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Beginners guide to Social Media

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Welcome to The Beginner's Guide to Social Media! Even if you're not entirely new to Social Media this guide will provide you with a little extra knowledge and help you to understand the best ways to implement it into your business for optimal results. Whether you're a social media fan or not, we should all know by now how valuable and even essential, it is to any business. You probably also know that it can be far more complex than it first appears if you want to use it to optimise and maximise your business; sometimes even a little overwhelming—we're here to help! We've tried to make this as comprehensive and digestible as possible, so no matter what your skillset is when it comes to social media, there's lots of information here to help you improve your social presence.



What is Social Media?

Social media is an online communication and interaction tool. It's pretty much been around since the beginning of the Internet, however, the last ten years has seen the number of social platforms surge and the way it's used change. We are very much living in the social media era. Its name derives from the fact that it's used to engage in a social context, which includes conversations, commentary, and other user-generated annotations and engagement interactions. The rise of social media has brought with it a new way of publishing content, which has been of great benefit to businesses. Even the less tech-savvy is now able to quickly and easily create content on a rapidly growing number of platforms, including those that are owned (hosted communities, blogs, etc.), rented (social networks or third-party communities), and occupied (commenting, contributing, etc.).

For businesses, the great shift in web consumerism and the social media boom brings huge opportunity, but just as much responsibility. Social media equals data; data means analysed and measured strategies, which is any marketers dream. Social media is also the gateway to customer relationships. This is where it's important to remember your responsibility to them. The shift in user behaviour also means a shift in user expectations so you need to ensure you're meeting those expectations, if not exceeding them. You need to be listening and engaging with your customer otherwise they'll be leaving you out of the conversation, which isn't necessarily a good thing.



Is Social Media here to stay?

As mentioned previously, there has been a surge of popular social media platforms over the last ten years like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, and many others. It's safe to say that social media isn't going away, in fact, it's probably just getting started, which means the need for social media in business will only grow over time. The impact social media has had on the world can only be described as mammoth, with the statistics speaking for themselves when it comes to the sheer number of users.



Does my business need Social Media?

Whether you're running a global conglomerate or small local business these statistics make it abundantly clear that you need to be online as that's where your audience is hanging out. Social media is used for everything these days, communicating with friends, colleagues, for work, shopping, recommendations, interacting with brands; the list goes on. If you're not around to join the conversation your competitors will be, so expect to miss out. Social media is the opportunity to add value to your business and build relationships with your customers to create the foundation for what can eventually become one of your greatest marketing assets: customer advocacy.

A positive social following is the nirvana of social media, and it is through this following that you'll see your efforts truly start to flourish and grow. Raving reviews about your product or service from customers on social media is worth a million times more to your business than any paid for advertising.



Recommendations from your customer's shows that your business is doing a great job, what more could you ask for when it comes to marketing for your brand? The first step to positive advocates for your brand is knowing exactly who your target audience is. This way, you know you're providing something they want, which is half the battle. You can also use social tools, your website data and customer data to identify your customers and figure out what is most important to them for a great user experience. It will also give you an insight into how they use your social media platforms, is it for recommendations, reviews or are they visiting for information, exciting news, sales and content etc. Once you know what's attracting your audience you can continue to give them what they want and even reward them for their loyalty. It is important to note, though, that your most beneficial customer relationships will be built organically, which can take some time.

The transition from a passive web to an interactive web has brought with it the perfect opportunity for businesses to get in front of more of their customers and is essential to the success of a business in today's market. The gift of being able to build relationships with your customers so easily through social media is one that will see your business grow from strength to strength, but only if you're listening to them. Social media gives you the power to reach more people in a genuine and authentic manner, drive more qualified site traffic, increase the authority of your brand, engage the people who influence your customers' behaviour, and gain the data necessary for insights-based business decisions.

So the question that begs to be answered is, why wouldn't your company use social media?



Will Social Media help drive my other marketing strategies?

The first thing to remember is, yes, social media is key to succeeding in today's market but it's not the starting point. Your business doesn't start with Facebook, Instagram or any other social platform; these are used as a gateway to strengthening your brand. Social media should be used in conjunction and as an extension of your existing presence. Capturing your company's voice and sharing it with the world through social media will open up unique opportunities in all other channels of marketing, including SEO, branding, sales, and more.

