

Turn Your Social Buzz into a

Loud Roar

10 Strategies for
Social Media Marketing Success

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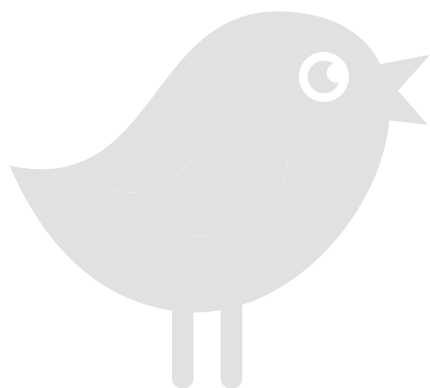
BEST PRACTICES GUIDE | SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING



In the evolving world of social media

It can be hard for a time-starved small business or organization to keep pace and know what to do when it comes to connecting with customers and members on sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Foursquare and Yelp.

While there's no "one-size fits all" approach, we've assembled 10 best practices for social media marketing success that will help your business or organization, whether you're just getting started or trying to take your efforts to the next level.



1

Have a Goal

Like most marketing and business efforts, it's good to have a goal in mind as you delve into social media marketing. It doesn't have to be anything audacious like increase sales 30% year over year. Something more along the lines of improving company/brand awareness; adding a new channel to interact with customers, members, donors, and prospects; or improving search engine optimization (SEO) will work just fine.

It's important to keep in mind that the return on investment with social media marketing cannot always be measured in hard dollars. While one can offer deals and make sales, the real power of social media marketing is in building relationships and remaining top of mind with existing customers. Plus, the viral nature of social media can help you find and connect with new customers.

74% of consumers rely on some type of social media network to guide purchasing decisions. That's because people rely on what others have to say about a product or brand before making an investment themselves. As you grow your network on sites like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn you'll improve your chances of reaching new audiences through social word-of-mouth. Doing so may not have a direct ROI attached to it, but it can indirectly help influence sales.

If you're new to social media, set achievable goals that will allow you to get your feet wet and start building connections with your existing customer base. As your comfort level and social media savvy grow, so too can your goals.

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2

Know Who You Are and Portray Yourself Consistently

Before diving into social media for your business or organization, you should decide what kind of image you want to portray through your various social media outlets.

Some argue that social media should be free and easygoing, and marketers should take a casual approach. Others disagree and think users should maintain a more serious, buttoned-down approach. The path you follow is up to you and your business or organization's culture. Either way, be sure to stay consistent with the brand identity you've established.

No matter which way you fall on the casual versus serious choice, make sure your posts sound human. After all, you're connecting with other human beings.

Social media marketing gives you a unique opportunity to humanize your brand and to show your customers, members, or prospects that there are real people behind the product or service — people just like them.

This helps people relate to your business or organization, and that goes a long way toward getting people to know, like, and trust you. When people know, like, and trust you, they are much more likely to share your message with their friends. And it's word-of-mouth (i.e.: the network effect) that makes social media marketing such a powerful marketing tool.

Additionally, you'll want to portray yourself accurately in your social media profiles. If you're using the company logo as your avatar, make sure it's the most up-to-date version. If you're using a photo of yourself, try using one that is no more than 18 months old. Chances are good you'll meet some of your social media followers and fans in real life, so you'll want them to be able to recognize you.

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brand.

3

Be Where Your Customers/Members Are

Social media marketing is important because today, customers want choices where they interact with brands. For example, some may like to follow a brand on Twitter but not on Facebook. Social media gives them that choice, so it's important to have a presence where your customers are looking to interact with you and other businesses. How do you know which sites are right for your business or organization? The simple answer is to ask your customers or members. When they come into your place of business or when you see them at an event, ask what networks they use. If they make a purchase, add a social media question to your feedback survey to collect information about what networks they use.

If asking isn't an option, you obviously want to look at the most popular sites first. With over 1 billion active users, Facebook is probably the first place to start given its sheer size. Twitter and LinkedIn — which both have more than 200 million users — will likely be the next places you'll want to consider.

