

How Can You Use Social Media in Your Business?

The whole social media bandwagon has really taken off and every business seems to be using it. However many of those businesses drop out when they don't see immediate results. In order to get results you need to be persistent, original and consistent. This does not mean setting up on Facebook and Twitter, posting a few things to your wall or sending a few tweets and expecting your customers and prospects to be impressed or attracted by your offering.

What can you do to be different?

My view is that you do not actually need to be different to stand out from the crowd, you just need to be involved on a daily basis. Passing on information, giving advice, responding to praise and criticism as well as getting your message out regularly, but not exactly the same message all the time which will bore your audience and seem like spam.

The basic steps:

- Take care with setting up your Facebook and Twitter presence. Use logos and backgrounds consistently, making sure they fit within the constraints of whichever platform you are using. Try to get as much useful information about your business as you can into your social media sites. Link everything to your website because that is where you have the opportunity to promote your business in detail.
- Don't just use Facebook and Twitter, they are easy to set up and use but your business may be better represented on other sites such as LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr and Foursquare. You should also use sites such as Digg and StumbleUpon to draw attention to your business.
- Blog. If you have any sort of enthusiasm for writing, write about your business or the issues affecting it and post it on a blog. Maybe you could ask your customers to contribute.
- Don't try to reinvent the wheel, watch what your competitors are doing and keep up with them. Even better, keep ahead of them. Watch what other businesses are doing, there may be some ideas that you could use to promote your business.
- Keep it fresh. You should have something to say every day. It doesn't have to be much but it needs to be relevant. Don't be afraid of giving advice if someone is asking for it, even if they are on another continent. People will see that you are being helpful and knowledgeable so they will pay more attention to you in future.
- Get involved. You can make your business the focus of a community based event or provide a free service to local businesses, even if it is just a mention of their events on your Facebook wall.
- Listen to your customers and try to respond by offering the sort of promotions and deals that most appeal to them. If they like your business and say so online, then let them know you appreciate it. If there are complaints then deal with them swiftly. It is best to take this process offline if you can, to avoid a messy discussion in the public eye.
- Use all the tools you can to manage all this activity. There are many products out there that enable you to manage your social media more efficiently. I like to write my tweets and wall posts in the evening but schedule them to be sent out when my customers and prospects are most likely to see them. Try to avoid those tools that automate your social media activity, it shows and it comes across as being false.

- Don't expect all this to achieve instant results, as you build the trust of your audience you will notice the benefits. Social media is a competitive space and until you have a momentum then you will struggle to be noticed.
- You could outsource all your social media activity, but you should only consider a provider that can give you the confidence that they will manage your social media consistently over time and not just provide an initial three months intensive activity.

©South Wales Social Media 2010