Relationships Relationships Relationships

I don't think we've mentioned relationships? To maximise social media for your business, positive customer relationships should be your end goal. This may not seem like the most natural thing to focus on coming from a traditional business background but we have to remember we're now living in a time of interactive web use not passive, so to maximise that bottom line, increase the ROI and grow the metrics, relationships are key. Social media is by far the best platform to build those solid foundations for relationships with longevity.

Social channels have broken down the walls between individuals at an unprecedented rate. Lets look at Facebook as an example:



Facebook released data showing that its users were, on average, 3.57 degrees of separation from each other, this pretty incredible. So it goes without saying that some of the most successful businesses have social media, Facebook in particular, to thank for their success; all through the power of interaction and building relationships. Great relationships build solid foundations for customer advocacy and loyalty, which in turn drives website traffic, conversions and business growth.

Customer Feedback

The speed in which information can be shared through social media is unmatched by any other platform, this means businesses can share information in real time and so can your customers. Getting instant customer feedback is invaluable for any business. This kind of data is also completely free so it doesn't get much better than that. Incorporating social listening into your marketing strategies can save you a lot time and money down the line, it can work as an early warning system and save on customer service costs, all while providing valuable development feedback.



Social media integration

Social media needs to be integrated correctly into a business, it can't just be an after thought or an add on – it's simply too valuable a tool for your business not to be comprehensively integrated and managed. By incorporating social media into your marketing strategy from the beginning, you can create a cohesive and scalable experience for your customers. Having a clear social presence from the get go will have a positive impact on your overall brand and brand voice.

As you can see, a social presence can have a huge and far-reaching impact for your business when it is thought-through and implemented in an authentic manner. By making social engagement a core part of your marketing strategy and not just an afterthought, you create better opportunities to maximise its power and reach.

Is social media valuable to my business?

As we have already discussed, one of the greatest benefits of social media is the ability to build and nurture relationships with your audience. That engagement is at the heart of social media, so it's important to harness that opportunity. You have the opportunity to interact with customers anywhere the world—on a huge scale. If a current or prospective customer has something to say to you or about you whether it's positive or negative, you now have the ability to respond immediately. On top of just the responsive communication social media allows for, it also opens up the door for conversation, it keeps customers coming back, increasing both loyalty and retention. The power of word-of-mouth and brand advocacy will see you make incredible returns. By creating a community and a place where your audience can engage you're also creating valuable and authentic content for your brand, a strong brand voice and building up authority for your brand within your industry. Your customers will trust you and keep coming back. The more you give your customers what they want the more authority you'll get back.



Social Media metrics and ROI

Another key benefit to online marketing is that you can measure everything; this gives you a huge upper hand. The biggest thing to remember here is that yes, you may be able to measure everything but that may not be the most efficient use of your time. The key is to figure out what to measure and why, to benefit your business. As a business, you want to measure any return on your investment, this can look very different for different campaigns, one size does not fit all when it comes to online marketing for your business. Your goal may be as simple as driving more traffic to your website and measuring conversion. Or, you may have more complex requirements from your metrics. You may be using social media to reduce your spend on customer service issues, using social media over the phone. Knowing exactly what information you want from your social media metrics is key to getting the results you want for your business.

The right data leads to the right steps being taken towards business growth and ROI, without the right data it's all just a guessing game and we all know that is not good for the budget. Looking at what things to measure for your business will see you focus on either quantitative or qualitative data.

Qualitative data consist of words and narratives. The analysis of qualitative data can come in many forms including highlighting key words, extracting themes, and elaborating on topics.

Quantitative data is numerical information, the analysis of which involves statistical techniques. The type of data you collect guides the analysis process.

Here are a few examples of quantitative data that may be useful to your business through the use of social media:



Followers - This is a metric that most businesses track as it gives us an instant sense of achievement watching the numbers increase. It's important not to place too much on this though as it's only a number unless you're seeing other areas of growth due to this increased following, such as increased traffic and conversion.

