

The Small Business Owners Guide to Social Media

by
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The logo for Word Wizard, featuring the words "Word Wizard" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font with a white outline and a slight drop shadow effect.

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Thinking about introducing social media marketing to your business? It's currently a big trend but if you're wondering whether to jump on the bandwagon, too, this report will help you decide.

In 2010, Facebook overtook Google as the world's most visited website. Now, 600 million of people have their own Facebook page, and while millions visit their own and other people's Facebook pages every day, others do so less frequently.

The three most common online networking sites for people in business are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. There are many other sites, too, which perform different functions but in our neck of the woods, where we are 3-4 years behind US trends, they have yet to become part of mainstream business.

What is apparent is that social media has become part of the marketing toolbox for all forward-thinking business. These businesses have seen the trend towards interactive communication and realised its power.

Once, if you had a website that was a sufficient online presence. Not today. Now, you need to be visible on as many sites as possible in order to maintain or increase your search engine rankings. That's because Google et al are now including social networking sites in their algorithms that decide where in the rankings your pages feature. Inevitably, the more sites you have a presence on, the better your results.

Being seen online by your clients is one thing. Actually having something to say to them is quite another. Many people have been put off using Twitter because it has been used by many for inconsequential banalities. While that hasn't necessarily gone away, people choose to 'unfollow' those who have nothing to say, preferring instead to 'follow' those who do. However, coming up with something useful in 140 characters or less, on a regular basis, can be taxing.

The same is true of Facebook. Your clients and customers want to see new content on a regular basis. That's how online conversations are generated, and how word gets out about your business. But coming up with interesting, inspiring, even funny content can be a drag. It can also be time consuming and a hassle when you are already overloaded. You may not even like doing it or want to be bothered with the whole business. You might want to consider bringing a specialist on board (see last page for more).

How to Get the Most out of your Social Media Efforts

Anywhere you go, any trip you take, starts out with the end in mind. You don't board a plane or get into your car without knowing your destination. The same is true of social media marketing.

Knowing what you are trying to achieve will ensure you reach your goal. Not knowing what you are trying to achieve will get you everywhere and nowhere. Commonly called the "scatter-gun approach", this will pretty much guarantee your failure in this new marketing arena.

When thinking about how social media marketing could be used in your business, begin with the end in mind. What are you trying to achieve? What are your objectives?

Here are some to consider:

Expanding your reach: Every business wants more customers and to get more customers, people need to know about you. So reaching a wider audience of potential customers who do not yet know about you may be one of your goals.

Brand building: Becoming the brand of choice in your market is an objective of many larger companies. Effectively, you are selling your brand or company name rather than specific products when you focus on this.

Engaging readers: You might have lots of really useful information to pass on to customers, because it will help them in their businesses. You want to make this enjoyable or entertaining. This type of content may be your own or it may be someone else's, like a You Tube video for instance.

Attracting industry heavyweights: In order to become known as the go-to person in your field, you might want to connect with other, well-known experts. Your goal here may be to become online friends with them, to become part of their networks, or simply to have their tacit endorsement by their link to your site. To achieve this, you need content that is unique and that they will either learn from or get something out of.

Turning casual customers into raving fans: Every business is keen to increase the loyalty of their customers, but we all know how hard it is to do. Using social media to spread the word about special deals or rates, upcoming events or sales, is a great way to achieve this. Especially if this information can't be found anywhere else.

Event promotion: If you are holding any kind of event, social media is the place to advertise it. The viral nature of the medium means your event could be publicised in places you don't even know about. And, if it's something quirky, or something that captures the imagination, you might find yourself with not only many more visitors to your page, but many more potential clients at your event.

Customer service: Today, if a client has a gripe of any kind it is much more likely to be aired on a social media site than directly to your company. Which means other people often read about it before you do. But the upside is that you can engage the complainer in online conversation, show a willingness to resolve it, and sort the problem out. In fact, this is very positive because it shows you're not just a faceless corporate that doesn't care about its customers; that you do take your customers seriously and care about them. This is the epitome of turning a problem into an opportunity.

