have to be expensive; it could be some free clothing, a DVD or confectionary. Just make sure that it creates a big ripple of excitement.

Here's a good example of a successful contest. Makeup brand Maybelline created a "Show Us Your Red Lips" contest as a promo for its Super Stay24h lipstick in Switzerland. The prize was to be the face of the product on its Switzerland page. Customers were asked to select a lipstick, take a picture, post it to the company's Facebook page and get friends and family members to vote on it. It was just a bit of lighthearted fun but the result was that 183 people entered, 9,000 votes were registered and Maybelline received 10,000 more fans to its Facebook page.

A contest is a great way to increase levels of engagement and let's face it who doesn't want to win a prize? Please note that Facebook has some specific rules about contests which can be read [here](#).

Include calls to action from time to time

Simple calls to action such as share, comment, like, and vote can elicit huge responses. But don't overdo it or your fans will grow weary of your updates and start ignoring them altogether.

The Bottom Line

Using Facebook for business is all about engaging with consumers at a deeper level and ultimately driving qualified leads back to your website.

Hot tips

- Keep your posts short. You don't need to write a novel
- Engage with your followers at least a few times a week

Reply to posts positively. Even if someone has irritated you, a public forum isn't the place for a slanging match

Twitter

Twitter is a micro-blogging platform where users broadcast short messages of up to 140 characters in length (called 'tweets'). For the small business owner Twitter is a tremendous tool that can allow you to instantly connect with thousands of people, expanding your reach to customers and potential customers.

As with other kinds of social media networks the key to getting Twitter to work for you is to concentrate your efforts on forging strong relationships with your customers and prospects. Instead of selling and promoting, look for ways to engage and add value to the lives of your audience. That way, more people will be interested in finding out more about you and will eventually choose to do business with you instead of the competition.

So what can 140 characters or less do for your company? The answer to that is plenty as tweets can really make your presence known.

Advantages:

- Drive new traffic to your website
- Create a buzz around forthcoming events or new products
- Amplify your impact
- Allow you to interact with individuals you might not normally come into contact with

A Twitter Success Story

One small business that has successfully used Twitter to boost growth is the Crème Brulee Cart in San Francisco. The business was launched in 2009 by carpenter Curtis Kimball as a way of earning some extra money. Within three weeks of setting up his business he discovered that customers were finding him through Twitter. He was being tweeted about by people who had stopped by his cart and loved what they bought. And so he decided to set up his own Twitter account (<http://twitter.com/cremebruleecart>) to spread the word.

Today he tweets about where his cart will be and outlines the daily flavors. His account has more than 22,000 followers and the business is doing so well that he's quit his job as a carpenter.

If Twitter is going to become part of your game plan here are a few best-practice suggestions to make the most of your time in the "Twitterverse".

Decide on your goals

Don't jump blindly into Twitter. Make sure you have clearly defined goals from the outset. Incidentally, this should be true of all your social media endeavors. Do you want to connect with others in your field? Build brand awareness? Announce sales or specials?

Whatever your goals the trick is to stay focused. But bear in mind that some of your clients will easily tire of your promotions and others might not want any information about what's coming up. Keep followers engaged.

Follow people that add value to you

When you follow someone you are signing up to their stream of tweets which will be automatically added to your timeline.

Avoid the easy temptation to sign up to celebrity tweeters as these will not add value to your business, unless you just happen to be a showbiz agent or a movie star. Instead follow people who are relevant to your business and who will be most likely to follow you back and re-tweet you. A re-tweet is where a Twitter follower sends your tweet to their set of followers, meaning your content gets exposed to an exponentially bigger audience.

Optimize your avatar

This is the picture or logo that's displayed next to your tweet and is the image that your followers are most likely going to associate with you. People connect with people and so it's a good idea to select a decent head and shoulders shot of a key member of your team, and not some random shot of you dancing on the photocopier at the Christmas party. Creating a professional image is paramount.

Engage with your audience

Twitter is not about Me Me Me and shouting at your audience. It's about engagement and having meaningful conversations. So that means taking part in relevant Twitter conversations, re-tweeting others and thanking those that re-tweet you.

