



Grow your Business with Pinterest

How can brands benefit from using Pinterest?

Introduction

Many brands have been keen to embrace social media in recent years, with businesses in a huge variety of sectors having established a presence on sites like Twitter and Facebook.

But Pinterest is rapidly establishing itself as an increasingly popular outlet too. So what exactly is Pinterest and how can companies incorporate it into their social media strategy?

And why would businesses want to use this to promote their brand and drive sales? This Blue Paper will discuss these issues and highlight how firms could benefit from embracing this rapidly emerging platform.

Part One - What is Pinterest?

As the name suggests, Pinterest is centred around an online pinboard, to which users can share photos and create collections based around various themes. Users can therefore browse for pictures that fit their own interests, as well as pin them to their individual pinboards.

Of course, some businesses that haven't heard of Pinterest or given it much attention might decide they don't need to embrace it as they already have a strong presence on Twitter and Facebook.

But these firms would be ignoring a platform that is rapidly growing in popularity. According to the latest figures from Semiocast, 70 million users were registered on Pinterest as of June 2013.¹

During that month alone, more than 20 million people either pinned, repinned or liked a pin. The US has the largest number of registered users, followed by Canada, but the UK is ranked in third place, ahead of major economies like Australia, Germany and France.²

More than two million people in the UK were registered with Pinterest by June

¹ "Pinterest has 70 million users More than 70% are in the U.S." Semiocast. Web. 23 June 2014. http://semiocast.com/en/publications/2013_07_10_Pinterest_has_70_million_users

² Ibid



2013 - which represents a considerable potential audience for businesses to target.³

How can it be good for your business?

1. Draws traffic to website

Pinterest is becoming an increasingly big driver of social media referrals. Indeed, figures from third-party measurement company Shareaholic revealed Pinterest now drives more referral traffic than Google+, YouTube and LinkedIn put together.⁴

2. Offers insights into customers' tastes

Social media offers a great chance for brands to find out what trends and developments are of interest to their target audience. This is particularly true of Pinterest, as it is easy to find out what subjects are being talked about and what content is being shared by consumers.

Marketers could carry out keyword and category searches of the site, or perhaps see what is being pinned from their competitors' websites.

3. Generates ideas

Once a company has found out what is of interest to consumers at any given time, it can use these insights to influence its future decisions and ideas.

As a result, it can tap into people's tastes and preferences in a relevant and timely way and show its target audience that it is in touch with the latest trends.

4. Pinterest inspires purchases more than Facebook

Questions have been asked in the past about whether Pinterest is as good as other platforms for driving conversions, since it provides visual inspiration rather than product information or a direct call to action.

But figures from Bizrate Insights show that it actually ranks ahead of Facebook as a place for shopping inspiration, tracking or product discovery.⁵



³ "Pinterest has 70 million users More than 70% are in the U.S." Semicast. Web. 23 June 2014. http://semicast.com/en/publications/2013_07_10_Pinterest_has_70_million_users

⁴ Janet Aronica. "Pinterest Drives More Referral Traffic Than Google Plus, YouTube and LinkedIn Combined." Shareaholic. Web. 23 June 2014. <https://blog.shareaholic.com/pinterest-referral-traffic/>

⁵ Hayley Silver, Eileen Tan, Cory Mitchell. "Pinterest vs. Facebook: Which Social Sharing Site Wins at Shopping Engagement?" Bizrate Insights. Web. 23 June 2014. <http://www.bizrateinsights.com/blog/2012/10/15/online-consumer-pulse-pinterest-vs-facebook-which-social-sharing-site-wins-at-shopping-engagement/>

Whereas just 40 per cent of online consumers who use Facebook have found something they have bought or intend to buy on the site, the same is true for 69 per cent of those who visit Pinterest.⁶

5. Shows willingness to innovate

Pinterest is a relatively new medium and probably not as well-known as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. But with the growing surge of interest in the platform both in the UK and in other countries, it will not harm a company's image to be among the first to use it.