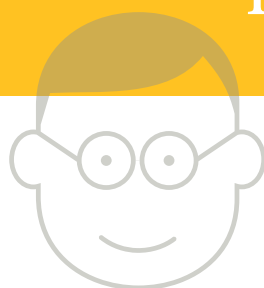
Another way you can identify where your customers and members are engaging is to look at your social sharing data:

On which sites are people sharing your content? After all, it's one thing for a customer to belong to a social network, but if he's actually *using* that site, then that's the place you want to be. This information can be an important part of making your decision.

While 90% of your time on social media should be spent on the networks you know your audience already is, the other 10% can also be spent doing trying something new. In the last few months sites like Pinterest, Instagram, and Google+ have attracted millions of social media users.

There's a good chance members of your audience are already on these sites, testing the new social media waters. It could be a good idea to get set up on these new sites and invite your current contacts to join you. If you see a positive response from your audience, you'll know which sites are worth considering.

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4

Tell Your Customers and Members Where You Are

Put links to your social media pages on your website, in your email newsletters, and in your personal email signature.

For stores, restaurants, and other businesses where people congregate in person, put out signs telling people where they can connect with you on social media.

Start with your loyal customer base: the people who are already signed up for your email newsletter. It's your loyal customers who are most likely to find you on Facebook and follow you on Twitter; these are also the folks who will share your posts and help you connect with their friends and connections. Think about it: If you stumble upon an organization's Facebook Page and it has numerous fans, including a few of your own friends, you're likely going to become a fan of it yourself, right? Seed your social media connections with your existing list to give yourself a head start on growing the number of fans and followers.

In short: Any place you connect with customers and members is a good place to mention that they can also connect and interact with you online.

Put links
to your social
media pages on
your website,
in your email
newsletters, and
in your personal
email
signature.

5

Don't Just Join Conversations. Add Value to Them

Social media is just that: social. It's about having conversations and engaging with people. Sites like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn excel at making conversations easy to start and easy to join.

What you don't want to do is jump into the middle of a conversation just for the sake of doing so or to make an obvious sales pitch. What you should do is add value to the conversation at hand by sharing your expertise and knowledge as it applies to the situation.

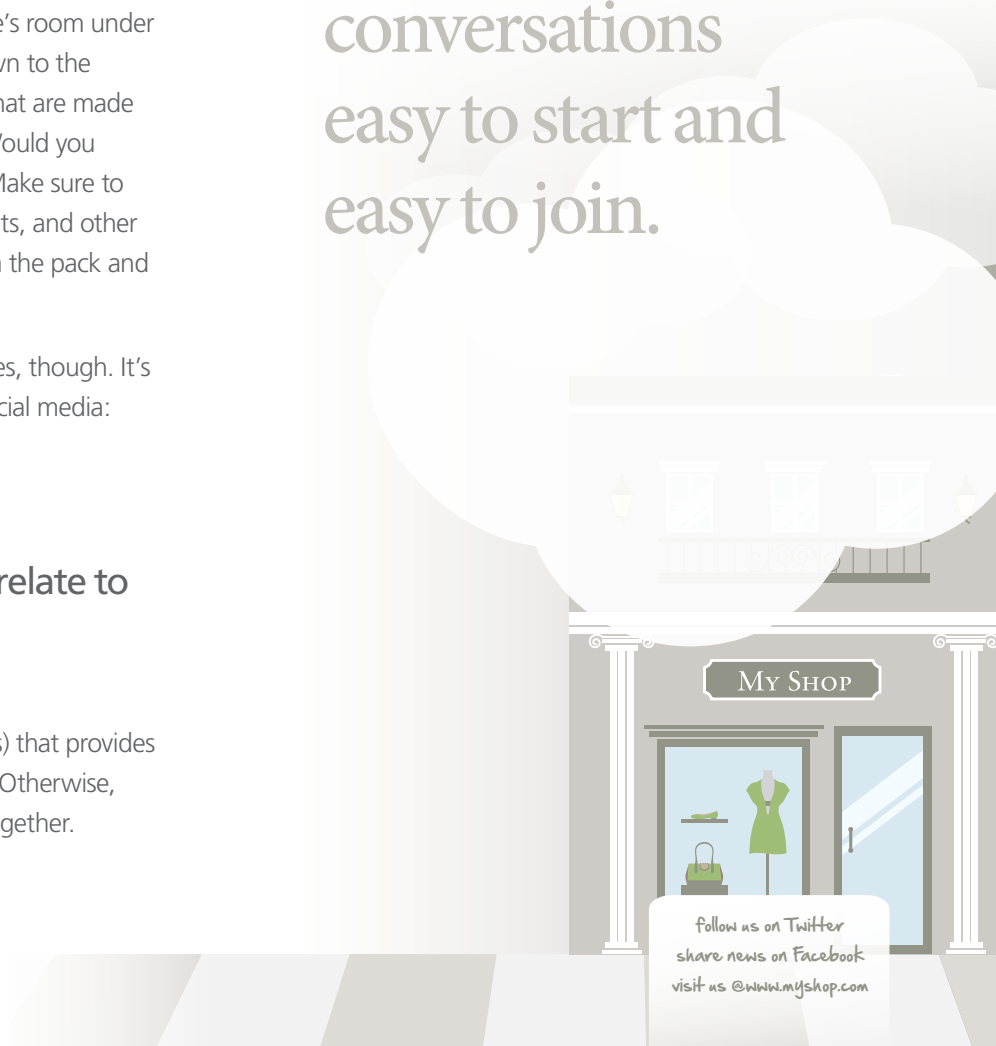
With Twitter, this applies to "retweeting" other people's comments. If you do retweet something and there's room under the 140-character cap, add a comment of your own to the forwarded tweet. There are many user timelines that are made up entirely of retweets and no original thought. Would you want to follow someone like that? Probably not. Make sure to add some value and original thought to your tweets, and other social network posts, to differentiate yourself from the pack and demonstrate your expertise (and personality).