Ask questions and encourage opinions

Don't always wait for the conversations to come to you. Tweeting questions and asking your followers for their points of view are great ways to increase engagement.

Add images to tweets

You don't always have to say it with words. Pictures are powerful ways to grab

attention. Tweets with pictures inspire re-tweets.

Add links to your tweets

According to *Strategies for Effective Tweeting: A Statistical Review* by Buddy Media, tweets with links received re-tweet rates that were 86% higher than messages without any links.

Add value to others

Share useful and interesting content that your followers are actually going to care about. You may well garner a lot of followers, but if they are not engaging with what you are saying, then you are most definitely doing something wrong.

Mix it up a bit

We're all suckers for a bit of variety and nobody enjoys the routine of doing the same things day in day out. This applies to the social media environment as well. And so if you are always tweeting data, ask your audience a question instead. If you only use standard texts for your tweets consider uploading a striking image once in a while.

The Bottom Line

The social interaction between you and your customers demonstrates that you are a company that listens and cares. By personalizing responses your audience will see that you value their input. This helps to build loyalty which ultimately benefits your business.

Hot Tips

- Follow people outside your industry to get an idea of the sorts of content and tweets that work well
- Act natural and be yourself. Don't be overly formal. Let your tweets reflect your personality
- Interact, don't just broadcast

Pinterest

Pinterest is a relatively new kid on the social media block, and it's nothing short of a phenomenon. Launched in 2010, it's now the third most popular US social media site. Not only is it attracting huge numbers of visitors but they are hanging around for longer. On average they stay on the site for approximately 89 minutes. But here's the biggie.

The site is better than Facebook for driving ecommerce sales. A [Social Shopping 2012 Survey](#) found that 59% of Pinterest users have purchased an item they saw on the site as opposed to 33% of Facebook users who made a purchase after seeing something in their news feed or on a friend's wall. Small wonder then, that Pinterest is attracting the attention of businesses looking for new ways to connect with their customers. It's already huge, but it's going to become even bigger.

What is Pinterest?

It's basically an image and video sharing site. Users create virtual pinboards based around categories that are of interest to them such as hobbies, pets, travel, wardrobe etc., (think of pinboards as the virtual equivalent of a bulletin board) and pin pictures and videos from their web surfing endeavors. It's similar to what you may do in the real world when you clip out interesting magazine or newspaper articles.

Other members can 'repin', like, or comment on the images and videos they find on your pinboards and you can also explore the pinboards of other users.

What makes Pinterest so valuable to the small business owner is that it's an easy and enjoyable way to personalize a brand, and with the accessibility of visual information it gets your message over in seconds. The platform is also particularly useful for freelance workers such as photographers, graphic artists and interior designers who can create pinboards to showcase their best work.

Advantages

- Drives more traffic to your website
- Provides insights into your consumers and followers
- Helps you to identify trends and business opportunities
- Makes it easy for people to share your content

There are many companies now successfully making good use of Pinterest for their marketing activities. Scholastic is a global book publisher and as such you might expect it to

have pinboards devoted to its book covers. Whilst they do have some of those they have also dreamed up creative [pinboards](#) that indirectly sell to the consumer. For example, Authors on the Road, Books That Take Place in the Summer, You Are What You Read, and Classroom Ideas.

The food supermarket chain Whole Foods uses its [Pinterest account](#) not to showcase produce for sale but rather to promote an organic lifestyle with such pinboards as Eat Your Veggies, Plant Based Diet Recipes, Meatless Monday, and Great Garden Recipes.

So how can you use Pinterest to give your business a boost? Here are some top ideas to get you off the starting block:

Interact with other users

As with all other forms of social media don't make it just about your business. Take the time to comment, repin and follow other users. Pinning other people's content will help you to gain a wider following.

Only pin compelling content

Don't just throw any old thing on your boards. Make sure the content you pin will catch the eye of the audience. Think creatively about the kinds of boards that will convey your company's personality, and make every pin count.

Create custom pinboards

Remembering that direct selling is frowned upon in social media you should create custom pinboards that indirectly market your products. For example, if you are a clothing retailer you could create pinboards around specific looks such as cool winter wear, summer apparel, beachwear, and accessories. A realtor could design pinboards about historic properties, famous properties and local properties, and a landscape gardener could have pinboards devoted to gardening tips, examples of completed work, and exotic landscaping designs.

