

Social Media for Business - Getting Ahead with Facebook and LinkedIn

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It is likely that in recent years every organisation has recognised how the development of social media has encouraged them to think about their business model. Social media channels such as Facebook and LinkedIn are rapidly expanding and companies yearning for success - whether it is a small family-run business or a massive multi-national firm - should consider using social media to retain and expand their customer base.

As Matt Dickman, executive vice-president of social business innovation at Weber Shandwick explains, "Social media isn't the end-all-be-all, but it offers marketers unparalleled opportunity to participate in relevant ways. It also provides a launch pad for other marketing tactics."¹

This Blue Paper will look at the importance of social media for businesses, how companies can be successful in their dealings on social media channels and why all firms in the future are likely to be using this medium.

Social media is getting increasingly popular

When implemented correctly, social media activity should help your business grow and expand.

A number of stats highlight just how popular the medium has become, including the fact that:

- 63 per cent² of companies say that marketing effectiveness has been increased by posting content on social media channels
- 57 per cent of small businesses are using social media to support their marketing efforts³
- 19 per cent are actively utilising a Facebook account, while 14 per cent are doing so with a LinkedIn account
- Brand awareness (27 per cent) has been noted as the most common reason for using social media, as firms seek to make sure their customer base is aware of its offerings
- Social media revenue by the end of 2012 was expected to reach nearly \$17 billion (£10.5 billion) worldwide⁴, a 43 per cent hike on the figure from 2011
- 70 per cent of marketers are placing a greater interest on social media than ever before⁵

So, a pretty compelling case can be made for businesses to sign up for social media and see where it takes them. But why are businesses signing up in their droves and exactly how do businesses implement a successful campaign?

¹ Don't forget the rest of the digital puzzle, TechnoMarketer, July 10th 2008, <http://technomarketer.typepad.com/technomarketer/direct_marketing/>

² Anatomy of Content Marketing Infographic, Content+, <<http://www.contentplus.co.uk/marketing-resources/infographics/anatomy-of-content-marketing/>>

³ How Businesses Use Social Media Infographic, Hiscox, <<http://www.hiscox.co.uk/business-insurance/tips-and-information/how-businesses-use-social-media/>>

⁴ Gartner Says Worldwide Social Media Revenue Forecast to Reach \$16.9 Billion in 2012, Gartner, July 25th 2012, <<http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=2092217>>

⁵ Companies' Online Behaviour Risks Turning People into Brand Blockers, Vanson Bourne, November 20th 2012, <<http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20121119006368/en/Companies%E2%80%99-Online-Behaviour-Risks-Turning-People-%E2%80%99-Brand>>



Why is social media so important for businesses?

Despite the fact social media is a relatively recent development - LinkedIn was launched in 2003 and Facebook followed in 2004 - it is becoming an increasingly important tool for businesses looking to expand their client base. In order to create and maintain a sufficient online presence, companies now have to do more than just the basics. Whilst many online marketing activities can quickly swallow a firm's budget, social media offers many benefits even to those with the smallest budget.

- It offers a new marketing channel to exploit that can increase visibility more effectively than traditional methods such as email marketing, as you don't need a mailing list and can access a massive audience almost immediately
- Social media creates reach into a new customer network, allowing you to create meaningful and personal relationships with both clients and prospects in a unique way
- It opens up new audiences, allowing people to share, like and promote posts both with and beyond their own set of followers
- Social media can also be used to build brand credibility and has increasing importance in search engine optimisation (SEO) - the process of improving visibility of a site in organic web searches
- No need to employ external agencies; getting started is quick and simple



“Usage of online social media has matured and more than one billion people worldwide used social networks [in 2012]. Although the number of social media users is large, and in some cases increasingly mature in their usage patterns, the market is still in its early stages from a revenue perspective.”

- Neha Gupta, senior research analyst at Gartner⁶

Moving forward, businesses should feel confident about devoting a significant portion of their time and budgets to social media channels, as it offers opportunities like no other platform, providing effective ways to engage a customer base and develop relationships in a way not previously seen.