You can (and should) reuse content from other sites, though. It's highly recommended to share the following on social media:

- > **New blog entries**
- > **Email newsletter archives**
- > **News and feature articles that relate to your area of business**
- > **New features on your website**

The key is to share content (even at 140 characters) that provides value to your followers and keeps them engaged. Otherwise, they could tune you out or stop following you altogether.

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and LinkedIn
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6

Be Relevant

No matter what network you're using for your business or organization, creating and sharing content that's relevant to your audience should be a top priority. For 42% of consumers, the number one reason why they decide to unlike a Facebook Page is irrelevant content.

Creating relevant content is about understanding who your audience is, what problems they face, and what topics are most interesting to them. It's about creating stuff that they'll actually enjoy, rather than just stuff that has a direct benefit to you as a business.

Take some time to consider why people would connect with you in the first place. Chances are you're already interacting with customers on a daily basis. Those interactions can provide great sources of content and can make it easy to understand what your audience is actually interested in seeing.

Then, all you need to do is pay attention to which type of content is getting the most engagement from fans, followers, and connections and adjust your strategy accordingly.

Anything
you can do to
be a part of
social media
conversations
helps increase
your exposure.



7

Be Engaging

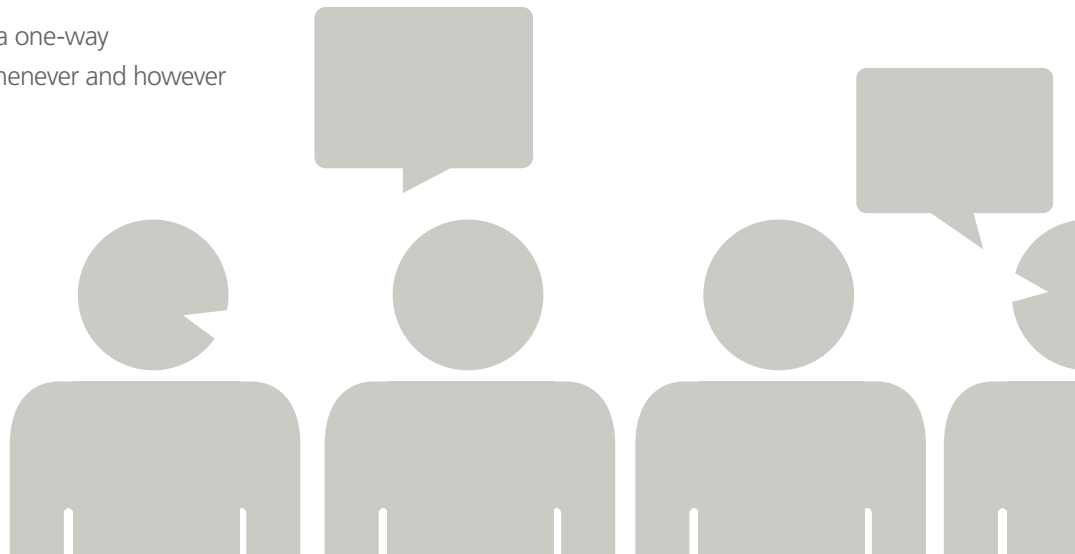
Social media networks — and by extension, social media marketing as a whole — tend to be more casual and conversational in tone and approach. People gather on sites like Facebook and Twitter because they have common interests, because they want to be part of a larger conversation, or because they want to be in the know. It's not formal communication, like a press release would be. Accordingly, messages are shorter, friendlier, and in many cases (but not all), more fun.