One of the great things about Pinterest is that when you pin something it automatically creates a link back to the source image or video. So, if you pin a book from Barnes & Noble a link will be added to the book's page on Barnes & Noble's website. The same is true when you pin photos from your blog or website, you create links back to these sites which can increase your traffic.

Create how-to pinboards

If you have published how-to videos for YouTube create a pinboard for all your educational and helpful content. It's a good idea to create a resource, something that people want to know about and will find useful as this can increase your exposure.

Conduct market research

Pinterest is a superb tool for conducting market research amongst your customers and followers. You can pin pictures of products in development, ideas for advertising campaigns, and packaging concepts and ask for feedback. Social media users like these sorts of initiatives from their favorite brands because it makes them feel valued and listened to.

Build a detailed picture of your clients

This is possible by viewing their pinboards and noting the themes that emerge, the people they follow, the images they pin and the names they give their boards.

Go behind the scenes

Is there something particularly fascinating about your company's inner workings that the world at large would like to see? If so, use Pinterest to bring them out in the open. A good example of a Pinterest behind the scenes pinboard is the Today Show, [Anchor Antics](#) board that allows the personalities of the program's hosts to come through.

Get fans involved

Pinterest allows you to select other users to pin on your pinboards. Make use of this feature and get your most active fans contributing to your pinboards. You could even run a contest with the prize of becoming a regular contributor to your pinboard. This should encourage your fans to spread the word about you.

Create offers

Devote a pinboard for special offers aimed exclusively at Pinterest users.

The Bottom Line

Used wisely Pinterest can be highly effective for small business marketing and give your sales a shot in the arm. The platform is about users sharing their experiences so act like a person and not like a brand or company. And if you engage people with great content they will be much more willing to learn about you.

Hot Tips

- Create a strong profile. As with any profile you must ensure that your Pinterest profile sells you to the fullest
- Create and build boards that are relevant to your business
- Add 'Follow Me on Pinterest' and 'Pin It' buttons to your website or blog
- Ask your followers to share photos of themselves using your products

YouTube

YouTube is the second most popular search engine on the web after Google. Its reach and power are phenomenal as the latest mind-blowing statistics provided by YouTube testify:

- The platform receives over 800 million unique users each month
- Over 3 billion hours of video are watched on YouTube every month
- 72 hours of video are uploaded every minute
- In 2011, YouTube had more than 1 trillion views. That's around 140 views for every person on the planet

That all sounds impressive, but what does it mean for the small business owner? Isn't everyone just watching Justin Bieber videos or footage of pets doing funny things?

Whilst it's true that many people turn to YouTube for entertainment, a considerable number are using it for advice and information. They want to find material that's going to help them solve a problem or benefit their lives in some way. And that's where you can come in.

You run a business so you are an expert in your field. You have specialist knowledge that people will want to tap into. YouTube allows you to give them what they want which has the added bonuses of boosting your profile and your reputation as an authority in your industry.

The types of informational videos that do well are how-tos and those that provide solutions to common problems. So for example if you are a florist you could create a video that shows your audience how to create a floral arrangement for a dining room table. And in another video provide the answer to one of the most common dilemmas that your customers might face, such as how to keep cut flowers alive for longer. The only limits for ideas are your imagination.

For some inspiration have a good look round YouTube and see what other companies are doing. You'll notice that some enterprises have videos demonstrating their products and services or behind-the-scenes footage of their operations; these videos can also do well on YouTube.

The key advantages of a YouTube presence are:

- Your video has the potential to be seen by the whole world

- It captures attention
- It forges deeper connections with consumers
- It increases traffic to your website as interested viewers will want to find out more about you
- It creates a high degree of credibility for your business

As with every other social media platform you need to use it well to get the most out of it. Don't think of it as a sales platform, but as a way of helping people with their problems and dilemmas.