Indeed, it could help to position a business as a forward-thinking and innovative brand that is willing to embrace new ways of doing things.

Does it work best for some companies more than others?

A cursory glance at Pinterest shows that some subjects are more popular than others, with a strong leaning towards interior design, cookery, fashion, DIY, hobbies and crafts.

The reason for this is simple - they are all primarily visual areas and can therefore be represented clearly with an image, with no need for lots of written background information and context.

As a result, companies that have a strong presence in these sectors could find Pinterest an extremely useful resource - as it chimes with the interests of many of those who are regularly active on the site.

This is certainly apparent in Econsultancy's list of brands that are using Pinterest particularly well in order to engage with their consumers in interesting ways.⁷

- **IKEA**

Sweden's famous superstore was praised for using lots of "great-looking" images to showcase individual items and collections. Econsultancy pointed out that many of the images are quite striking and in some cases, include price information so they serve as an extension of its catalogue. However, it said the lack of links to its homepage is something of a "missed opportunity."



⁶ Hayley Silver, Eileen Tan, Cory Mitchell. "Pinterest vs. Facebook: Which Social Sharing Site Wins at Shopping Engagement?" Bizrate Insights. Web. 23 June 2014. <http://www.bizrateinsights.com/blog/2012/10/15/online-consumer-pulse-pinterest-vs-facebook-which-social-sharing-site-wins-at-shopping-engagement/>

⁷ David Moth. "Six brands making good use of Pinterest, and two that aren't." Econsultancy. Web. 23 June 2014. <https://econsultancy.com/blog/10097-six-brands-making-good-use-of-pinterest-and-two-that-aren-t#i.5wp6bm13wedeax>

- **ASOS**
Online fashion retailer ASOS was praised for embracing Pinterest “with real gusto,” as it posts engaging lifestyle and celebrity content, product ideas and even competitions. Econsultancy said this shows that it “gets the social aspect of Pinterest.”
- **L’Oreal UK**
The cosmetics company regularly includes top celebrities in its advertisements, from Cheryl Cole to Beyonce. Econsultancy said L’Oreal uses its Pinterest channel to make the most of its associations with some of the top stars of the day, so it can “promote its brand values rather than [go] in for a hard sell.”

Firms could soon advertise on Pinterest

Many companies want their name to appear at or near the top of search engine rankings for certain keywords. This prompted Pinterest to launch its Promoted Pins format⁸ in the US last year, so firms could pay to get higher rankings in search results and category feeds. The service is being run on a trial basis right now, but it could be rolled out in the UK in the future.

How is Pinterest different from other social networking sites?

With businesses putting lots of time and resources into managing their customer relationships and adding compelling content to their Facebook and Twitter accounts, some will ask themselves if it is worthwhile focusing on yet another social networking site.

Joanne Bradford, global head of partnerships at Pinterest, believes it offers one distinctive attribute that sets it apart from Facebook, Twitter et al. “Pinterest is a visual planning and discovery tool that helps you plan your future,” she commented. “Facebook is about your past, Twitter is about what’s happening now and Pinterest is about the future. Marketers want to reach people when they aren’t even looking, when they’re considering their options, and when they know what they want. People do all of these things on Pinterest and businesses are a natural part of this cycle.”⁹

⁸ Lara O’Reilly, “What brands can expect from Pinterest ads.” *Marketing Week*. Web. 23 June 2014. <http://www.marketingweek.co.uk/sectors/technology-and-telecoms/news/what-brands-can-expect-from-pinterest-ads/4010483.article>

⁹ “Ibid.”



Part Two - Pinterest success stories

To fully understand how businesses could benefit from using Pinterest, let's look at a couple of companies who use the site to discover why they believe it is so worthwhile.

Random House Books

The book publisher now has considerably more than a million followers on Pinterest, as well as over 40 boards and thousands of pins.¹⁰

Random House Books therefore has a massive online community to engage with, which gives it room to do more than simply promote its own products.¹¹ After all, reading is a lifestyle choice for lots of people and arouses strong passions, so it makes sense for the firm not to limit the discussion simply to what it has on its roster.

