

Managing Your Company's Social Media Presence To Increase Sales



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Keeping track of the numerous social networking profiles for a small to medium-sized business can get tricky when both the budget and the amount of hands-on experience with Twitter, Facebook, Google+, and LinkedIn is limited. However, managing the presence of a business on the social media landscape can be easy to control, inexpensive, and can bring much higher engagement to loyal customers; ultimately expanding the reach of a business all in one fell swoop.

Social media has transformed the way we use the Internet and share content online. And with that, consuming and sharing all sorts of different content from businesses has become that much easier, even becoming a very profitable mode of marketing that can bring in a steady stream of sales and leads when done properly. Like with anything associated with online marketing, though, businesses conduct a balancing act; the company's message must get out there, while cautiously avoiding going overboard with engagement efforts. Cross this line and customers may find it too much of a "sales pitch" and go elsewhere.

How can that be avoided successfully? How can a business create a great social media presence and manage it properly? It doesn't have to be a mystery or require tons of time and money. Everything can be planned out in an afternoon and implemented immediately.

The Rise of the Social Networks

More than 200 popular and well-known social networks exist at the moment, and that doesn't even include smaller, niche sites. Roughly 340 million tweets being sent out from Twitter daily, one billion statuses on Facebook daily, and Google+ is seeing about 400 million of active users on their social network. All of that content becomes social media; the content that is shared, viewed and shared some more - ultimately becoming a powerful tool to make that final sale.

Which social networks bring the most engagement to businesses? How about the best reach for their brand? While most social media experts can argue on this topic for hours, these are the biggest social networks on which all businesses need to be present:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Google+
- Pinterest

Of course, this list has the potential of changing for each business's social media strategy. Regardless, the above are the most popular, have the biggest reach, and the most engaged users for a business of any size. Five may seem like quite a bit, but each one has its own purpose within a strategy and all can work in a cohesive manner.

All sorts of businesses can have multiple accounts on dozens of websites, all of them serving a different purpose, while also providing the same brand image and message. It is ultimately up to the business to decide which of social networks are best to distribute content and get more sales. Let's take a look at the biggest social media networking sites and how your business should think about them...

King of Social Media

Facebook has become a staple for any business and is a great starting point for a comprehensive social-media strategy. Lots of free plug-ins and add-ons can be used on Facebook Pages for businesses of all types, especially on the small to medium scale. Facebook is also the most active social network, with a reported 1 billion users. Facebook has a highly customizable advertising network that even a business with a smaller advertising budget can afford.

Bite-Sized Management

Then, there is Twitter. Considered the second-largest social network, Twitter is perfect for those bite-sized pieces of content and social media to really entice the community and provide on-the-go engagement with customers. Twitter is also indexed on Google, which is perfect for page rank. Not only is Twitter great for better engagement and one-to-one "conversations" with customers, it is also great for customer relationship management in general.

Socially Professional

LinkedIn is increasingly showing its prowess in the social media sphere. LinkedIn's new individual business pages, much like Facebook, allows companies to showcase their brand, their company's internal culture, and forge another link in social media management. Despite all of the positives, LinkedIn is still best to fill in that B2B gap to nurture potential sales with fellow businesses, or even garner new consumers through networking with other professionals.

The Newcomers

Google+ and Pinterest round out our Top 5. Both are relatively new to the arena, but both have already garnered lots of users, engagement, and reach. Choosing between the two might seem difficult, but it can be easily done by deciding what type of "role" the website can provide that is missing in a social-media campaign. For example, Facebook is a good generalized "hub" of social media, Twitter fills in the on-the-go gap, and LinkedIn takes care of that B2B networking. When you're thinking about adding another link to that strategy, it can come down to a few choices: Google+ is generally considered to have a "close knit" community while Pinterest takes care of the picture and online image gap.. Or, there's just setting up an account on both for a wider presence and reach online overall.

New and popular social networks are always popping up, such as Quora, Learnist, Path, Instagram, and many others. Many social media professionals agree that part of any social media strategy should be a way to monitor trending social networks so that businesses can secure their brand's name on them. This ensures that no one else can take that name and create possible slander on the brand name, causing a potential messy PR stunt.

Also, a new network can create a brand new avenue for content and yet another sales funnel. Many businesses have been flocking to Instagram, for example, especially after Facebook acquired it, which made that integration even stronger. All it takes is a little of research to discover new paths to sales.

Creating Social Media Content

Once a decision has been made as to which social networks are best; it is time to get work on the content, which will populate all of those profiles. Surveys of B2B and B2C companies conducted by the Content Marketing Institute found that blog posts, online articles, newsletters, and infographics are the most popular types of content.

Finding the perfect "sweet spot" of content is entirely up to demographics of the business, although blogging, online articles, newsletters, and infographics are all great ways to bring in leads because they are consistently successful ways of obtaining customers. Just as Facebook and Twitter are staples in a social media strategy, so too are these types of content in marketing.

But, creating that content and calling it day isn't the way to do things--especially with online marketing to get more sales. With all of that data available on demographics, customer personas, and everything else in-between, content with purpose is always going to win out. High-quality content that provides something to the user and provides more to the sales funnel can seem difficult to create. But consistently great content isn't impossible to create.

What Types Of Content?

- Images have the most engagement and reach on Facebook and Twitter (and obviously Pinterest). Infographics, "meme" pictures, daily office pictures, even stock images linked to online articles are all popular ways to ignite engagement, reach, and build a bigger community.
- Video content accounts for a major part of most businesses' content strategies now. In fact, YouTube rivals Facebook in reach and engagement when it comes to social media, so video is a great way to create a strong community of leads for sales.