Employ good production values

Whilst you don't need to be a Spielberg or Scorsese your videos should be professionally made and easy to watch. If the images are poorly focused, the camera work is all over the place, there's bad lighting and the audio quality is poor, you will irritate your audience and lose them. And this will tarnish the image of your company.

Optimize your video

With millions of videos uploaded every day you want to give yours more than a fighting chance of attracting eyeballs. You can title and tag your video with the most common terms your customers are searching for (see SEO chapter for explanations of the terminology).

Engage with your audience

It is after all a social platform and so respond to comments that people make about your videos. And also check out other content on the site and leave comments. You can even upload video responses. If you can't bear to do this to your competitors or other related companies in your field look for content or channels that cover your local area or charitable causes that your company supports. Be a part of the community and not a "YouTube island".

Promote your videos

Don't assume that viewers will automatically find a video once you have uploaded it. Actively promote in to your email lists and other social media sites. Don't just say, "Here's my latest video", provide a hook line that will pique your audience's interest and whet their appetite.

Include a call to action

Add a call to action at the end of your video. This could be a link to your website or a

request to viewers to click your subscribe button or leave a comment. Just make sure you have something there to keep them engaged.

Show-off your expertise and thought leadership

Build your credibility and establish your authority in your field by posting presentations you've given and any public speaking engagements.

Demonstrate your products and services

Help your customers come to a decision about making a purchase from you with a clear and informative video. Here's a good example by vinyl ceiling tile company Celiume - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_w5mQilystY&feature=player_embedded

Or you could really put the brain cells to work and come up with something unique that could go viral.

Total Blender by BlendTec is just another blender but the manufacturers have created a YouTube phenomenon with their series of short "Will it Blend?" videos where the company's founder Tom Dickson tries to blend such objects as brooms, golf balls, and iPhones - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwXX2aqHRME>.

The Bottom Line

YouTube allows you to reach out to current and potential customers and gives you a golden opportunity to market your business to millions of people for low cost. Big budgets are not necessary and so it is perfect for small businesses.

Hot Tips

- Keep the videos short; YouTube audiences don't have large attention spans
- Post customer video testimonials. Let your fans become your cheerleaders
- Take the audience on a video tour of your company and introduce your key personnel

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is another big beast on the social media landscape, a hugely popular and highly successful tool for networking and business marketing. With more than 175 million members it is the world's largest professional network providing a platform for people to trade ideas, build business relationships, and promote and market their enterprises.

Of all the social media sites that are out there in the virtual world it's the one that is the most business-oriented and it's deeply respected in the business community. You'll even find top executives from Fortune 500 companies using their LinkedIn profile to create connections and build credibility.

There are many reasons why this social media site is good news for the small business owner and it can play a powerful role in contributing to your success.

Here's how:

- You can acquire new customers through word of mouth
- You can build your industry network
- You can network with peers
- You can increase your visibility
- You can find new business opportunities

Once you have signed up to the service don't just post your profile and leave it at that. Social media success relies heavily on users being active not passive participants and there are a number of simple techniques you can adopt to maximize LinkedIn's potential and get your business to where it wants to be.

Develop a compelling profile page

According to LinkedIn completed profiles receive seven times as many views as sparse ones. Spend some time and effort on your profile and ensure that it includes all your latest accomplishments and achievements. LinkedIn will save what you type so you don't have to do it all in one sitting.

One of the benefits of creating a strong profile that you may not be aware of is that Google likes LinkedIn so you have a better chance of appearing higher in search engine rankings if yours is worth reading. As well as your company profile create a personal profile as people like to know the face behind a business. And as with all profiles they play an

important part in your branding.

Start networking

Start building your network by sending out invitations to connect, and search the LinkedIn Groups directory for associations and networks that you can join. The site will also make recommendations to you based on the details that you have supplied.

Join and interact with LinkedIn groups

This is one of LinkedIn's most useful features. Individual members start groups based on specific topics and themes related to their industry. Like-minded souls meet up in these online forums for discussions, to share news and post jobs. They are terrific places for you to share your knowledge and increase your visibility among people who are interested in your line of business.

You will not derive any benefits from your profile if it's just sitting on the site doing nothing. Don't just join a group – participate.

