

How to Begin With Social Media for Your Business Success

About the Author

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Introduction

Currently a lot is being said about social media. The term is relentlessly tossed around without any great discussion about what it is. As there are so many platforms that can be utilised, it is a minefield that can become very frustrating for someone who is starting out on their social media journey and would like to utilise it for their business.

Social media is not actually complicated but most business people say where do I start?

This e-Book is a beginner's guide on how to get started using social media. It is intended to support people who are unsure how to commence with social media and who want to learn a bit more about it before interacting on social networks sites.

The goal of this book is to get you thinking about your social media strategy. Instead of just diving in and using the technology, the aim is to have you interacting with the process with some knowledge about how social media works. This is the foundational work to set up a successful social media plan.

Technology is not the basis of this e-Book as it is only the vehicle platform and this space is evolving and developing so quickly. My objective is to get you to learn a bit about the basics of social media so that you can understand how to begin.

Once you understand the fundamentals of social media you will be better prepared and confident to interact, participate and contribute to the environment that is shifting the way we communicate.

What is Social Media?

Before getting started with social media some understanding about it is vital. Although it seems that the tools are the priority, they are only the facilitator and should actually be the last thing you consider. Most important is to understand social media and its purpose. This is because understanding how social media operates will enable you to interact more effectively. In turn you can more likely connect better, thereby creating greater opportunities for success.

What is social media? Ask ten people this question and you will probably get ten different answers. None of them will be completely right or wrong. This is part of the challenge of social media – it can't be easily described and there are so many differing opinions.

Although, social media is best described as online media (web or mobile based) that allows two way communication and a blending of technology and social interaction, I believe, it is best understood as 'what it provides' rather than 'what it is'. There are certain characteristics that shape social media that separate it from traditional media and allow a picture to be formed of what it provides.

FOUR OF THESE CHARACTERISTICS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

Openness	Participation
<p>The Internet is built on the openness concept. Social media is no different. Opinions, contributions and sharing of information (that is free to access) are the core aspects of not only the Internet but social media as well. Barriers to accessing content are limited for this very purpose – everyone has equal access (in theory at least).</p>	<p>Traditional media is a linear medium that broadcasts information to an audience (i.e. television). Social media is collaborative with contributions from the audience (i.e. user generated content) allowing them to participate in a two-way conversation. This in turn blurs the line between media and the audience.</p>
Community	Connectedness
<p>Groups are formed very easily to develop communities that share common interests (i.e. particular political views or hobbies). These communities can share information and engage according to their topic of interest.</p>	<p>All these factors allow people to connect not only through their conversation but also through member's resources and links to other sites. This makes people feel like they belong or have a common purpose.</p>

Getting your head around these 4 principles is key. Understanding that **social media is about social interaction** first and marketing a distant second will allow you to fully utilise the space for the purpose it was intended. This is what will build connection, interaction and most importantly trust.

Dos and Don'ts of Social Media Etiquette

Social media is fast becoming a part of every day business life even if business doesn't want it to. This is because there are millions of people who use these different networks. These sites are a great resource to expand your network and directly tap into your audience.

However, most businesses are not really sure how to utilise these networks and use traditional media rules to guide them. This is not the way to go about it. (Although traditional marketing techniques should not be used in the social media space, this subject is too large to discuss here). There are, however, certain unspoken rules about social media etiquette, what you should and should not do. Breaking these rules would not be wise for your business reputation.

Here are some dos and don'ts of social media. Stick with these and your reputation will remain intact.

DOs

- Use your real name to maintain a genuine and professional profile. Update your profile regularly with new information so that the profile doesn't become static.
- Social media is 'social' so be friendly and obviously social. Use it to connect and interact.
- Think before you write. Not everything should be shared so take a moment before publishing.
- Your brand philosophy is a must. Just because you are online using social media doesn't mean you abandon your business beliefs and values.
- Learn the social culture of the networks you are part of. This way you are less likely to make a social gaffe, which will, have you thrown out of the community.
- Be authentic and honest but also professional. Engage in the conversation. Your audience will know if are misleading them so don't even try.

- Build a strong social network. Make sure those in the network are the people you want to be interacting with. A huge following doesn't equal a strong community.
- Listen to what others are saying. Social media is a two-way conversation. It is not all about you.
- Write inspirational posts. Reveal how you overcame problems and you will appear real. People gravitate to motivating tales.
- Keep trying. Social media success doesn't happen overnight. It takes time and effort to gain a reputation and a following.