Generating sales: you'll notice this is the last item on the list rather than the first. That's because social media marketing is so much more than just selling stuff online. And businesses are more than about sales. They're about the customer experience, about helping people achieve their goals, and possibly even about having fun along the way.

Never forget that social media is a two-way conversation. It's not top-down like traditional marketing, it is driven by your customers and what they have to say about you. This can be very scary for some people, but today people expect to be heard. When they've got a problem that remains unresolved they don't just tell 20 friends and colleagues, they tell the world. And this gives you infinite opportunities to interact with them in a positive way.

I've listed eight objectives or goals for your social marketing efforts. Work out which of these is the most important to you before setting out and your efforts will be richly rewarded.

Successful Facebook Business Pages

Now that Facebook has overtaken Google in user numbers, even those who have been staunchly anti-Facebook are having second thoughts. And it certainly makes sense, given that social media marketing is becoming such a powerful tool for even the smallest of businesses.

One of the most common stumbling blocks, however, is the problem of content. Just what should be put on a Facebook business page?

This will depend on each company's individual social media goals. For instance, do you want to sell something? Make potential customers aware of your business? Initiate two-way communication with clients? Inform clients about special offers? Or something else entirely.

Whatever your goal, the 11 suggestions below will help improve your Facebook content.

Awards – have you recently won an award? If so, shout it from the rooftops. Send a press release to the relevant local and trade media (or national if your award is big enough) and place the link to it on your Facebook page. Or you can forgo the press release and just write a status update about it.

Vacancies – are you looking for staff? List jobs on your business page. You'd be surprised who knows someone looking for work that might just match your particular vacancy.

Newsletters – do you have a regular newsletter? If so, you will no doubt also be uploading it to your website. Link to it on your business page. Facebook is a great place to let people know about your newsletter, be able to find it, read it and hopefully subscribe.

Events – This is an area in which Facebook is exceedingly strong. Listing your event will save you a great deal of hassle because you can even use it to send out invitations.

Accolades I – Has a staff member achieved something momentous? Completed a qualification, won a sporting event or got married? Your business page is the place to let the world know. Do be careful, however, to get your staff member's permission to put this up, it's only courtesy.

Accolades II – Has a customer or a supplier achieved something momentous? Again, let the world know – with their permission, of course. Being aligned with successful people is always good for business. You don't need to restrict yourself to accolades, of course, it could be something that your client or supplier is planning, running, or working on that might be of interest to your readers. Cross-promotion like this is an excellent way to build relationships.

Tips – what help can you give your customers? A tip sheet which will assist them in doing something in your field of expertise will be of great benefit. Examples

include how to present a house for sale (real estate agents), how to write a press release (copywriters) or how to apply for a mortgage (bankers).

Specials – from time to time most product-based businesses have a sale or specials they need to discount in order to move. And people love the prospect of a good deal. So, what better place to advertise it than your business page. Facebook also has a marketplace section where you can list items for sale.

Articles – Whenever your business appears in the mainstream media, put the link on your page. Again, success begets success, and people like to read about companies or people they know. Likewise, if you are writing articles yourself that you are placing on your website, put a link to these on your Facebook business page.

Competitions – Just like a deal, everyone loves a competition, especially if the prize is something worth having. Running a competition via your business page is a good way for it to go viral – be passed on to other people. And, you end up with lots of new people to add to your database, who may choose to like you and follow you on Facebook.

Videos – If you have good quality video presentations about your business, add a link to them. There's good reason why You Tube is the biggest website on the planet – people love multi-media.

Links – Not all your business page content should be about yourself. You should also include content from elsewhere – or links. These can be links to You Tube videos that relate to your business (or that you just like), links to your favourite causes and links to affiliated businesses. If, for example, you are a member of a business networking group like BNI, then you could link to other members' businesses. This makes you look generous and could increase traffic to both your page and the other business's page.

Whatever your choice for content, just remember that to make it a proper two-way conversation you need to have considerably more content that is not self-serving, that is of interest to others, than content that pushes your own barrow. If it's always about you, your readers will un-like you pretty quickly, which is the opposite of your goal.