Answer questions

LinkedIn has a question and answer tool that can give you a lot of exposure. This is a golden opportunity for you to win new business and connect with new prospects. Other LinkedIn users will find your answers in the site's advanced answers search and it's a great way for you to soft pitch your expertise and professionalism without coming across as a boorish self-promoter. It's excellent publicity for your company.

Get recommended

Don't be shy about asking for recommendations from your customers, clients and friends. These can be viewed on your LinkedIn profile and will help to establish your credibility, encouraging others to do business with you. A simple and easy way of receiving a recommendation is to give a valuable recommendation to one of your contacts.

Update your status regularly

Every time you post a new update such as company news, success stories and musings about your field, you appear on the homepage of all your LinkedIn contacts. It's a good way of keeping them informed about your latest happenings and increasing your visibility. Update your status at least once a week.

Get answers to your market research questions

You could ask your network for their thoughts on future product ideas, current offerings and innovations. It saves time and money polling your customers or engaging expensive market research companies.

The Bottom Line

LinkedIn founder Reid Hoffman made the following observation in a book he co-authored called *The Start-Up of You*. He noted that it's people that give you business not companies. So start building those personal relationships online.

Hot Tips

- Send out at least one invitation to connect every day
- Answer questions at least twice a week
- Comment on the profile updates of people and companies you follow
- Use keyword phrases in your heading and title (see earlier chapter on SEO)
- Import all of your offline and online contacts into LinkedIn

Acknowledge your new connections with a personal reply

Blogging

First, a simple definition: a blog is a web page made up of short articles or posts typically arranged in chronological order. They are veterans of the social media world having emerged in the late 1990s, and many small businesses have turned to blogging as a simple, quick and convenient way to further connect with their customers.

Blog posts can take many forms: they can be opinion pieces, personal experiences, information articles, round-up lists, news comments, how-tos, reviews and previews, Q&As, reaction pieces and comparisons.

Advantages of blogging

- It's a low-cost way to get your company's name out on the Internet
- You can build a community around the things you are interested in and that are relevant to your industry
- You can achieve higher rankings in the search engines and so be found easier on the Internet
- You can build better communication with your customers
- You can establish your authority on a topic

How to Create a Blog

By far the most popular free blogging service is [WordPress](#), a content management and blog publishing application. It is open source which means that all of its files and software are free to use. Although it started life as a blogging system, WordPress is also a website creation tool. Just sign up and follow the easy step-by-step instructions.

Making the Most of Blogging

Don't just dive into blogging for its own sake. Before you get started ask yourself the following questions to determine what you want to get out of the endeavor. What is the blog going to do for my business? Am I going to blog to establish my authority, boost my brand or increase sales?

In terms of the last question you may want to blog for any or all of these reasons. Knowing why you want to set up a blog will help you determine what success will look like.

Here are a few tips to help you make the most of your blogging experience:

Decide on the frequency of blog posts

Do you want to post once or twice a week, every day or even once a fortnight? There is no right or wrong answer although the more frequent the updates the more engagement with your customers. However, frequency of itself is not enough to ensure a loyal following. No matter how frequent you post you must always provide high quality content.

Be consistent

Once you have developed a schedule – stick to it. If you are blogging three times a week you will have built up an expectation amongst your audience so don't let them down. Set a realistic schedule that you are comfortable with.

Keep it interesting

Your blog posts should never feel like a chore to write. Readers love posts by people who are passionate and knowledgeable about their subject.

Explore different media

It doesn't always have to be text. Some of the best blogs contain written articles, videos, images and surveys.

Learn from the Best

To get some ideas about what works in the blogosphere take a look at these popular and successful business blogs

[Springwise](#) – a blog about trends and smart new business ideas

[The Selling Sherpa](#) – a blog by Patrick L. Williams, international speaker and sales performance expert

[Sweet Leaf Tea](#) – a blog about specialty teas. This is an excellent example of how to promote your brand without being too “salesy”.

The Bottom Line

Many people don't blog because they feel they have nothing to talk about. But the truth of it is you have plenty to say. You've spent time developing expertise about the industry you work in and this will help you to come up with loads of content ideas.

