

5 Ways a Small Business Can Succeed with Social Media

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Social media has altered the small-business marketing landscape. It is not enough to have a website even if it is informational and well-managed. Social media marketing is a must for a small business today – it is quick, precise, measurable and inexpensive. Anyone can do it but not everyone can do it right.

"Think of social media as a cocktail party," says David Meerman Scott, author of "The New Rules of Marketing and PR" and "World Wide Rave," books about how to create buzz online. "You don't go to a cocktail party and scream at the top of your lungs, 'Buy my product.' What works is you have some meaningful conversation first. And that's just how social media works."

Here are 5 ways your business can stay ahead of the competition and succeed in the new world of social media.

Build Your Community

Use free sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Leverage your business by creating a fan page on Facebook. Don't use your company name for your personal account on Facebook because you won't be able to use it for your business fan page. Pick a user name for Twitter with a maximum of 15 characters. Fill out your profile and upload a photo or business logo. LinkedIn is a great way to get the business results of Facebook without the clutter of wall postings, unnecessary applications and games. It is easy to sign up by simply filling out a profile. LinkedIn has a more affluent audience but fewer users than Facebook or Twitter.

Pay Attention to What People Are Saying

Now that you have a community – listen! Your customers have a lot to say. When you participate with them on your social media platforms, you will get some very useful information. People will tell you what they want and what they need. It is also a great way to monitor and take part in conversations about your business and confront problems before they get serious.

Pay Attention to Your Competition

Keep an eye on what your competition is doing. Where are they listed? Who are their fans on Facebook? What kind of promotions are they offering? Check their inbound links for their business directories and then add yourself to the same directories. Make sure your company is on Google Maps, too. You can do this by signing up at Google's Local Business Center.

Start a Blog

We said it before and we'll say it again. A business blog is a critical cornerstone of your social media efforts. A blog on your website will increase the number of keywords – words or phrases that search engines recognize - and boost your ranking in all-important web searches.

Contests and Promotions

Using your community to drive sales and brand your product or service is the true beauty of social media. One way to excite the community is to create a contest or offer an exclusive discount or promotion. Promote monthly wine tastings if you have a wine shop. Post lunch or dinner specials if you own a restaurant . If you have a car dealership feature vehicles with rebates and incentives or hold a raffle. If you have a service offer promotions or discounts. Discounts are a great way to connect with your community. By giving special coupons to your social community, you are telling them you are not only a business to engage with but also one to buy from.

These are 5 ways a small business can get going with social media. There are many others and we will pass them along to you soon. We hope this helps.