By showcasing covers that are not Random House publications, it is showing it has an outward-looking view and is not solely interested in making money. Instead, it is demonstrating that it is genuinely interested in subjects that matter to its audience.

Random House actually entered into a partnership with Pinterest last year to use its application programming interface¹² so it could help people find popular content, which it believes will provide a richer experience both for Pinterest users and those who are yet to subscribe.

Indeed, the partnership means that visitors to its website will find it easier to discover authors and books that are driving activity on Pinterest at any given time.

Christine McNamara, vice-president and director of partnerships at Random House, said: "Random House is thrilled to partner with Pinterest and showcase what is trending on our websites from their community of tens of millions of users, many of whom are avid readers and book lovers. Pinterest's ongoing innovations in online discovery and community make them an important and desirable partner for our authors."¹³



¹⁰ Pinterest. Web. 23 June 2014. <http://www.pinterest.com/randomhouse/>

¹¹ "Random House LLC Launches Pinterest Top Pins on Select Sites." Random House. Web. 23 June 2014. <http://www.randomhouse.biz/media/publicity/files/2013/11/Pinterest-RH-API-Partnership-Press-Release-11-14-13.pdf>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

It certainly seems to be a win-win scenario all round, with book lovers, authors and the publisher itself all benefiting from the buzz being generated around the latest works.

Sony Electronics

A tech company might be expected to be at the forefront of an online revolution, but Sony Electronics' embracing of Pinterest almost happened by accident.

Callan Green, senior social media specialist at the company, saw lots of pins on Pinterest relating to a pair of leather trousers. She decided there and then that she wanted them, so she went out and bought the item.

In other words, she had seen for herself that simply seeing an item that is proving popular on Pinterest could be enough to motivate a person into spending their money. "We were all using [Pinterest] personally and realised the power of the platform to drive people's interest in purchasing," Ms Green commented.¹⁴

Sony Electronics made a conscious decision to strike a balance between entertaining content and purely promotional images. Their Pinterest campaign is designed to increase brand affinity and grow the Sony community, yet still drive traffic and sales to the website.

The company has underpinned all this by making sure its website has Pinterest plug-ins, as well as a healthy and strategic mix of content types tailored to engage with a wide audience. For instance, some boards tap into people's artistic sensibilities, while others are more tech-focused and relate specifically to its products.

But interestingly, Sony's Brand New Product Board is proving to be the main driver of sales at the moment, which the firm believes shows that while the "fun and the fluff and the brand stuff" is very popular, there is still a place for product-focused content. At the end of the day, people on Pinterest do want products - they want to pin products and they want to buy products. There's room for both kinds of strategy," Ms Green said.¹⁵



¹⁴ Louise Julig. "How Sony Became a Pinterest Rock Star." *Social Media Examiner*. Web. 23 June 2014. <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/pinterest-case-study-sony/>

¹⁵ Louise Julig. "How Sony Became a Pinterest Rock Star." *Social Media Examiner*. Web. 23 June 2014. <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/pinterest-case-study-sony/>

Part Three - How can Pinterest work alongside other forms of marketing?

Brands need to do more than place a poster on a wall or pay to advertise on TV if they really wish to engage with their target market. With the emergence of the internet - in particular social networking sites and blogs - companies are increasingly placing a focus upon providing existing and prospective customers with compelling, original content.

In fact, figures from the Content Marketing Association indicate that firms that use content marketing invest about one-fifth of their budgets on it. This puts it ahead of TV (14 per cent), online advertising (11 per cent) and print advertising (ten per cent.)¹⁶

So can Pinterest be included as part of a firm's content marketing campaign, just as the likes of Facebook, Instagram and customer-facing websites are at the moment?

Content marketing often involves methods such as search engine optimisation, with targeted keywords used to give brands prominence in search engine rankings, while well-written and informed content can position a brand as an expert and authority in its field.