DON'Ts

- No spamming. You will lose your credibility and all your efforts will amount to nothing.
- No 'full on' marketing tactics to sell. Any marketing must be subtle or you will lose your connections.
- Don't send automated message to new followers. It is annoying.
- Negativity is not on. Don't criticise your competitors or constantly complain about your bad days or your clients.
- Never forget your online reputation management. Monitor what people say and take what they say seriously.
- Don't try to speed up your social marketing campaign. Social media is a slow process, which takes time to actively engage conversation.
- Excessively linking to your own sites is a common mistake. You can link but not with every second message you send.
- No sabotaging of your competitors by saying stupid things or pretending to be an unhappy customer. You will be found out.
- If people unfollow you, don't automatically unfollow them. It is childish.
- Don't forget to regularly update your social profiles. Social media is not static, it is constantly moving so when you have something new, add it to your profile.

Have a Clear Goal

A lot of the time, business gets into social media because it's free. They don't really know how to utilise the platforms but don't want to miss out so they jump in without giving much thought to what they are doing. Social media platforms may be free to join and use, however, a lot of time is needed to contribute to the platforms. This is time that can be used on other business activities, so think carefully about how you want to use your time.

The key point in any social media strategy is to have a goal or purpose which is written down. There are 2 main reasons for this.

1. It gives you a focus. This minimises frustration as you have an understanding as to why you are using social media for your business.
2. It manages your social media expectations. Instead of being concerned about what is not working you can focus on your plan to move forward.

Before setting yourself some goals, ask yourself the questions on the following page. Take the time to answer these before you get started. It will assist you in determining whether social media is actually for you and your business. If you decide it is and you want to give it a try then you will have some solid preparatory information to set your goals and begin the process.

Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Why do I want to use social media for my business?
2. What do I want to get out of Social Media? – i.e. more newsletter subscribers, branding exposure
3. Are my target audience using social media?
4. Am I comfortable learning about social media?
5. Am I willing to put in hard work to get my social media plan off the ground?
6. Do I have the time to devote to using social media?
7. Do I have the resources to devote to social media?
8. If I don't have the time, energy, or effort, resources for social media, can I outsource it?

Answers to these questions, will support you in moving forward with your social media plan if you decide to take the journey.

To set your goals, use the **SMART formula**. It is the simplest and easiest method to use.

S - specific, well defined, clear, stretching

M - measurable, meaningful, motivational, goal is obtainable

A - attainable, achievable, action-oriented

R - realistic, relevant, reasonable, rewarding, results-oriented

T - time-based, timely, tangible

Remember, social media is not a race

Social media is about people, conversations, friendships, education, and communication. When you are setting your social media goals, remember to assess what you want to get out of your experience. If you do this from the beginning, you can avoid the frustration of having little success to show in the early stages.

Benefits of Social Media for Business

Social media is not all about marketing and advertising. If you want fast results and Return on Investment (ROI) you will be disappointed. Social media is not easy to measure, as you can't put a numeric value on conversation. This can be hard to get your head around but if you can social media can be very beneficial to business. Determining how to use the social media space is for each individual business to work out. What is clear, however, is that social media should not be ignored. It has gone mainstream and there is a wealth of opportunities and possibilities. The emphasis is on conversation. Here are some real benefits:

Wider Audience Reach & Exposure

There are literally millions of people using social media for both personal and professional reasons. This means there is potentially a massive pool of people that can be tapped into and where your business can gain exposure. The possibilities are enormous.

Customer Relationship Building

With this potential exposure, interacting with your audience is in a way much simpler as you have a sizeable audience potentially in one space. This interaction is vital in social media and it can be used to build customer relationships. It is all about conversation and connection in a social environment. By conversing with your audience, your customers may gain a different perspective about your business and hopefully increase confidence and trust in what you do.

Cost Effective

Although, most social networks are free, there is a time and energy component in managing your social media accounts. This does require a commitment to keep your information up to date and respond to queries. If, however, your business spends a lot of money on advertising, yet you are still just one of the crowd, think of the potential benefits of tapping directly into your audience instead of going through the middleman. Getting the right social media strategy though is important in this regard.

Proactive Branding Management

If done correctly, your online presence should allow your brand to grow. By being proactive and utilising social media, you can be hands-on with how you want your brand to feel. You can start to build up an audience who will gain confidence in what you say and will start spreading the word. This will allow you to be on the front foot for when the negative comments come.

Risk Management Strategy

Businesses are fearful of using social media, as they are afraid of the negative feedback they will receive. However, if you are involved with the technology you can counter this and neutralise the risk. The negative comments will come regardless of whether you are participating or not. When you are on board you can be proactive and one step ahead with your risk management strategy. If you have been conversing with your audience and you have built up trust they will spread your positive message and you can correct the negativity.

Conclusion

Even if you may not completely understand social media and how it works, business needs to be involved and have a social media presence. Millions of people are using it to engage, interact and connect. It is essential for businesses to learn to engage with their customers this way and discover the endless possibilities.

There is no right or wrong for social media. It is a matter of experimentation to see what works for your business. Through research, engagement and trial and error, you can find a structure that will make your business more efficient.

The most important aspect however, is to enjoy the process and have fun!