Hot Tips

- Here are some great content ideas for your blog posts:
- Ask your customers what questions they'd like answered
- Create tutorials. These are similar to providing answers, but are written in a how-to format. They can provide great value to your customers
- Make your top customers the focus of your posts
- Create lists such as 'Seven Reasons Why I Love my Business' and 'The Top Ten Products Selling in My Store and Why'

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

One of the most difficult challenges for any company or freelance worker doing business today is how to differentiate yourself from the competition. You may have a website, but then so does every other Tom, Dick and Harriet.

Your website is your prime piece of real estate on the web, but you need to ensure that it is situated in a great spot on main street and not down some back alley. So how can you make yours more visible to those customers in your niche? The answer is with search engine optimization or SEO for short.

SEO is the method to improve the quality and quantity of consumer traffic to your website or blog; it's the process of optimizing your website so that it will appear high up in the search engines for the products and services you are selling. There are many aspects to it but to break it down to its bare bones it's about the words you use on your site and the way that other sites link to you on the Internet.

Why Does My Website Need SEO?

The majority of traffic on the web is driven by the big commercial search engines such as Google and Yahoo, and although your site can be found via other means, such as social media sites, search engines are the principle means by which the overwhelming majority of people navigate the web.

If your website is not properly optimized for search engines people will not be able to find you and they'll turn up at the websites of your competitors instead.

So if you sell guitar widgets and someone goes to Google and types in 'guitar widgets' you want your website to show up on the first page, and ideally high up on that page. People rarely search beyond the first page so it's vital that you are there.

There are billions of pages on the web and an optimized site will make it easier for the search engines to find you.

Advantages of SEO:

- Increases awareness of your brand
- Provides targeted traffic to your website so that your products and services are found by customers
- SEO is one of the least expensive marketing options available to you

- Increases traffic to your site which should mean increased sales
- SEO levels the playing field. You don't need to hire an expensive marketing agency to get your company in front of local, national and international customers; all you need is effective use of SEO

Keyword Research

This is where it all starts. You need to know the phrases and words people are using when they are searching online for the kinds of products and services that you offer.

When someone is looking for information on the web they'll type in a word or phrase in the search box. This is known as the 'keyword' or 'keyword phrase'. So if you were to type in 'guitars' the search engine will go away and search every single page on the web that mentions the word 'guitar'.

Your starting point is to brainstorm a list of keywords that relate to your business. These are the words and phrases your customers use as opposed to industry jargon.

For example if you are selling cleaning services in New York your keyword phrase will most likely be 'cleaning services in New York'. You will also want to use variations of your keywords and so you might also have 'New York cleaning services' and 'domestic cleaners New York'.

You can also enlist the help of some online keyword tools. There are many aids out there to help you find the right keywords for your business, and two of the most popular free ones are [Google's keyword tool](#) (delivers results based on actual Google searches), and [Wordtracker](#).

Creating Content

Once you have selected the most appropriate keywords it's time to start creating your content - either articles or descriptions of what you do and offer or both.

Now search engines have things called 'bots' that will automatically 'read' your website to find out what it's about and to decide which keywords each one of your pages will rank for. This doesn't mean that you should write solely for the search engines. Some companies still make the huge mistake of repeating the keywords in their content, hoping that search engines will rank them higher. But search engines just see this as spam and give the sites a low ranking, which more or less consigns them to obscurity.

The wrong way of optimizing your content:

“New York cleaning services offer the very best cleaning services in New York. If you’re in the city and need an excellent cleaning services then try us for all your domestic cleaning service needs in New York.”

The right way of optimizing your content:

“Deluxe Cleaners is the premier cleaning service in New York. We provide a professional and competitively priced service that you can trust.”

When writing content your focus should be on people, making the words easy to read. Then you can optimize for the search engines without sacrificing the quality of your content.

Backlinks

Search engines favor sites that have good quality external links pointing to them from other sources on the Internet. Links from other websites pointing back to yours are called *backlinks* and the more high quality backlinks you have the higher up the search engines you will appear. You can think of it like this: a link from another website to yours is like receiving a vote of confidence. They are the most difficult part of SEO and very time consuming to acquire. If you are just starting out it is better to spend your time on creating great content using keywords rather than obsessing about backlinks.

