

# Growing your business with social media

by Allan Evans, FirstTech Marketing Manager

It's not just about print ads and collateral these days. We don't control the conversation or channels anymore. This thing called social media has re-written the rules. And for the record, this is a good thing.

This would be an excellent time to back up and define social media. Wikipedia says the term social media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue. Social media technologies include: blogs, Twitter, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowd sourcing, and voice over IP (Skype), to name a few. Think of regular media as a one-way street where you can read a newspaper or listen to a report on television, but you have very limited ability to give your thoughts on the matter. Social media, on the other hand, is a two-way street that gives you the ability to communicate too.

One of the key components in successful social media marketing is building social authority. Social authority is developed when an individual or organization establishes themselves as an expert in their given field, thereby becoming an influencer in that field. It is through this process of building social authority that social media becomes effective.

So, how do you go about achieving social authority? The first point is a don't: don't use social media for your marketing messages. Remember, you are looking to build trust, not sell. You must honestly convince people of your genuine intentions, knowledge, and expertise in a specific area by providing valuable and accurate information on an ongoing basis—without a marketing angle overtly associated. If this can be done, trust begins to develop naturally. This person or organization becomes a thought leader and value provider, setting themselves up as trusted advisors instead of marketers. Top of mind awareness develops and the consumer naturally begins to gravitate to the products and offerings of the authority.

Having an intuitive, easy-to-use website is a great beginning. Make it clear who you are, what you sell, who you sell to, why you are the best choice as well as how do potential customers buy from you. Differentiating your organization from competitors makes your website an effective sales tool by concisely answering those key questions for your prospective customers.

Having a website gives you a platform to share your ideas (blog), offer communication channels (surveys, feedback forms and newsletter signups) and ways to integrate your social media offerings (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube videos, LinkedIn, Google Places and Yelp, for instance).



Facebook is the great connector. Use that to your advantage. Facebook opens the line of communication between your business and your customers. An essential step is to set up a Facebook business page, separate from your personal profile and register a unique address for that page. You can also use Facebook ads to search for new customers. These ads let

you control your target demographic (age, sex, location, education) and pay only per click. I love the return on investment tracking this allows. Facebook also allows you to add a "Like" button to your websites content, letting a user share your content with their friends on Facebook. When the user clicks the Like button on your site, a story appears in the user's friends' News Feed with a link back to your website.



Twitter is the newer tool in the social media toolkit. I will admit right here, that when it first was making headlines, I was not a believer. The funny thing about change is it keeps happening to us, whether we want it or not. I now keep a Twitter feed window up on my desktop allowing me to stay current with breaking news, key industry figures, and the people I follow in soccer and writing (my interests). Facebook even allows you to repost your status updates automatically to your Twitter account, saving time.



Youtube surpassed Yahoo last year for the first time in total search queries, putting it in second place behind Google. Posting content on Youtube is both free and easy. For example take a video of yourself walking and talking us through a property, and post it to Youtube. Then link to that content from your website and your social authority is obvious to your audience.



LinkedIn allows you to increase your visibility, improve your connect ability and improve your Google PageRank. By adding connections, you increase the likelihood that people will see your profile first when they're searching for someone to hire or do business with. On the whole, people would much rather work with people their friends know and trust. You'll want to make sure your business's profile is complete.

Google Places and Yelp allow you to post a description of your business as well as images to show potential customers what you do best. Google Places and Yelp also allow customers to post reviews of your business—good or bad. Peer reviews carry a huge impact, so monitor this conversation closely.

Apple offers many great timesaving tools to assist your social media efforts—all standard with each new Mac purchased. iMovie allows you to import, edit, add titles, transitions and music, and export your video directly to Youtube. iPhoto allows you to easily bring in your photos, touch them up if needed, and post them to your business's Facebook page with one click. Designing a website may seem difficult, but with iWeb, it's easily within your reach. Create your site using themes. Customize it with photos, movies, text, and widgets (maps, RSS feeds, etc.). iWeb even notifies Facebook when your site changes and adds a link to your profile so your customers stay up to date.

Today, everyone can achieve social authority, thanks to free tools like blogs, podcasts, and video sharing. Plus, we now have new ways for real people to play a role in providing feedback, organization and promotion. Whether you're a large well-established company, an individual with loyal fans, or simply someone with ideas and opinions, social media provides new ways to create and communicate with people.