

Social Networking For Small Business

Social Networking is the term given to a variety of new techniques for communication with clients, customers, prospects and other interested parties.

As with other marketing techniques it needs careful planning to ensure that the right message gets through to the right (target) audience.

Whilst using social networking and media can be a blunt, scattergun approach, with careful planning and dedicated application it can, like a rifle, be accurate, well targeted and can be useful in developing relationships with the target audience.

What it is

Social networking is a variety of tools that can be used to develop relationships with customers. Of particular importance is the fact that the use of these tools will help to drive traffic to a website or blog and ultimately help search engine optimisation of the website.

For businesses these tools can be used for reputation management, test marketing and feedback from customers on existing or proposed new products. It can also help to increase awareness the business and raise the profile of individuals establishing them as experts in their field and can be linked to articles, websites, blogs and a variety of other media.



The main tools for small and micro businesses are LinkedIn, Twitter and increasingly Facebook where Business pages can now be set up. Google+ is also increasing membership quickly.

Facebook currently has over 700M users and businesses find this increasingly useful to provide a channel for communication with customers. For instance videos and photos can be downloaded from the site and forums set up to discuss various aspects of the business and its products.

What it isn't

Social networking is not a quick fix for getting customers. Like all marketing it needs a careful and thoroughly thought out plan to achieve goals set for it. It should be used as part of a complete plan and not instead of it.

At all times the focus must be on the business goals and not on chatter about your social life. If that is what you want to network about, then set up additional business accounts with that as the main focus.

Each of the tools identified (and there are many more that you should consider to see what is right for you and your business) have different purposes.

LinkedIn for instance allows you to search for specific people in your target market. It also has very useful Q & A area where your expertise can be shown and your own reputation as a knowledgeable expert can be developed.

Twitter on the other hand only allows 140 characters in each 'tweet' so the main purpose is to drive traffic and enhance your Google search listing as tweets are also indexed by Google.



As mentioned previously Facebook can be used for business and personal reasons. Currently the development of Facebook for business is in its early stages but it can still be used for developing your expertise and to link to other media such as your website and blog by setting up a simple 'fan page'.

How to get started

Getting started is simple. All the tools mentioned are free to set up an account and to use. Just register and start using.

A word of caution, however. Although they are free to use to be effective needs a considerable amount of time. Firstly you need to establish your account; then you need to gather fans, friends or other contacts.

This can be done for searching for your target audience or ensuring that your communications are keyword rich.

Then you need to provide useful content and information. Only then can you start to see the benefit. It needs co-ordination between these tools and your blog and website.

However before you even start, develop an action plan so that you can integrate this form of marketing with your existing plans and make sure they work with each other.

10 Top Tips For Website Improvement

Search Engine optimisation (SEO) is the term used for a range of processes and tools that help to ensure your website is found and, hopefully, found on the first page of any search engine listing for certain words.

These tips are by no means exhaustive but it will at least start bringing the hits to your site.

Tip 1: Website Content

You just need to look at any website randomly and this point is amply illustrated. The text that you use should be visitor friendly. A visitor wants to see that they are searching for fairly immediately.

Any website should be about benefits to the potential customer. With this in mind your text for the website should not be all about what you do but what you can do for the customer.

Tip 2: Research Keywords and phrases

Ask yourself which search terms will people put into search engines such as Google to find you? This is the basis of all search engine optimisation. You need to follow a few simple rules and identify which are the most important ones for you. Suggestions for key words can be found using Google's Keyword Tool.

Tip 3: Include relevant keywords in your text

To ensure your site is more relevant, include keywords in your text. A word of caution here. You should not be too repetitive with the keywords just to achieve a higher ranking. Also you can have different keywords on the same page or different ones on different pages. This will ensure that each page is optimised not just the home page.



Tip 4: Call to action

Ask yourself one question once you have read a web site page. "What do you want me to do now?"

It is very important to have a strong call to action on each page. This call to action can be anything from "call now" to "buy now to get free gift", etc.

Tip 5: Keep Navigation Simple

Today people in general have a short attention span or they are impatient as time is precious. You will hear variations on a theme of the following statement but typically when someone lands on your site you have about 12 seconds to capture them. As a rule of thumb no more than three clicks should get anyone to where they need to go to get information they are looking for.

Tip 6: Use Title Tags and Alternate Tags

When you carry out a search on Google or other search engine you will be returned a website name and some other text. The text used comes from the title tags. By default the many websites include something to the effect of "Welcome to our website" or similar. However a better approach would be to include some of your main keywords. It is perfectly acceptable to include keywords only and not form them into a sentence.

Alternate tags are the text messages you see when you hover your mouse over a picture or graphic.

Tip 7: Update regularly

There is nothing worse than seeing a last updated date of many years before. This says that the company cannot be bothered to keep it updated. If this is the case why should the customer be interested? Regular updating is essential to ranking. The more you update your site the more often Google will return and the more often that happens the higher your ranking will be. One way of updating your site regularly is to include a news feed or a blog. This will allow you to change the content of the site without it being too time consuming.

Tip 8: Build Links

Linking to other sites both incoming and outgoing is an important part of optimisation. The more traffic that you have coming from external sites the better your ranking. This means not only trying to obtain reciprocal links but other activities that can be very cost effective. Some of the newer approaches include social networking. LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook among many others can be used to improve your brand but also to encourage people to visit your site.

Tip 9: Add Google Analytics

Google Analytics is free code provided by Google that you add to each page of your website. It tracks what visitors do when they visit your site and provides valuable information that you can use to make changes to your website to optimise the performance.

Tip 10: Add download sign up

Assuming visitors are coming to the site - you want to capture their basic information like their name and email address by offering them something of value relevant to what they are looking for and your business. A 'top tips' guide for example.

Once you have this information you can then follow up via email and start to build rapport with a potential customer.

In the SEO world there are no guarantees and it takes a lot of time consuming effort but the results will be worth it. Also be patient as it will take time for your site to climb the rankings. And finally keep at it. Good SEO requires persistence above all else.



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