There are whole books devoted to strategies to obtain quality backlinks including how to build up relationships with quality sites, guest blogging and straightforward requests. But one of the most successful strategies is to create superb content that gets you noticed and that people will want to link to.

The Bottom Line

Search engine optimization is not an exact science and the best you can do is try a number of different methods and stick with the ones that work best for you. You can do it yourself or you can hire SEO consultants to optimize your site for you, though this may be costly. For most, if not all businesses that have a web presence and want to attract more customers, SEO can reap rich rewards.

It's important to remember that SEO is a part of your marketing strategy, not your entire marketing strategy. So don't obsess about it or worry if your website is not at the top of Google's rankings. It is of course entirely possible to run an extremely successful and profitable business without ever receiving one single visitor via a search engine.

Hot tips

- Ensure that your website homepage contains 2 or 3 of your top keywords
- You will need to add fresh content from time to time. This is where a blog can come in
- Write a blog post based round each of your keywords

Before You Jump In

If you are small business owner and haven't yet embraced social media you are missing out on inexpensive ways to promote your business, and ignoring the opportunity to forge strong and meaningful relationships with your customers.

Doing social media well doesn't mean jumping aboard every social network. There really is no need for that, and in any case as a business owner or freelance worker you only have a limited amount of time.

Just pick a small number of channels that you feel are going to be the most effective and focus your attention on them. Spreading yourself too thin is counterproductive.

And when new networks appear don't rush to sign up to them. Hang back for a while and see how well they do. Networks come and go and no one really knows where the next Facebook or Twitter is going to come from. When you do try new networks always ask yourself the following questions? How well will it serve my business? Does it offer anything different from the networks I am already using?

Getting it Right

One of the most frequently asked questions by all social media newbies is: "How often should I tweet or update my Facebook status or post content to my social media networks?"

Well, there's isn't one "right" answer to that question. Although with Twitter tweeting every hour is too much and tweeting once a week is too little.

In the beginning it's a good idea to tweet and post a Facebook update at least once a day and as you progress you'll soon find a rhythm and discover what works best for you.

To stop yourself from being overwhelmed budget the time you spend on your social media networks. This could be 30 minutes or an hour a day perhaps. Make it part of your routine. You could also plan ahead and create an editorial calendar of the things you want to say, that way you won't be struggling to find content when you come to update your status.

Before you jump in here are a few words of warning about the social media sins that you must avoid committing:

Don't be pushy

A hard sell doesn't work. If you just try and promote and sell your products you will fail in social media. Yes, you want to let people know of upcoming events, product launches, promotions and giveaways, but remember social media is all about interaction and creating

relationships. If you just endlessly self-promote you will come across like that awful person you once met at a party who did nothing but talk about himself for the entire evening.

A 2012 survey of 1,000 companies by Business Network International found that three quarters of business owners were put off using companies that bombarded them with messages.

Social media relationships take time and energy and you must have a genuine interest in both creating and nurturing them. It's not all about you. When you create good relationships the opportunities to sell will occur organically and naturally.

Don't neglect your social media accounts

So you've set up your accounts and have acquired a good number of quality followers. And then because it's a pain in the you-know-where to keep up as you need to spend your time on running your business your account doesn't get updated for a week or two. This is why many companies fail at social media and where good scheduling of your time comes in. It also involves a change in mindset. Social media is not an add-on to your business, it's part of your business.

Don't argue

There will always be dissatisfied customers and the Internet is a great place for people to post negative comments anonymously. If someone posts a complaint on one of your accounts don't argue with them. Remember, every one of your followers will see your reply and you have to maintain professionalism at all times. Instead send a private message to the complainant and see if you can deal with it that way. If someone gets really nasty and malicious then you can always delete their comment.

Don't ignore social media

It could put your company at a competitive disadvantage.

Boost Your Business

Social media is moving fast and is hard to ignore. The whole world is having a conversation online and you need to be a part of it. Business is all about relationships and if you invest the time in other people it will pay off. With some planning and research and by learning the rules of the game you will discover that networking online can lift you above your competition and deliver better results.

Good luck!

Scott Clarke