⁶ Gartner Says Worldwide Social Media Revenue Forecast to Reach \$16.9 Billion in 2012, Gartner, July 25th 2012, <<http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=2092217>>

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How to use social media successfully

According to Gartner, there are six core principles related to using social media properly.⁷

Participation

This may seem obvious, but businesses need to make sure they are getting enough participation through their social media channels. Two-way conversations - those between the consumer and the business - can form the lifeblood of a successful policy. Updating statuses, introducing competitions and using games are all measures advised. For example, your company could make it a goal to update your Facebook page at least once every day.

Collective

Typically people using social media are uniting around one common cause. They want to feel part of the collective and so businesses should be encouraging their customers to comment and contribute, as eventually the situation will develop whereby individuals will be self-motivated to take part. You should look to get a status shared a certain amount of times, perhaps offering a prize to the person who takes you over the line.

Transparency

One of the most attractive elements of social media is that people are privy to one another's participation. As it is able to self-govern and self-correct, the content being produced is continually being improved. This principle distinguishes social media from other forms of content sharing and you should look to use this fact to your advantage. This is why you should respond to feedback promptly and try to use tools - such as tagging, voting and star ratings - to make this as fun as possible.

Independence

Social media offers people anytime, anyplace and any-member collaboration. Businesses should look to minimise the controls, administration and moderating present on their social media channels, as this will slow down the whole process. The easiest way to do this is make the commenting process straightforward.

Persistence

Information is collected in an effective manner through social media, as participants' interactions and contributions are captured in a real-time setting. Companies should use evolving technologies to make sure it is as easy for consumers to capture this content.

Emergence

Behaviours emerge over time when using social media. Community members collaborate to come up with new ways of expressing information and deal with any issues that arise. Businesses should think about the ends - not the means - and give the customer base the time they need.



⁷ Gartner Highlights Six Core Principles to Tap into the Power of Social Media, Gartner, August 29th 2012, <<http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=2138415>>

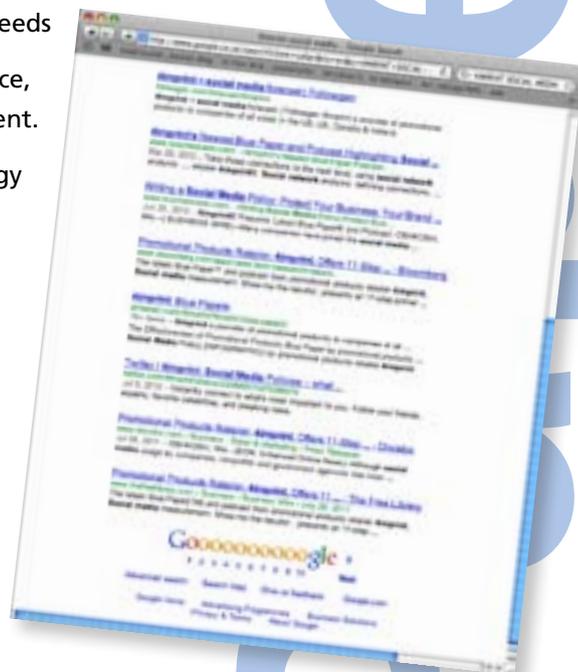
Although it is hard to understand why businesses would avoid implementing a social media strategy given all the benefits it brings, it is important not to overdo it. Research by Vanson Bourne found that 65 per cent of consumers would stop using a company if its social media behaviour was irritating or upsetting.⁸

Unsolicited marketing - or spam, and pop-up advertisements are two of the most annoying social media marketing tactics. The best social media strategies promote relevant information to their target audience, and engage with them on a regular basis. This activity will more often than not lead to recommendations from peers, both in and out of your existing network.

To be successful on social media a coherent and achievable strategy needs to be put in place. Every company is able to develop an online presence, but the key to social media is creativity, and diverse yet relevant content.