But in recent years, brands have increasingly moved into more visual-based content, from striking images and photographs to infographics and videos. As a result Pinterest has established itself as the ideal platform to showcase this to a wider audience.

Searchmetrics founder Marcus Tober adds "Pinterest has the power to put publishers' content in front of new people and drive traffic back to their sites."¹⁷

Fashion retailer Topshop is a good example of a brand that has encouraged consumers to do exactly this. The company offered its customers the chance to win prizes if they pinned their favourite items on its website on their own Pinterest boards, so they could create personalised festive gift guides in the run-up to Christmas.



¹⁶ "CMA Research: For those using content marketing 20p in every marketing £1 goes on content." Content Marketing Association. Web. 23 June 2014. <http://www.the-cma.com/news/cma-research-20p-in-every-marketing-goes-on-content>

¹⁷ Andrew Pugh. "Study: Guardian has most Pinterest followers but Mail Online has most pins." Press Gazette. Web. 23 June 2014. <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/study-guardian-has-most-pinterest-followers-mail-online-has-most-pins>

Users of the site were able to see which items had the most pins, so it could inspire lots of people into picking appropriate Christmas presents, generate a buzz around the Topshop brand, drive conversions and boost website traffic all at the same time.¹⁸

Sheena Sauvaire, global marketing and communications director at Topshop, commented: "For us it is part of a strategy to see how we can connect what is going on in the digital world and social communities with our store environment. We've worked with other platforms but thought Pinterest was perfect because of the interaction it encourages with products." Ms Sauvaire added that since Pinterest is very popular with younger females in particular, it is an excellent fit with Topshop's target audience. "We also have a lot of engagement on Instagram - the visual channels are where we are seeing the greatest interest," she stated.¹⁹

Part Four: How can companies determine if Pinterest is delivering results?

So, we have heard from brands who have successfully incorporated Pinterest into their multi-channel marketing strategy, but how exactly are they measuring the success of their efforts?

After all, brands need to know how their Pinterest account is contributing to their wider marketing efforts, as every aspect of a promotional drive must be geared towards pushing the same brand message.

Fortunately, Pinterest has made it simple to get answers to all the questions they might have regarding the site, thanks to their free analytics tool for business users.²⁰

- Companies can instantly find out information such as the daily average number of pins and how many people on average are pinning from their website. As a result, they will be able to identify trends regarding what type of images are generating the most attention.

¹⁸ David Benady. "How marketers use Pinterest and Instagram to win customers." *The Guardian*. Web. 23 June 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/dec/04/how-marketers-use-pinterest-and-instagram-to-win-customers>

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ "Pinterest for Business. Analytics See how your website's doing on Pinterest." Web. 23 June 2014. <http://business.pinterest.com/en/analytics>



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- They can see the average number of times their pins are repinned on Pinterest every day, so they get a further insight into what content is engaging with their audience most strongly.
- The analytics tool allows firms to find out how many times their pins appear on people's boards, main feeds and search results – which allows brands to gauge the reach of their content.

This is just an overview of the kind of analytics a company can access with this tool, which will show them straight away if Pinterest is delivering the kind of results they want.

Crucially, the patterns of engagement that they uncover can help to inform their future marketing decisions and enable them to find out what does and doesn't work when it comes to engaging with their audiences.

However, analytics and data are only worthwhile to businesses if they know how to use them. This means they need to have a clear idea beforehand of what it is they want to achieve in order to find out whether or not they have been successful. Then they can know exactly what data they need to get hold of, extract meaningful insights from this information and use it in a practical way that genuinely benefits their business.

According to Christine McNamara of publishing firm Random House, success on Pinterest is down to "authenticity and consistency." "Keep your following engaged with relevant content on a regular basis and you will find success. And it can't hurt to find beautiful images to communicate with such a visually compelled audience," Ms McNamara continued.²¹

Conclusion

Knowing your audience is a fundamental principle of marketing that applies to any channel, but it is particularly pertinent to social media. With Pinterest being heavily lifestyle-focused, companies can gain an invaluable insight into what makes their audience tick, so they can engage with them in a targeted and relevant way.

