

## Harnessing the Power of Social Media

**S**ocial media in today's society has developed a rather rocky reputation. From celebrities to presidents, almost everyone has a Twitter account or Facebook page. One can easily dismiss this form of communication as a passing fad driven in large part by young, tech-savvy kids, but that would be a mistake. The truth is social media is quickly becoming the lifeline between businesses and consumers.

Networking websites and mobile applications that enable users to share ideas and communicate effectively all fall under the broad umbrella of social media. With new apps and websites popping up every day, it is a tremendous challenge to keep track of all of the players.

Currently, the social media sites that are most used by business are Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram. These sites all offer different types of sharing platforms and use varying forms of communication to engage their audience. It is worth your time to explore a number of the leading social media sites to see which one will work best with the type of business that you have as. Some will be a better fit than others.

Facebook, for example is perfect for posting news and sharing content, which is why so many businesses have pages on this site. Twitter is an "on the go" application geared towards the short and to-the-point message, offering news in tweets that have a limit of 140 characters. Pinterest is a rather new site that encourages users to create virtual bookmarks and mood boards for sites and news they want to share. A social

media site that is a bit more visual but still professional is Instagram. Instagram offers the sharing of photos and images and links directly to Facebook.

Utilizing the power of social media for your business can be a daunting task, especially if you started your company years before Facebook appeared on the scene. The businesses that survive and prosper are the ones that are best able to adapt to change. Everyday, more and more potential clients are making purchasing decisions based on what

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they read on social media sites. Focusing your attention to marketing on social media is the key to communicating to the masses in this new era of instant news and knowledge.

The most important aspect of using social media is the ability to provide quality content to your followers. On sites such as Facebook, businesses are able to create pages where customers and clients can "like" and "follow" these companies. Having interesting content encourages your followers to share and

engage with your posts, thus opening up a new world of fans, followers, and potential clients. The more your content is shared, the more opportunities and traffic your company will see.

Understanding your audience is also a key factor in developing a social media-driven marketing approach to your business. Tailoring your content to the type of followers and fans you want to attract to your site is an exercise in customer service. Take the time to narrow down your target audience and create the content that attracts these followers who will engage in your posts.

Word travels fast through the world of social media. If you aren't using at least one social media platform to help promote your business, there is a good chance that your competitor is. According to the 2013 Social Media Marketing Report, 86% of businesses found using social media a key component to their marketing plan. 79% of these businesses attribute more exposure and increased traffic to social media marketing.

Twitter isn't just for the birds, and social media isn't just for your kids with their smart phones. Now is the time to utilize what social media has to offer. With quality content marketed to the appropriate target audience, you will quickly see the benefits of social media through increased exposure and incoming website traffic. ■

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