Some top tips for businesses to consider when creating a social strategy are:

- Use social media for SEO. You can improve your organic search ranking by making comments that have been optimised for SEO. Traditionally, real-time search in Google meant that search was only as valuable as the latest blog post, comment or social share, but this has changed thanks to its support of social media.⁹ In order to benefit from better indexing and appear higher in search results, all creators of content - whether it is copy, social commenting or videos - need to be on one brand team
- Actively seek out your customers through social media
- Make sure you tailor your strategy for each social media platform
- Learn from the experience of others
- Try and generate interest organically
- Direct social media interest through an on-site blog



⁸ Companies' Online Behaviour Risks Turning People into Brand Blockers, Vanson Bourne, November 20th 2012, <<http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20121119006368/en/Companies%E2%80%99-Online-Behaviour-Risks-Turning-People-%E2%80%98Brand>>

⁹ Using Social Media to Increase Your Search Rank, Clickz, August 22nd 2012, <<http://www.clickz.com/clickz/column/2200201/using-social-media-to-increase-your-search-rank>>

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Using Facebook

Facebook's mission statement is to 'make the world more open and connected'. With one billion active users, 604 million of which sign in at least once a month,¹⁰ it seems the company has achieved this and for this reason amongst others it should not be ignored

The common mistake companies often make is to simply just set up a Facebook page, and wait for the fans to flock. Facebook can be an extremely successful advertising platform, so businesses have to ensure their pages are used in the correct way.

Facebook offer five avenues for advertising these are:

1. **Facebook Ad** - These appear on the right-hand side of a user's Facebook profile and newsfeed. They are in simple ad form and they can send the user to an external page, or a Facebook business page.
2. **Sponsored Story** - A post generated because someone has interacted with whatever is being promoted. These are effective because they can show up on a person's profile, even if they have no immediate connection with the business.
3. **Promoted Posts** - These can be used to increase visibility, as businesses can promote a post that is already on their page. It can lead to an external link, or another Facebook page.
4. **Sponsored App** - A business can sponsor an app. Facebook will make an ad for you, which can be tailored to reflect the benefit of the app. An example of this can be seen with Website Grade¹¹, which is a free tool that measures and analyses all of your marketing efforts. An advert for this app appears in the right hand column of the home page of Facebook users who do not currently have it, which improves its chances of being downloaded.
5. **Event Sponsorship** - This option offers businesses the chance to show their advert for an event to people they think would be likely to sign up for it.

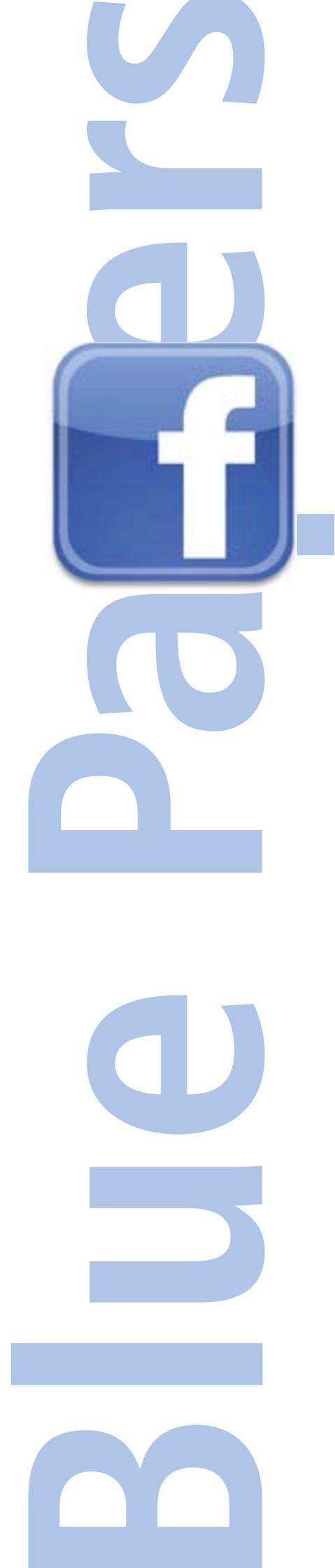
The constant changes to Facebook mean it is important for companies to stay up to date with the developments, to ensure they are not implementing an out of date strategy.