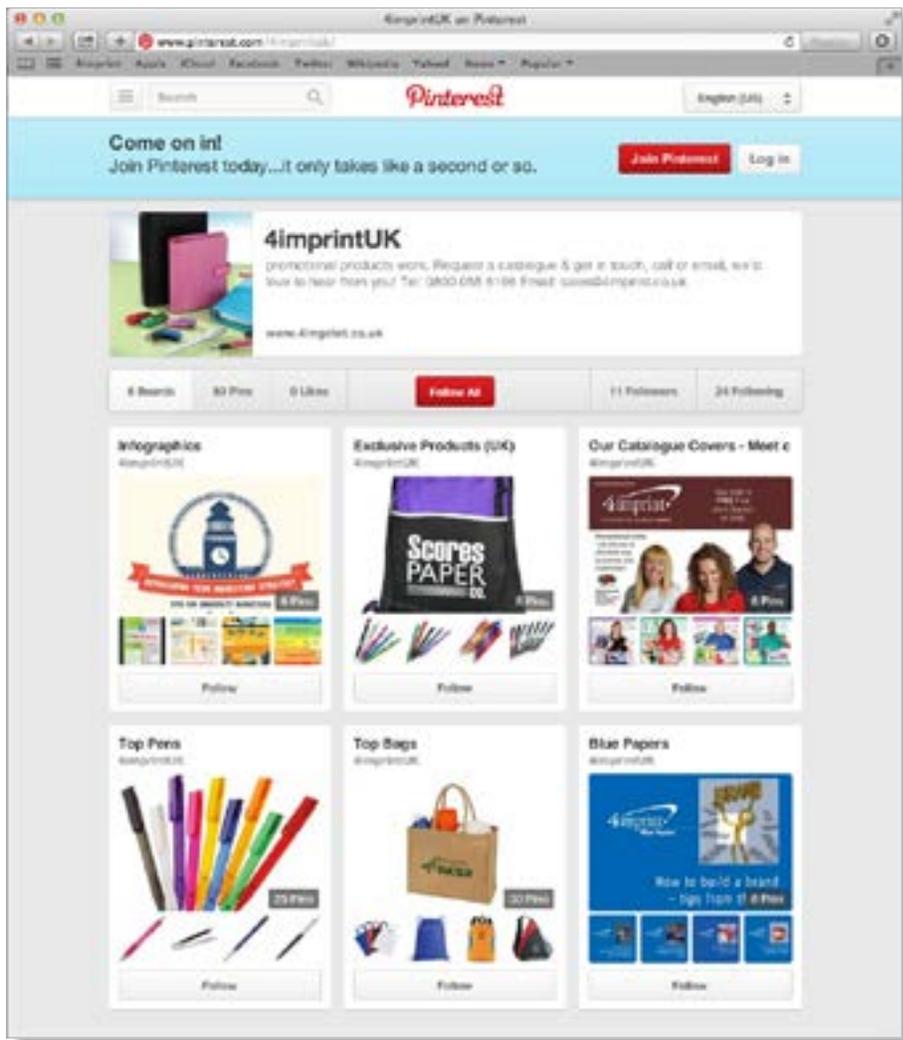
And since the site is rapidly growing in popularity both in the UK and overseas, there appear to be plenty of opportunities to build brand



²¹ David Benady. "How marketers use Pinterest and Instagram to win customers." *The Guardian*. Web. 23 June 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/dec/04/how-marketers-use-pinterest-and-instagram-to-win-customers>

awareness among a wider audience and attract new customers.

As with other social networking sites, Pinterest offers an affordable and effective platform both for large international businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises. As a result, over the coming years more and more companies are likely to make it a prominent part of their multi-channel marketing strategy.



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