If you really want to derive value from social media, you need to engage with people. Like any conversational interaction, listening is the key to being effective. You need to listen to what people are saying *to* you and *about* you. When appropriate, be sure to respond.

But social media marketing is also about sharing your expertise, news, and even promotions. You can show your followers that you know your business and industry by posting links to related articles, notes about other complementary businesses, and by interacting with others on the networks in which you participate. *Don't just post information; ask people what they think of the article you're posting. Ask thought-provoking questions that will encourage a dialogue. Post photos or videos that show what's going on with your business or organization, and encourage your friends, followers, and fans to do the same.*

Social media is a two-way dialog, not just a one-way communication. Make the most of that whenever and however you can.

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8

Be Active

How often to post is another gray area in social media marketing. Do it too little and followers may not notice. Post too often and they may get annoyed.

When posting something to Twitter, such as a link to a new blog post or special deal, you may want to post the same information more than once in a given day. Twitter feeds can be a fast moving stream, so if a customer doesn't see your original tweet, they may miss out. That said, while it's alright to post something a couple times a day, it's important to change up the wording a bit each time to freshen up the content. Otherwise, you'll look like a spammer and people may unfollow you.

For Facebook, a single link to a blog post or deal of the day is enough since those posts tend to have a little more stickiness in a user's news feed. The same goes for LinkedIn updates.

Generally, you can post multiple updates to Twitter, one or two to Facebook, and one to LinkedIn over the course of a given day without the risk of annoying the followers on each site. But don't post just to post. Make sure what you're sharing is going to engage your fans, followers, and connections, and will be worth sharing.

Like with email marketing, knowing your audience will help you determine how often to post. Test different frequencies and see how fans and followers respond.

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9

Respond in a Timely Manner

The frequency advice only refers to original posts. You can, and should, reply to people's questions and posts as often and as quickly as possible, particularly when they mention a problem with your business, organization, product, or service.