The most important changes in 2012 were:

1. **Global Brand Pages** - This development made it easier for community managers to look after multiple brand pages at the same time as the process is much more streamlined. This means companies can now use one page to manage all of their content
2. **Mobile-Only Ads** - Businesses can now pay for ads that will only appear in the Facebook mobile app - instead of them also being displayed in the desktop version
3. **More Targeting options** - Facebook gave businesses access to data such as age, gender, relationship status and education

¹⁰ Key Facts, Facebook, < <http://newsroom.fb.com/Key-Facts>> column/2200201/using-social-media-to-increase-your-search-rank>

¹¹ Simple Breakdown of All Your Facebook Options, Hubspot, November 19th 2012, <<http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/ibid/33829/A-Simple-Breakdown-of-All-Your-Facebook-Advertising-Options.aspx>>



Such changes mean that business pages are able to display more information and have better functionality than before, meaning that the task of attracting and retaining customers is easier than ever before

More recently (January 2013) Graph Search was introduced. The search engine is focused on people, photos, places and interests located within Facebook. Results are unique to the person running the search and these results can then be refined based on a set of factors, such as age, gender and location.¹²

The tool can be used as a recruiting tool or recommendations site, as searches such as 'friends who like pizza in London' could return useful results for a pizza company or someone looking for food.



Case Study - A Successful Facebook Business

A company that has been able to successfully engage its Facebook audience is How to Market Your Horse Business.

The company won Social Media Examiner's Top 10 Small Business Facebook Pages for 2012¹³ and the judges were impressed by the social media marketing site for a number of reasons, including the amazing engagement and good use of pinning - which is where administrators choose to display a post prominently at the top of their page

The company answered every post and published a variety of content, such as advice pieces, photos and guidelines. It also used photo memes - pictures that have writing over the top of them - to show off their business, but also demonstrate good humour on their part.

Features such as the Word of Mouth Challenge and tag lines like 'Are you ready to take hold of the reins and ride forward into future success?' were well received by users. Good visual branding - including apps and cover photos of horses pulling funny faces - were also highly thought of.

Whenever it runs any competitions, the company also makes a point of producing content on the competition winner, which makes the whole experience even more friendly and interactive.

This highlights how by doing simple things well, any business can create an effective and engaging Facebook portal. Reader involvement is key in social media and so companies should ensure they are offering a positive and ultimately useful experience whenever customers visit their Facebook page.

¹² Facebook Introduces Graph Search, Social Solutions Collective, January 15th 2013, <<http://socialsolutionscollective.com/facebook-introduces-graph-search/>>

¹³ Top 10 Small Business Facebook Pages: 2012 Winners, Social Media Examiner, September 6th 2012, <<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/top-10-small-business-facebook-pages-2012-winners/>>

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Using LinkedIn

New users are currently signing up to LinkedIn at a rate of two per second, while it has 187 million members spread across more than 200 countries and territories.¹⁴ If firms are going to be successful, they need a targeted strategy to attract the right people.

- Build your LinkedIn page like a webpage¹⁵ - Think about what branding and messaging you want to use when designing the page
- Update company statuses - Being active is vital, as consumers will not visit your page regularly if nothing is happening. Links to resources, blog posts and Twitter updates should keep them interested
- Integrate your LinkedIn company page with your website - Adding a 'Follow Company' button on your website makes it easy for customers
- Keep company profiles up to date - List all recent projects and any upcoming schemes, while also make sure staff information is correct
- Set up LinkedIn groups - These are good for helping businesses to find potential customers. They allow you to connect with like-minded people
- Keep your products and services page up to date - Anyone who takes an interest in your business will want to know exactly what you do. An empty page will make it hard to convert a visitor into a client

LinkedIn also lets you separate your audience into countries and languages¹⁶ and this means different social media goals can be set for these groups. So if your business is looking to expand its operations internationally, you can target the relative nations in an easy manner.

You should also aim to be a bit more sophisticated when it comes to staying in touch your followers from different countries. Simply putting an English blog into a translation tool will not create engaging content, so using a translation service is a good idea to ensure everything produced is interesting and translates well.