How to Get People to 'like' your Facebook Page

Once you have a Facebook business page set up you'll want to encourage people to visit it. Easier said than done.

Recently a business network colleague posted a message on our Facebook group page begging us all to "like" his Facebook page. The implied reason was so he could obtain a vanity URL.

My initial reaction was to help so I visited his page to see what he was offering. The answer was nothing, zero, zilch. He'd filled in some brief details about his company (which operates in the highly competitive area of insurance) and that was all. No industry updates, no company updates, no information that would help me decide if he was someone that, first, I would want to do business with, and second that I would want to recommend to others.

Facebook and other social networking sites are about connecting with others, certainly, but they are more about creating and maintaining strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect rather than merely gathering numbers. Begging for "likes" rather defeats the purpose of acquiring quality followers who will contribute to your page, offer feedback and be interactive.

As well, by liking a page, I'm publicly putting my hand up to say I think what someone else is doing is worth my friends and followers investing their time in looking at. Now, I value their time as much as my own, so I wouldn't suggest they waste theirs by looking at a page with nothing on it.

However, Andy Moore, a director at a company specialising in "creating innovative online marketing strategies" believes it's a good strategy.

He says, "I've had success building a community around brands using Facebook pages and in my experience one of the most effective ways to grow a business page is to encourage likes by harnessing the personal network of the individuals associated with the brand. Once you have their attention the challenge is create interaction by offering great content." In other words, he's saying it's ok to ask people you know to like your page, before putting anything on it.

How should we go about getting people to like our Facebook pages? For a start, there's a facility on Facebook to "recommend" pages to friends. I don't have much problem with that, I've used it myself. But I tend to do so only after I've posted an item I think people will find useful. I simply wouldn't expect people to like me when there's nothing there for them to like. It's like being asked to buy before knowing what the product is. After all, as I've already said, liking a page makes it visible to everyone in your network.

Here are some ways to encourage people to like your Facebook page:

- Post useful information that helps people in their business or personal life
- Ask (relevant) questions that inspire interactivity

- Post events that followers might like to attend
- Offer links to other sites, pages or videos that entertain or inform visitors and followers
- Congratulate other connections on their achievements
- Comment on relevant news items pertaining to your industry

Really, you are only limited by your imagination. But, like anything on the web, offer value. Give freely of your knowledge and experience. You'll find this returns far greater dividends than begging for likes because your followers will be genuinely interested in you, your page and your business. And isn't building relationships what Facebook is all about?

The Media Marketing Channel that Shines in a Disaster

When Christchurch experienced the second worst natural disaster in New Zealand's short history one social media channel stood out in the aftermath as key to providing information people wanted to know. Twitter.

In times of disaster, the greatest difficulty is not knowing what's going on. Not knowing what to do or where to go. Not knowing what's the safest course of action or what's going to put you in danger. Not knowing where the other members of your family are or if they are safe, and not knowing how to reach them.

The quake decimated the city's phone and power lines. Communication was only achievable through cell phone, and then only patchily as the network struggled under the huge volume of calls. Many people who had run for their lives had no time to pick up their belongings, leaving behind handbags, wallets and cell phones. Even if they'd picked up their car keys and their vehicle hadn't been squashed under tonnes of rubble, there was no way they could drive home – the roads were bent, buckled, blocked, cracked and flooded with liquefaction. This meant no access to radio broadcasts telling them what was going on.

Almost immediately, however, social networking emerged as the best way of passing on information. Hashtags were set up on Twitter that ran a constant stream of information. If you needed to know where the free showers were, where to go to lodge an insurance claim, how long it would be before the portaloos arrived in your neighbourhood, or the current death toll, everything was being communicated via Twitter. In fact, even if you had no other means of communication, you were better informed than most.

Of course, for many, Twitter as an information source was impractical. No power meant no computers – even if they survived the quake – and no method of charging cell phones, either. But very quickly power was restored to most of the city, allowing citizens to come up to speed on what was going on around them. It also allowed those of us not living in the quake zone to do our bit to help by passing on information to our networks.

