
Effectively Using Social Media for Your Business

In our article last month we talked about the value of social media as a customer retention tool. This month we're going to focus on the value of social media as a sales tool.

Social media is an excellent venue to promote your products and services, and one of the biggest benefits, is the chance to stand out in an increasingly noisy world. This exposure leads to brand awareness, increased web traffic, improved search engine optimization and new leads.

The Top Benefits of Social Media:

- **The cost to participate in social media is minimal.** Compared to other forms of marketing, such as print, broadcast and online advertising, the actual expense to market your business with social media is relatively low. The greatest cost will be time and resources.
- **Gain credibility and authenticate your brand.** When you focus on sharing industry expertise, insight and knowledge people will view your company as a resource. This develops a company's credibility and builds trust. Blog about your business and share tips/advice. If your followers trust you they'll tell others. Social media also personalizes your businesses. The best way to build a relationship with your audience is to share your personality with them.
- **Opportunities for providing customer service and feedback.** Maintaining and improving client relations, and conversing with prospects via social media create opportunities to improve your company's reputation, and allows for increased engagement with your stakeholders.
- **Increase traffic to your company website.** Once you develop a sizable audience and begin posting links to products, pages, blog posts etc. you will see an increase of traffic to your website.
- **Search engine optimization.** Search engines index content on social media sites which will create links back to your website and improve your search engine rankings. As search engine rankings improve, so will business exposure and lead generation efforts, and overall marketing expenses will decrease.
- **Brand awareness.** Social media gives everyone a voice. Whether you choose to listen to the comments

about your company is up to you, but you need to realize that this is an opportunity. Positive comments should always be rewarded with gratitude. Negative comments should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. It may surprise you to find out how many negative comments result from a simple misunderstanding. You will also be surprised by how enthusiastic people, in the social space, become when they learn that companies are listening to them and are eager to rectify adverse situations. This is an excellent chance to turn a negative into a positive. Conversely, if you don't monitor what is being said about your brand, you will miss these opportunities, and as result, you could suffer damage to your brand.

- **You can generate leads and better develop your business.** If your current and potential customers are online, you need to be there, too. Social Media allows you to reach people who might not otherwise know about your products and services. In order to generate leads through social media it requires equal investments of time, strategy and patience. You also need to be consistent with these things; if you do not plan on being consistent, don't do it at all.

Some basic steps to get you started:

1. Add social bookmark links to web pages, email correspondence and/or blog posts to improve your exposure and to make it easy to share your information.
2. Focus on using a conversational approach when building business relationships.
3. Couple your email newsletter content with additional blog content for improved interactions.
4. Test an integrated approach to generating leads by incorporating a blog, social networks and a face-to-face event.
5. Investigate into whether your product sells better by recommendation or by education. Social media will help with the recommendation side and videos and podcasts are excellent for providing education.
6. Track your inbound links so you know where your traffic is coming from.
7. Don't be afraid to fail. Be ready to apologize. Admit when you've made a mistake.

The most important thing to remember is to be true to the spirit of social media and act honestly and transparently. Don't use social networks as one-way marketing and advertising channels. Instead, talk to people and engage them and leads will begin to trickle into your sales funnel. Marketers must understand that social media works very differently from traditional direct marketing channels. There's no place for aggressive sales pitches and marketers need to be mindful of their tone.

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