

9 social media tips for your small business

[Media](#), [Social Media](#)



A strong social network can become an asset for any business. Social media offers every business the opportunity to strengthen relationships with their target audience, creating loyal customers and even brand advocates. Exploiting this potential is no easy feat, but can be done if the medium is used well.

Unfortunately, many companies are still not getting the best out of their social media accounts. Yet social media is big business: usesocial networkingsites, and for younger adults it's even more. That's a huge readjustment of the paradigm.

The fact is, if you want to reach your audience, is the place to start. But avoiding the many pitfalls can prove difficult.

1. Don't create accounts just because

Everybody's doing it, and they're telling you that your business should be too. It may be great for other businesses, but you just aren't sure how it can help your company.

If you aren't clear on the , then the chances are you aren't going to use it properly, and it could be damaging to your business. Yet, no presence on social media is a poor choice as well. Even if you aren't on Facebook or Instagram, your audience is and they're likely having a conversation about you -- without your input.

Take the time to understand social media and what it can do for you, and invest the time and budget needed to do it well.

2. Don't ignore social norms

It's difficult to get the tone right on social media. Each social network has different systems, rules and social norms. What is acceptable on one network may be a social faux pas on another.

Unless you're confident on each one, it's only natural that you will make mistakes. But getting your tone right is a must. Common expectations of corporate behavior include:

- Take the time to respond to messages left by customers; social media is about engagement and conversation should be a two way street.
- Don't , or spam your followers' feeds with sales messages.
- Don't be needy. Asking for retweets and likes for your content is frowned upon. If the content and messages you are sharing are truly interesting and insightful, shares, likes and retweets will take care of themselves.

Don't be afraid to be imperfect (in fact humanizing is a good thing on social media) but be aware you are expected to follow the unwritten rules of social networking behavior.

3. Don't be present on every social network

Spreading yourself too thinly across every social network is a common mistake. You want to be everywhere so you can maximize the opportunity, but cast the net too wide and it will be difficult to across all channels.

Building a strong network on 1 or 2 social media platforms is much better than having a weak and patchy presence on them all. It's more difficult for a

business to many social media accounts. Even if you manage to maintain a regular presence, the quality of your content will probably suffer. Being on too many social networks will undermine your brand values, not reinforce them.

Each social network has its own strengths, and they are popular with different audiences. Choose one or two that are best for you. Research them to find out where your audience hangs out and think carefully about what you want to achieve on social media. If you are a creative, youth oriented brand, Instagram or Snapchat may be a great social network for you to engage your audience. Conversely, if you're a B2B company, LinkedIn may be the best choice.

4. Don't favor quantity over quality

Your social media presence should be about and , and these goals should be at the heart of your business strategy on social media.

Too many businesses use social media as a broadcasting channel or sales channel. But social media isn't just a free advertising channel -- it has the potential to build a relationship with your target market and improve customer loyalty. But first you have to get your content right.

In order to build your network you must consider your customer's needs and have a content strategy in place. An unfocused approach that prioritizes quantity of content over quality isn't going to be successful. If it doesn't provide value to your audience, they aren't going to engage with you.

5. Don't ignore comments

Building a conversation with your customers is the holy grail of social media. But many businesses invest most of their time building awareness and growing their network, rather than having a conversation.

Comments from customers are the beginning of a dialogue with them, the moment at which they give you permission to interact with them. Yet research has found 80% of tweets sent to brands are ignored. The same research found people expect a response within 4 hours, and the average is 10 hours.

Take the example of . In 2013 a customer promoted a tweet to complain about the customer service, the company's Twitter account was only monitored during office hours so there was a delay in their response, which gave the tweet plenty of time to circulate around the Internet.

It's ironic that so much energy is spent building a social network to strengthen customer relationships and the opportunity to do so is ignored when it presents itself. Balance building your social presence with strengthening your network and always respond to your customers promptly.

6. Don't remove negative comments

We all want to show ourselves in the best light possible, but sweeping negativity under the carpet is simply going to infuriate dissatisfied customers even more. No organization is perfect, but show you are prepared to learn from your mistakes by facing them head on.

People are increasingly expecting a response to their complaints through social media. They won't call you, they won't write (not even an email), they

will however take to social media to inform you, and everyone in your network. It's a particularly public form of complaint, and you need to be ready or it could prove costly. United Airlines paid a heavy price for poor complaint management in 2008 when a disgruntled passenger after getting no satisfaction from their complaints procedure.

When this happens, be professional and don't be defensive. The old adage (some might say cliché) about a complaint being an opportunity is certainly true on social media. You can't stop people from complaining about you, but you can demonstrate a willingness to learn from any mistakes. Not just to customer with the issue, but to all your customers in your social network.

7. Don't be complacent about security

All a disgruntled employee needs is your login and password, and they have access to your entire social network, including customers, partners and your target audience. The potential to damage your reputation and lose business is incalculable.

In 2013, an employee of British retailer HMV . Senior management was helpless as it didn't know its own password.

To avoid this situation happening to you, put in place a system that secures your social media accounts and reduces the potential for reputational damage.

- Set up limited permissions for selected staff to update your social media. Managing your social media accounts shouldn't be left to a low level employee.

- Make sure publishing rights are only given to a select number of people who have responsibility for overseeing the suitability of the content (though many people in the organization should be encouraged to draft content).
- Train your staff about social media.

Complacency can lead to public embarrassment; put in place security measures to protect the integrity of your brand.

8. Don't rely on automating updates

It's understandable businesses are inclined to reduce the burden of updating their social media accounts by automating them. But automation tools should be used with caution; they can never be a substitute for true engagement with customers.

Businesses should take care to ensure customer engagement isn't forgotten in the rush to reduce workload. Without customer engagement you are reducing your social networks to a promotional tool, or a cheap , and you won't get any value out of it. Your customers can't have a conversation with an automation tool.

9. Don't treat it as a marketing function alone

It's often the case that businesses fall into the trap of 'silo thinking,' and social media is no exception. In organizations that still treat social media as a promotional tool, it's often left in the control of the marketing function.

In recognition of its increasing importance as a means of managing the customer relationships, many organizations are now to reflect customer

expectations. Your social network is now a sales channel, a promotional channel, a customer service channel and a market research channel. To get the best out of it, and to meet your customers' expectations, move it out of the marketing department and make it an integral part of your customer relationships.

Conclusion

The place of social media in business strategy has evolved, and it has moved from just a marketing device to a tool that's of strategic importance to your company and its brand. Many companies haven't embraced its full potential.

Organizations need to remember customers are using social media as a place to discuss and complain about brands whether the company is engaging with them or not.