Social Media for Small Business
Research Network Tip Sheet

The Pew Internet Project reported that as of September 2013, 73% of adults who use the internet use social networking sites. The prevalence of mobile phones make access to social networking sites even more common, with 40% of cell phone owners using social media sites on their phones. Businesses use social media too. According to Social Media Today, 90% of small business owners are active on social networking sites, and 74% see the value of online social networking.

Social Media Platforms:

- **Facebook** www.facebook.com – Most popular social sharing site. Users can "like" business pages, view updates, share photos, video & links.
- **Twitter** www.twitter.com – Micro blogging site that allows posts of 140 characters or less. Source of real-time news and updates.
- **LinkedIn** www.linkedin.com – Business oriented social networking site. Allows users to create an online resume, explore job opportunities and learn about companies.
- **Pinterest** www.pinterest.com – Virtual pin board for sharing digital images. Currently dominated by female users, content is dominated by décor, fashion, health, cooking and crafts/diy.
- **Instagram** www.instagram.com – Picture (and short video) sharing site.
- **Google** + plus.google.com - Social sharing site owned by Google. Presence can improve Google search results, Hangouts allow for conversation and group video calls.
- **YouTube –** www.youtube.com Video sharing site.
- **Blogs** – Self-publishing forum, allow for fuller expression and reader comments.

Why should I use social media for my business:

Create awareness

Social media allows you to interact with customers and potential customers. Those who like or follow your accounts are indicating that they want to have a relationship with your company. Their social media connections can see their interactions with your company, increasing your digital exposure.

Provide customer service

Social media allows your customers to provide you with feedback on your products or services or ask questions before a purchase. Naturally, this requires you to closely monitor comments and respond to concerns quickly.

Drive traffic to your website

Social media allows you to promote your content, and link back to your website. Search engines value "sociability," and view social media mentions and conversations as an indication of your authority and popularity, thus improving your search engine rankings. Social media pages also appear in search results, improving your chances for new customers to find you.

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How should I use social media:

Have a plan. Understand your goals – are you trying to improve attendance at your events? Make sales? Increase your visibility in the community?

You don't have to try every social media platform. Social media use is time-consuming (if done correctly), and it's better to be active and successful on one platform than stagnant on many.

Post regularly. It doesn't have to be every day, but it should be consistent.

Monitor your results: Use insights and analytics to determine what kinds of posts are most effective, the times of day your users are active, and how you are meeting your social media goals.

Understand your target audience. Don't just push out information about your business, tap into the interests of your customers and promote conversation.

Take advantage of start-up assistance offered to small business owners on the various platform websites. Websites like Mashable.com and Hubspot.com are also good sources for social media guidance.

Social Media Success Stories

Bada Bing! Pizzeria in Springfield, OH has about 2,400 likes on Facebook, but a very engaged audience. They don't just post about their pizza sales and specials; they show pictures of special pizza creations, pictures of their employees and customers, and have a weekly pizza giveaway. They post twice a day, a few hours before lunch and dinner, trying to get both lunch and dinner customers excited. Their most successful Facebook experiment was a contest to guess how many pieces of candy were in a pizza box, the winner earning the candy and a free pizza. They even paid $40 to promote the post on Facebook, but gained 924 new likes and reached 75,208 people. http://sliceoflife.pmq.com/2013/11/best-facebook-practices-case-study-1.html

Carl Christensen, a photographer and artist, and his wife, Ina, a jewelry maker, both sell their work on the online handmade marketplace, Etsy. They use Pinterest to pin images from the web that they find inspirational, but also images of their own work. While other users can re-pin their images, they will always link back to their Etsy sites, making a sort of online, sharable catalog. Carl attributes $60,000 of annual revenue to the Pinterest/Etsy combination. http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/224286

When Curtis Kimball started his mobile food cart, The Crème Brûlée Cart in San Francisco, he discovered that his customers were using Twitter to tell their friends where the cart was located and what they ordered. Curtis then started his own Twitter account, and quickly acquired 10,000 followers. He shares his daily location and details on his special flavors. http://sproutsocial.com/insights/twitter-small-businesses

Nile Guide, a trip planning website, used LinkedIn to make industry connections for their business. During their fundraising period, they searched LinkedIn for venture capital firms. They also identified niche publications in their field, and contacted individual reporters with whom they had a least a "friend of a friend" relationship. Similarly, they found contact information for specific people within companies they hoped to partner with, in some cases paying to contact them through LinkedIn's premium email service, and in other cases capitalizing on shared connections willing to make an introduction. http://www.inc.com/maisha-walker/2009/08/building_your_tribe_-_6_linked.html

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