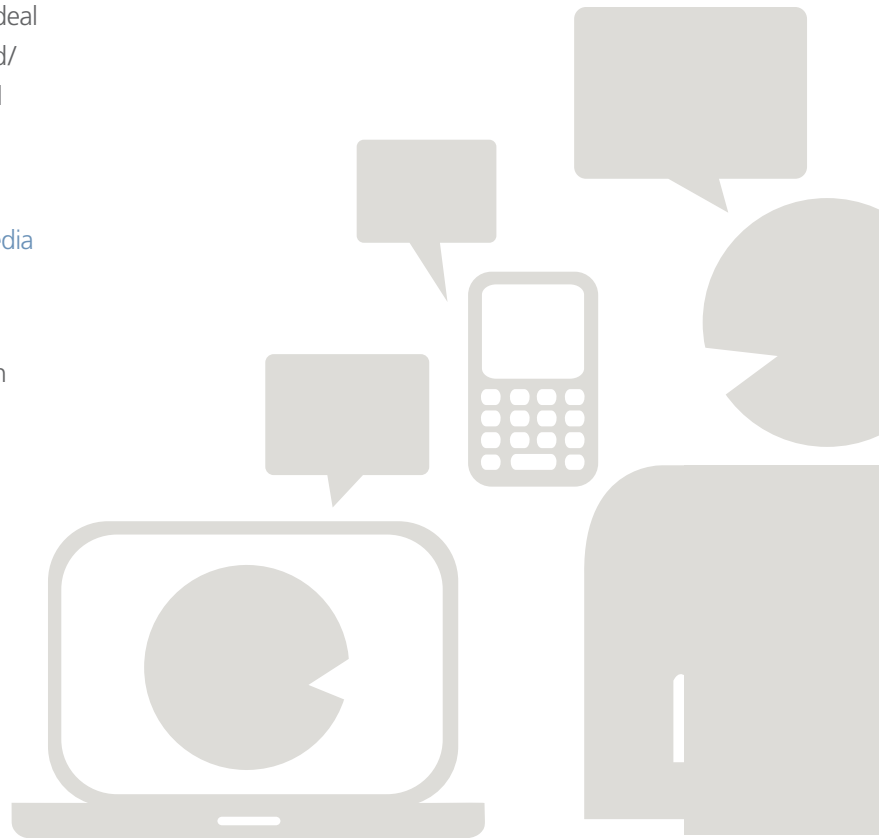
Twitter in particular is used to lodge complaints all the time. Often, people are just venting and not expecting a response from the company they're complaining about. But if you're tracking your company name, Twitter handle, and/or key product terms via Twitter Search, you can easily spot these complaints and respond. (NutshellMail from Constant Contact is a great tool for monitoring Twitter Search results without having to constantly sit at the computer.) We recommend responding within a single business day if possible. Any longer and your response could fall on deaf ears.

When you respond, it's recommended that you nicely ask how you can help the person, then attempt to take the conversation offline, or to another channel like email or an instant messaging client (meaning not in a public social media conversation) to deal with the nuts and bolts of the issue. You don't want a he said/she said debate littered across Twitter, where it can be picked up by search engines and read by anyone, or posted on your Facebook wall, where it could have a longer shelf life.

Two things to keep in mind when it comes to using social media for customer service issues:

- 1. Keep a thick skin:** You're going to run into negative comments. Don't take them personally, and try to turn that unhappy customer into a happy one.
- 2. Respond to the positive comments as well.** If someone gives you a glowing review, respond with a thank you. It shows that you're paying attention to all of your customers, not just the squeaky wheels.

When you respond, it's recommended that you nicely ask how you can help the person, then attempt to take the conversation offline.



10

Give Credit Where Credit Is Due

It's a best practice to share links to relevant articles, blog posts, and other content with your audience. Social media networks make this an easy thing to do. One thing to remember, though, is to cite the source of the link if it's not your own content. This is particularly important with Twitter, where shortened URLs can obscure the site being linked to. [The best practice here is to add the person or source's Twitter handle \(if known\) when linking to third-party content.](#) Doing so offers two benefits: One, you're not pulling a bait-and-switch by passing someone else's content off as your own (yes, the person clicking the link will realize it soon enough, but that doesn't make it right). Two, the person you're crediting will see that you're sharing his content with your own customers/members/followers since the tweet will show up in his "Mentions" timeline. This person may decide to follow you as well.

This is not as much of an issue with Facebook since it automatically includes headline, description, and even image thumbnails from the target page when one shares a link, making it more obvious who the shared content is from.

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Do What's Right for You

When it comes to social media marketing, it's good to remember that it's just another — but very powerful — tool in your marketing arsenal, and not a cure-all or replacement for other strategies that are already working for you. These best practices will help you improve your social media marketing, but ultimately, it's about doing what's right for you and your business or organization. You know your customers best and what they expect from you. Delivering the content they want and engaging with them, no matter what the channel, is the most important thing. Over time you will learn from your fans and followers what works and what doesn't.

So get out there, experiment, and learn by doing!

Want to learn more?

Check out our free online resource, [The Social Media Quickstarter!](#) There you'll find step-by-step instructions for getting started on any of the top social media sites.

Or check out the [Constant Contact Blog](#) for all the tips and tricks you need for growing your business with online marketing.

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