

## **Social Media – Giving your audience a Voice.**

I read a definition of social media every day, but I don't see many reasons for small businesses to embrace it. Unless you have plenty of time to set up your presence on one or more of the social media sites, and it seems that three is the absolute minimum, then your message is going to get lost in the massive stream of advertising, promotion, information and plain rubbish that characterises social media.

### **So, why do it?**

The one advantage of social media that has caught my attention is the ability it has to give you, the business owner, access to the views and opinions of your customers and prospects. Take Amazon for example, not the most obvious social networking site but I never buy a product from Amazon unless it is favourably reviewed. I use Trip Adviser in the same way. Customer or user feedback is what can make or break a product or service and it has never been more freely available.

### **How can you use your social media presence to your advantage?**

If you have a social media presence it can act as a focal point for customer observations and feedback. It also gives you the opportunity to manage and respond to comments as well as interacting with individuals or groups of customers. In order to achieve this, your social media presence needs to be attractive and accessible, customers and prospects need an excuse to visit you and have a reasonable expectation that they will benefit from their visit in some way. Your interaction should be conversational rather than confrontational, respond to praise as well as criticism. Have a clear policy to deal with any serious or malicious adverse comments. Be prepared to recognise when you are at fault and also try to view every situation from the customer's perspective.

If this all seems to be a time consuming process, it is. So get some help, there are a lot of people like me that will allow you to outsource some or all of your social media, just pick one that is fairly local and that you can trust.