



public interest

When it comes to using social media for business, it's important to keep it impersonal.

So you've decided to take the plunge and get into social media as part of an online strategy for your business.

There are differences between using social media in your personal capacity and in a business context, but at the same time there are many similarities. Mostly, these revolve around your motives and what you should realistically expect to achieve from your social media endeavours.

In your personal life, mainstream platforms such as Facebook enable you to connect with friends and family and to stay in touch. There is no commercial motive so the nature of the relationship is social at its purest and it works brilliantly.

In the business world, simply keeping in touch on a purely social level has limited value, plus it's time consuming. So if socialising is not your primary motive, then what is? If you're already active in social media, you should stop for a moment to consider and formalise your objectives and what role social media is going to play in your online strategy. Choose your social media platforms carefully and set some clear goals and measurements, otherwise you may feel like a mouse on a treadmill – lots of effort but little to show for it.

To be successful in social media, you need to build a network or audience of like-minded individuals. Clearly, if your audience doesn't share common interests they won't stick around for long. However, building your social network is not an overnight project. Like a circle of friends, it takes some time and effort.

Don't get sucked into the hype of having more 'followers' or 'fans' than anyone else, it's not a numbers game. Sure you may feel you've earned some bragging rights, but it's far more important to

focus on quality. Sadly, the majority of fans and followers are social media voyeurs; following but not participating.

So what's a good starting point to promote your social media profiles? Add your profile links to your website and include them in your email signature. Ask your clients and suppliers to follow you. Search for blogs, Facebook pages and Twitter profiles of companies or individuals that are involved in your industry, and share your points of view by commenting and retweeting. Join LinkedIn and participate in the many 'groups and associations' that exist in this space. In addition to original content creation, active participation is essential to building an online audience and a reputation as an expert in your field.

People will follow you if you have something worthwhile to contribute, so 'give and you will receive'. A good strategy is to find a niche in which you can become recognized as an authority, then generate and share a consistent flow of useful information. But don't be tempted to stray from your subject, otherwise you may have an exodus of followers. It is acceptable to inject your personality into your social media, but leave the personal topics to your private profiles.

Unless you're a celebrity tweeter like Paris Hilton, there's unlikely to be any overnight success in social media. But the gratifying thing about being patient, committed and unselfish online is that you will eventually be rewarded in interesting and unexpected ways. Success takes time but the long-term rewards will make your social media efforts worthwhile.

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Send your questions to:

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We'll ask our experts to look at them and publish the answers in an upcoming issue.

DO YOU HAVE A SOCIAL MEDIA QUESTION YOU WOULD LIKE ANSWERED?

Characteristics of popular social media profiles

Visibility

Has multiple social media platforms (all inter-connected) where customers are exposed to and connect with their brand. Good visibility on social media sites is helping drive traffic back to the company's web site.

how to make this work for you

Have Twitter and Facebook icons on the front page of your website with a link directly to them and in reverse, list your company's website on your Twitter and Facebook accounts. You can take icons on your company website a step further with Facebook widgets. This allows you to post a box on your website which can simply show a condensed version of your Facebook page, or can include how many fans you have, and recent posts. This is a great way to entice your website visitors to your social media pages.

Participation

Successful online companies have got the fact that they are operating in a pull not push environment. They draw fans in by being interested in their opinions and what they have to say – good or bad!

how to make this work for you

If you are not afraid of the frank feedback you may get as a result, ask your fans what they think of a new product or service. However, be cautious of who in your company is managing your social media sites and responding to feedback as they will be providing a window into your company culture. Whatever you do, be consistent – set a small time aside everyday to managing your social media sites. It needn't be a difficult task. Find an interesting article related to your industry to post for a quick fix.

Community focused

Passionate about the platform they utilise and supportive of other users. They will re-tweet an interesting comment and recommend other worthy profiles to follow. Proactive with doing favours for and collaborations with online friends.

how to make this work for you

Look for and follow other interesting profiles and if appropriate recommend them to your own networks. Not only is this a favour to a fellow social media friend, but helps you build trust with your own audience. If someone shows interest in your social media profile, it could be because they work in a similar or complementary industry, so keep an eye out for potential opportunities to collaborate in mutually beneficial on-line ventures.

Providing value

By answering questions, providing relevant links and running competitions. They realise that constant submissions of links to their own website is boring and that social media users can spot a profile interested only in benefit extracting from a mile away.

how to make this work for you

You may wish to set up your Twitter or Facebook account as a forum where customers can go for answers on your product or service. Offering a small amount of free advice could be profitable for you in the long run. Or why not use social media for social good. If you support a charity, use your networks and encourage them to champion your cause.

In practice

Jacquie Dale, from Real Nutrition keeps her Facebook followers up to date by providing regular links to articles she has found online, and which she believes are worthy reads for her fans. This along

with regularly posting of nutritional values for popular food groups helps to endorse her expertise field of health wellbeing. You can get more information on Jacquie's website www.realnutrition.co.nz