Twitter has emerged as the social media of choice after a disaster. Messages are short and to the point. They provide a link to more information, and can be sent by anyone from their PC or their phone. This latter makes Twitter an excellent tool for imparting urgent messages quickly. Its viral nature means it can spread to a huge number of people almost simultaneously.

Instead of messages having to be sent to a media organisation for dissemination, tweets are direct. No editing, no manipulation by authorities who want to keep information quiet and no time delay. People can find out what you have to tell them in seconds, rather than hours.

From my observations of the Christchurch earthquake and its aftermath, I now believe that any company doing disaster planning should incorporate Twitter into its information channels. Smart phones are becoming more numerous, not less,

so the number of people who can access Twitter while mobile only continues to grow, making this channel even more effective. And now, Facebook users can have texts sent to their mobiles, making it more useful in disasters, too. Which is excellent because it's good to know that in a disaster, there is still a way of knowing what's going on.

The 4U's of Tweet Writing

Still think Twitter's a waste of time? Not sure of the value of LinkedIn? Wonder what on earth people see in Facebook? Let me tell you a secret that few people seem to be aware of: it's all about cross-marketing.

Most of us have experienced cross marketing – it's when you order a Big Mac and you're asked if you want fries with that.

In social media it's now quite common for different platforms (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook etc) to be linked. Programs now allow you to write one entry and upload it to all three sites.

And individual platforms allow you to cross-market from your website. For example, once I update the blog on my website, it automatically comes up on my Facebook business page.

Once upon a time (a year or two ago), when you wrote a tweet and it disappeared too fast down followers' feeds to be seen by those you wanted it to – tough luck. It was gone. Now, however, that same tweet will come up on your LinkedIn page, your LinkedIn company page, your Facebook page and your Facebook business page – in fact anywhere you want it to. Which is pretty important with many people following so many tweeters that the tweet feed is nothing more than a blur.

Of course, there's a downside. All your tweets hang around. They'll be read by people checking their other platform pages. So your tweets need to be useful. Informative even. In fact, here's a lesson I've adapted from American Writers and Artists Institute (AWAI), it's called the 4U's. That means every tweet should be useful, unique, urgent and ultra-specific. Not easy to do in 140 characters, I know, but even if you manage to incorporate three out of four you'll still be writing much better tweets than most twitterers.

Social Media Marketing – Best Practices

Social media builds from the bottom up, not the top down. Success begins with delivering value.

Do

Be generous.

Empower your followers, friends and contacts to feed great content to their audiences.

Be open to new ways of thinking and working.

Look for and encourage social media alliances.

Be consistent in what you share.

Be human – it's what social media is for.

Offer a varied and interesting diet.

Don't pay or get paid.

Don't

Don't follow people just to get followed

Don't tweet or update your wall just once a week

Don't sign up for too many social media sites

Other Reports Offered FREE by Word Wizard

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Social Media Marketing Services offered by the Word Wizard

The Word Wizard's Social Media Marketing Service Package operates in three parts:

1. Setting the goals and objectives of your social media marketing campaign
2. Choosing the best channels to achieve the goals and setting up accounts and pages
3. Creating and managing content

Goals and objectives

This could include any of the following:

- To reach a larger audience of readers, prospects and customers
- To build the brand
- To engage readers
- To engage influencers and connectors
- To increase customer loyalty
- To drive people to places and events
- To improve customer service
- To generate direct sales

Channel decision and set-up

This could include any of the following (or others):

- Twitter
- Facebook
- LinkedIn

- You Tube
- Blogs
- Foursquare
- Delicious
- Stumbled Upon
- Podcasts
- Flickr

Content creation and management

This can include any of the following:

- Planning content
- Sourcing content
- Writing content
- Uploading content including blogs, status updates, tweets etc
- Monitoring comments / likes / shares / retweets

The Word Wizard's Social Media Marketing Service is priced on a per project basis and depends on the reach of each client's SMM programme and level of involvement. To discuss your company's social media marketing needs contact the Word Wizard:

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