Share URLs of any pages that feature enticing images on your company page, as this will then be pulled into your LinkedIn company update. Firms should be looking to make connections that will serve them well as Reid Hoffman, LinkedIn founder, noted it is "better to be the best connected than the most connected."¹⁷

¹⁴ LinkedIn Press Center, LinkedIn, <<http://press.linkedin.com/about>>

¹⁵ How companies on LinkedIn are building success, June 18th 2012, <<http://www.stuffedweb.com/how-companies-linkedin-building-success/>>

¹⁶ 7 Tips to Optimize Your Social Media Strategy for a Global Audience, HubSpot, September 26th, 2012, <<http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/33616/7-Tips-to-Optimize-Your-Social-Media-Content-Strategy-for-a-Global-Audience.aspx>>

¹⁷ 10 LinkedIn Tips for Building Your Business, Social Media Examiner, May 20th 2012, <<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/linkedin-tips-business-building/>>

LinkedIn®

Business

Recent key developments for LinkedIn included:

1. **New company pages** - A redesign meant updates by companies, products and services all featured more prominently than they used to, while space for a cover photo and an improved layout for jobs was added
2. **Targeted updates** - Updates can now be separated based on company size, industry, geography and job function. Advertisers can publish updates right to a user's homepage and it has led to an increase in engagement levels
3. **Break up with Twitter** - Until June 2012, LinkedIn and Twitter pages could be linked, allowing updates to be posted through both channels. This is no longer the case and although people can still post to Twitter from LinkedIn, they cannot post to LinkedIn from Twitter

Case Study - A Successful LinkedIn Business

A company that continues to recognise the power of LinkedIn is IBM. The global IT giant has over 450,000 followers,¹⁸ which means it is the most followed company on the network.

Blog posts, tweets, an introductory video and stock prices all appear on its company page, while there are typically 300 job postings and dozens of recommendations designed to drive onlookers to various departments within the firm. This has been pointed out as the best part of the page, as it encourages people to find out more about the company.

The IBM page demonstrates how a company can showcase itself thanks to the customisation options that are available. It also highlights how available jobs should be posted on the LinkedIn company profile page, as millions of people considering a job change are looking at this every day and this could therefore drive great engagement.

Research by Gartner has found that companies are likely to be doing themselves harm in the long term if they do not invest in social media at the same time as their competitors.¹⁹ As using social media becomes increasingly familiar to people, their views on how organisations should use them has changed as well. This means you have to be ready to communicate with those whose preferred choice of communication is via social media or else they may not be your customers for much longer.



¹⁸ 7 Lessons From Successful Companies on LinkedIn, Mashable, September 22nd 2011, <<http://mashable.com/2011/09/22/linkedin-brand-tips/>>

¹⁹ Gartner Predicts that Refusing to Communicate by Social Media will be as Harmful to Companies as Ignoring Phone Calls or Emails is Today, August 1st 2012, <<http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=2101515>>

Customers' expectations continue to change and businesses should look to evolve to make sure they meet these new demands, or else online users today could be left underwhelmed if they are unable to interact in real-time with their favoured brands.

Carol Rozwell, an analyst at Gartner, revealed the churn rate - the number of people who leave a social media channel over a period of time - can increase by 15 per cent due to the "dissatisfaction stemming from failure to respond via social channels."²⁰

Those companies who receive a regular or frequent volume of notifications should consider adopting a minimum social response time to reply to posts.

Nominating a person or giving a small team the responsibility of monitoring and responding to social media posts and comments will improve response times and ensure nothing is missed.

Whilst it may be impracticable to respond to every single comment, those that express negativity or could cause damage should be moved offline, whilst ensuring other followers the problem is being addressed. On the other hand; all positive posts should be responded to with engaging comments, thus promoting further interaction between you and your brand.

Social media platforms offer companies an opportunity for brands to develop relationships with their customer base. The key is to engage in real-time discussions and to learn from any mistakes - such as failing to respond to an irate customer - along the way.

Businesses will increasingly devote their time and resources to social media as they look to promote their products, services and brand as much as possible. You should never forget that social media exposes your brand to the world and therefore adequate time needs to be spent maintaining your social media presence to ensure that your social reach and visitor perception of your brand is overwhelmingly positive!



²⁰ Gartner Predicts that Refusing to Communicate by Social Media will be as Harmful to Companies as Ignoring Phone Calls or Emails is Today, August 1st 2012, <<http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=2101515>>

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