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S M A R T M A R K E T I N G S T R A T E G I E S (D I Y)

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Warning: Social Media Means New Marketing Initiatives

(Consider Facebook, LinkedIn and/or Twitter for Business)

“Your social media class rocks!”

Elaine Cimino,
Artist,
Advocate and
Author

You know social media has come of age when the venerable magazine, *Business Week* publishes print articles and posts video interviews about using Twitter! So if you're wondering if social websites are good for your business, the answer is an unqualified YES. That is, *if you follow some simple steps to make the most of your social media efforts.*

One of the benefits of being part of these virtual networks is that it's a low-cost way to share information about yourself and your business. Low-cost, not no-cost, as it will take some time for you to set up your accounts and to keep your information fresh; time is money.

Some people worry that their lives will become public property if they participate in a social media site. Not true. You control the amount and type of information that is shared, and you connect with only those people you feel comfortable with. And social media can work for your business whether you're a small retail specialty shop or a big guy like Ford Motor Company.

Enhance VISIBILITY

One of the major benefits of using these sites is that search engines like Google and Yahoo include posts on social websites in their search results. This means if you or your company shows up on Twitter or any of the other social sites, it will enhance your chances of being recognized by a search en-

gine - which in turn enhances your VISIBILITY. Visibility is the first step in engaging Internet surfers in your business "story." You can link to your website from most social media sites, making the connection easy.

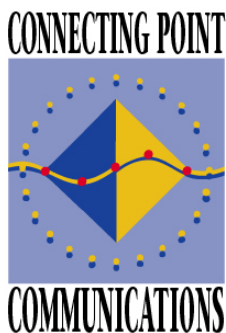
Social Media Pointers

First, KNOW which social media websites will best serve you and your business. For example, LinkedIn is an online business network of experienced professionals. On LinkedIn, you can post your work experience and your current and former jobs, as well as keep others up to date on happenings at your business or company. You can let people know if you're changing jobs or starting a new career.

Facebook, on the other hand, allows you to share any part of your life that you wish. Most any subject is fair game, from hobbies, vacations, social events, to, yes, even your career. It's a friendlier, more casual connecting place.

Mighty Twitter.com is the site causing the most buzz these days and can be a powerful micro-blogging tool in your business promotion arsenal. Internet guru, Chris Brogan states definitively that for business: "Twitter is a must."

Twitter poses one question, "What are you doing?" You get to answer with whatever is new, exciting, or relevant in your business. On Twitter, your answers must be under 140 characters



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Brevity rules and authenticity is mandatory. Social media is changing marketing forever.

in length and can be sent via mobile texting, instant messaging, or the web.

Social Media Choices

So how do you choose the best media...and what do you say?

LinkedIn doesn't make sense for a restaurant or retail operation, although retailers and restaurateurs could use it to connect with vendors and other professionals. A group of like-minded individuals might offer discussion opportunities and questions/answers about problems associated with the industry.

Facebook offers extra opportunities for business promotion with groups and fan pages. You can provide any type of information, from background links and articles, to merchandise photos.

Twitter also serves many brick and mortar establishments well. It offers real-time snapshots of keywords and topics. (Remember, just 140 characters!)

Many businesses use Twitter to drive prospects to their websites. Jet Blue uses Twitter to address issues of customer service. Koge Korean BBQ, the mobile taco company in Los Angeles, expanded dramatically by using Twitter to announce the location of its stops and daily specials. Koge now has more than 22,000 followers. Dell Computers consistently uses Twitter as a sales channel, alerting readers of special sales and discounts.

Other Opportunities

Consider video, one of the hottest trends on the web. YouTube, the largest video sharing site of all, gets more than 13 billion views monthly.

And then there are blogs. Technorati, a real-time search engine dedicated to the blo-

gosphere, tracks more than 112 million blogs. Don't have a blog yet? Then get to it! On a blog you can share as much of yourself and your business as you like.

Or, consider social bookmarking, the art of moving your "favorites" online. Sites such as Digg or Delicious frequently get indexed by search engines, and your profile there adds credibility and visibility to your business.

Begin Noticing

Before you dive in, follow your interests. Look at the competition and the leaders in your market niche.

Once you find the right social media for you and your business and begin to post, **be human**. There's little or no corporate blather on social websites, and direct selling is frowned upon. It's real people living real life and sharing their views, their challenges and their victories or finds.

Brevity rules and authenticity is mandatory. Be original. Be relevant. Offer news about your company or education about your product or service. If a graphic or photo is relevant, add it. Interview a guest or have a guest blogger. Offer discounts. Ask questions of your readers, and learn what they're interested in.

Conclusion

Participating on social media sites will force you to ask yourself important questions: Is my brand consistent and memorable? What is my competition doing with social media? Who do I know, and will connecting with them help my business? The answers will help you decide whether investing in the social media game can benefit your business.

Social media is changing marketing forever, and puts a new spin on an old saying: "It's not who you know, it's who knows you."



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