- Blogging on a consistent schedule means a better rank on Google; content that is easily shared by the community, and can be easily automated to show up on social media feeds via WordPress and other blogging platforms.
- When an idea or event is bigger than a blog post, switch the format to an article, press release, white paper, and even an e-book. These normally fall into the "conversion" part of the sales funnel by providing free incentives to users to become customers of your business. By allowing them to download bigger chunks of content, that reach on social media is grown.

Outsourcing the creation of content is another option that doesn't have to take a huge chunk out of the budget. There are several different websites out there such as Microworkers, Help A Reporter Out (HARO), Media Pison, Interact Media/Zerys, and many others, which provide the writers and content creators to boost that social media strategy. But, if you're working with a much smaller budget, doing everything in-house can be just as effective.

Social Media Management On a Budget

Bigger companies have the luxury of having entire teams of social media experts to manage their content and social networks, but that doesn't mean small and medium sized businesses should neglect social media management completely. A business can have a strong online community and expansive reach without having to spend thousands of dollars monthly.

Make it a group effort internally

When it comes to sharing and social media, one key ingredient will make it all work: People! Encouraging the entire office to share, engage, and expand the reach of the company as a whole is a great and inexpensive way to bring in sales. The entire office can be the social media team to easily rival a major company's own social media department by half the price.

Maximize the help of interns

Sometimes a little extra outside help is needed, but seasoned veterans aren't the only ones with talent and ideas. In fact, employing the help of local colleges by employing interns is an inexpensive way to build up that social media strategy and have an ongoing team to manage it all.

Make it a required task

Everyone is busy and time is money. Sometimes work can become a little too overwhelming, but sitting down to reorganize the day and make social media a requirement is just needed at times to make sure it can expand its ROI and bring in those sales. After taking all of that time to plan and implement everything, it seems

rather unfair to neglect it all now.

Automation is key for management

Most everything in the realm of social media can be automated. Social networks and social media management tools have the ability to "schedule" posts to make sure management can mostly be automated daily or even weekly. Setting up the automation itself still takes a little time, though.

As with any sort of marketing strategy, scheduling is a key component to making everything work. Creating an easy-to-follow schedule is an inexpensive and time-savvy way to make sure social media management isn't pushed aside or forgotten, as well as validating all of the different methods to manage it all.

Social Analytics and Reporting

While managing a social-media presence and creating content is all well and good, analytics and reporting are important tools to make sure the marketing budget doesn't go to waste. The business of social media analytics has ballooned into a huge industry, allowing for businesses to take advantage of data collecting tools to better tweak their campaigns, but what exactly is being monitored?

Facebook provides analytics into a Facebook Page, third-party tools exist for Twitter analytics, and even LinkedIn gives some insight into the customer landscape for a business. But most of them only offer limited data on users in the form of views, conversions, and click-through rates. Companies sell services to mine data from text messages, special online promotions, create workbenches for reporting, and perform other snazzy tasks. Businesses looking to do as much as they can on their own – and with an eye on the bottom line – have options.

What should you be monitoring and reporting on?

- User reaction on social platforms. This includes comments, tagged status updates, tweets, and messages sent directly to the business. Social media is more than just distributing content and making more sales; it is also customer-relationship management and creating a positive, lasting impression on people.
- Engagement of users following the brand and their social circles. While creating content is fine, an engaged audience must exist to heighten the reach and achieve the intended purpose of creating buzz and directing new customers to the business.
- Influencers within the social media sphere relative to the business that should be reached. Monitoring their engagement ratios, how much their message can reach, and potential conversion rates of top social-media power users can mean a great collaborative initiative for more sales.

- Click-through rates and conversions are just as much a part of social media as keyword campaigns, so making sure every piece of content is doing its job is another task that needs to be monitored during a campaign. Just how many people are clicking through to the content? How many conversions are coming in from that?

Social Media Tools For Businesses

Being able to analyze, track, manage, and update all of those accounts doesn't have to mean signing into each website individually, or using analytics on each of the different websites and wasting tons of valuable time. In fact, everything can be streamlined cheaply to make sure that everything can be easily read--or glanced over--all on one page. Social media management suites have become a must-have staple for any business, but finding the right one can seem a bit daunting with all of those options out there.

Ideally, goals such as click-through rates, views, conversion rates, and other parameters are the best to monitor during a social media campaign. Establishing close connections with customers, building a loyal community of engaged users, more paths for lead generation, higher customer retention, and, of course, obtaining higher sales numbers are other worthy goals. Sometimes a little outside help is needed to track all of that data. Social media dashboards such as TweetDeck, HootSuite, and others are some of the most popular ways to do this.

Popular Social Media Tools

- **HootSuite:** Offers a tiered system of relatively inexpensive features for small- and medium-sized businesses to streamline their social-media management. Also works closely with Twitter as a collaborator.
- **TweetDeck:** Another popular social media management tool and go-to alternative to HootSuite.
- **MediaFunnel:** A comprehensive social media management suite that can provide an easier way to talk to customers, land them directly to sales pages, and even provide customer-relationship support all in one tool.

Bringing It All Together

Social media management is here to stay. Creating a strategy that is highly customizable and works for any type of business doesn't have to require thousands of dollars in a marketing budget, nor does it mean having to hire on an entirely new team to manage all of that social media. Social media isn't just for the big boys. Small- and medium-sized businesses have the perfect advantage when it comes to social media.

How, exactly? Businesses on a smaller scale can have well-developed company cultures that can be showcased and transparent on social networks. Company transparency is a highly sought-after quality these days because of the importance of online security by consumers. All of the content is homegrown and personalized, adding that "spark" for better engagement. And, finally, most social media is geared toward small- to medium-sized businesses in the first place.

It's time to take advantage of that and create some great social media content. All it takes is being able to take that step into creating a plan, implementing said plan, tweaking it along the way, and becoming a social-media management rock star.

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