

Social Media – By Anna Cairo

Social media is gaining in importance every day. Ten years ago businesses were asking do we need a website. Today having a website is mandatory for any business. This is now true for social media. Millions of people use social network sites and business needs to have a presence to connect with these networks of people.

However, social media without a well thought out plan is ineffective. That is why I work with you strategically to plan an approach best suited to your business requirements so as to increase your online visibility and to maximise opportunities.

What is Social Media?

Social media can be challenging to describe, as it is a broad umbrella term that covers a number of platforms. It is best described as online media that allows two-way communication, blending technology and social interaction. However, it is best understood as 'what it provides' rather than 'what it is'. Certain characteristics shape social media that separate it from traditional media. Four of these characteristics include the following:

- Openness
- Participation
- Community
- Connectedness

Traditional media occurs in a linear direction, however with social media communication occurs in a two way conversation allowing a sharing of information, thoughts and ideas. This allows connection and discussion to take place on any number of topics or issues.

Social media is predominately a 'social' tool although more and more businesses are using it to engage their audiences for a number of purposes including:

- Recruiting
- Managing brand reputation
- Growing customer database
- Sourcing new ideas
- Customer feedback

There are a number of technologies when it comes to social media and this can make it more problematic than it need be. Businesses don't need to utilise all the technologies just the ones which are suitable for their business needs and goals. Three of the most popular social media networks are the following:

Blogging

This is an important tool that business can use to raise their profile and engage in a two-way conversation with their users. This engagement allows business to advance their expertise by posting relevant and useful information which can be done through text, images or links. As users can respond to posts and add to the conversation, a relationship can form which can increase trust and credibility – essential elements for business.

Having a blog is a great way to drive people to your website as any comments posted can be linked back to user's networks for others to see increasing the visibility of your business.

Facebook

Facebook is a social network site where individuals or businesses can create a profile for free. Once a profile is created, business can join other networks or add friends increasing their potential network of people.

By using some of the other features of Facebook, such as, uploading photos or posting information on your wall you are able to create a community, reinforcing your brand and linking to users on a potentially extensive scale.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social network site that is business focused and used mainly for professional networking. It is a powerful tool because it ranks your profile at the top of Google searches when people search via your name.

Once you establish your profile you can network to find colleagues to add to your network. As people regularly change employment as well as location, LinkedIn can be used to stay in touch with colleagues, communicate and collaborate or to explore opportunities, ideas or build your professional reputation.