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Social Media for Small Business

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There are plenty of small business owners and entrepreneurs fully engaged in social media. There are also just as many now just sticking their toes in the water. But if you're not one of them, don't beat yourself up. A recent study by the University of Maryland reveals that only 24% of small business owners are utilizing social media in their marketing arsenal. Feel better now? Good. Now let's do something about it!

When done correctly, social media can increase sales, improve customer service, and provide a nice pop to your bottom line. But if it's done wrong, you might as well go ride a bike with one wheel for all the good it'll do you. Of course, in order to generate all of those potential benefits, it may be a good idea to step back and get a big picture of which social media platforms are most valuable and how to maximize their effectiveness.

As you put your feet up on the desk to dive into all of this pearly wisdom, we first need to decide which social media alternatives deserve your valuable time. Right now, the big three are Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Each have their own unique benefits and should be used in different ways to produce the best results. And of course, not each is right for everyone.

Twitter

The only thing more hyped these days than Twitter may be the cast of Jersey Shore (and yes – Snookie and The Situation are on Twitter). But of course, we're more interested in Twitter for generating business, not sharing the tawdry details about our personal lives (if only our personal lives were so interesting).

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Twitter can be a huge time sink that devolves into useless drivel with strangers, or it can be used to extend your reach with current and potential customers. Here are 5 tips for maximizing Twitter:

1. Setup a free Twitter account with your own name or your business name. If you're a consultant or the personality of your company, use your name. If not, go with your business name.
2. Use Twitter search to look for other people or companies of interest in your area. Then "follow" them.
3. Anytime you find a link to an interesting article or have a helpful tip that comes to mind for your customers, share it with your followers.
4. Create more Twitter followers by promoting your Twitter page on your website, in your email signature, and in all your collateral materials.
5. Find your Twitter balance. 1-3 Tweets a day is just right. Some days will be more, some less. And never miss the chance to engage other Twitter users.

Facebook

The first thing you need to decide is whether you want to use Facebook for just your personal life or a combination along with your work life. Hmmmmm. Thought about it? OK. Let me help you out. Keep it separate. Unlike Twitter, Facebook has become split into two camps, personal and business. Your family and friends love you, but they just don't need to know about your latest product offerings and your fans don't need to see your family vacation pictures.

If you want to use Facebook for business, create a "fan page." You'll need to have a personal Facebook page in order to create your fan page, so that should be step one for you to get rolling.

LinkedIn

If there is an unsung hero in the social media world for professionals, it's LinkedIn. Everyone in business should have a LinkedIn profile. The best part about LinkedIn? It's virtually no

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maintenance once your profile is finished! The only thing you need to do is occasionally check in and find more connections to be part of your network. Here are some tips to maximize your LinkedIn profile:

- Complete your profile. LinkedIn even provides you a “percentage done” icon to let you know when your profile is complete.
- Use your connections to build your network. Once you’ve found folks to add to your network, look at their connections and invite those folks you know to become part of your network.
- Get recommendations from happy clients. Testimonials rule!
- Grow your network by joining relevant industry and alumni groups.

Generating new customers and maintaining relationships with current clients is easier than ever with social media. By utilizing Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, you can be sure that you’re expanding your reach and maintaining a helpful dose of top-of-mind-awareness with those good people that pay the bills.

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