Engagement - One of the most important metrics you can measure is engagement. This is a true indication of your success and efforts. Depending on the platform or channel you're using, engagement can measure a host of different items. All of these metrics combined can give you a very good idea of how your target audience is responding to your content. For example, on Facebook this could be how many shares or comments you get, similarly to a blog post, the more shares and the more comments you get, the better it has been received. Engagement is a good indicator of how well you are connecting with your customers.

Timing - A key metric to take note of is timing, when exactly is your audience active and engaging? Are you also active at the same time? If not, you should be. This is often a missed opportunity to expand your reach as many accounts are only managed during business hours, but that isn't always when your customers are listening. There are plenty of free tools to help you measure the best times of day to be active for your audience or it can be as simple as looking at the times your customers comment or post.

Click-through rate (CTR) - Measuring click through rate is nothing new when it comes to online marketing, it delivers some of the most valuable data, this is also true of social media. If your goal is driving traffic back to your website and increasing conversion then it's the perfect metric to tell you how well you're doing this. You can then work on improving this rate.



Qualitative data can often be overlooked, as a lot of the time we're driven by cold hard statistics and numbers (they can be extremely gratifying) but it can be extremely beneficial to a business, take a look at a few examples that may help drive your business forward:

Influence - Everyone business would love to find their community's key influencers and use them to maximise their products or services. But how exactly do you do this? There is no universal standard for measuring influence or finding those people. An ideal scenario would be the influencer in your industry, but if not look for those that match your brand and be very careful when choosing people to be the face / voice of your offering, remember that all takes is one bad post for a reputation to be ruined.

Sentiment - Analysing sentiment means your measuring the general feeling towards a conversation or topic. Essentially, are people loving or hating your content? Or worse, are they neutral and there is no engagement. If you can measure how well your content is being received, you know which way to drive the direction of future content.

Conversation drivers - There are lots of tools out there to help you see what people are talking about when it comes to your brand and business. Knowing what your customers are saying about you and even your competitors is incredibly useful when it comes to implementing future strategies and campaigns. Conversation drivers is one of the most important and insightful qualitative measurements you can use.



Which Social Media platform is right for my business?

This is a very important question but unfortunately, there is no one single answer to this question. For each and every business, this question will be answered differently and as with any marketing channel, the more thought and strategy you put into your implementation plans, the greater your chance of success. That said, it's a pretty safe to say that most companies should have a Facebook page. If you refer back to the statistics above, it's quite likely you will find a good portion of your customers here.

You need to look at your business and define your target audience, if you have one. For instance, 60% of snapchat users are under 24 years old, therefore if you think your product is suitable for that age range then go for it. If the reverse is true and your product is aimed at an older market then perhaps Facebook has a better profile for you as the 25 to 55 age group accounts for 32% of Facebook users. Statistics also show that this slightly older age group visit their Facebook page several times a day.

If your company is female focused then Pinterest is a significant social media platform, 42% of women online are Pinterest users and in this instance, age is of no significance as no one age group is dominant. If your product has a strong visual image then this is the perfect platform for your business.

Another tool to help you narrow down the 'where' of your social strategy is to go on a bit of a exploratory listening journey. Use one of the many social listening tools to discover where your customers and competitors are having significant conversations. This data will help you unearth which platforms make sense for your business.



How many Social Media platforms should I be using?

If you are looking to use multiple platforms to market your products then it is very important to pick the ones most suited to your demographic. Also, you should consider seriously the time and cost involved in maintaining the platforms you choose; two or three carefully chosen and well run social media marketing campaigns will make for better returns than having lots that cannot be maintained and kept relevant.

Give your customers what they want not what you think they want

Once you get going in social, it's easy to become distracted. New trends, app and tools are released daily but it's important to stay authentic. Remember, the most valuable thing social media offers your business is great customer relationships; this is what drives your business forward so make sure you're giving them what they want. Like we said before, it's better to do fewer things effectively than many things ineffectively. That said, it's important to keep up to date with social trends but it's about striking a balance. Social media is an area that changes with every passing day so you have to keep your finger on the pulse.



In summary

In conclusion, don't be put off by the amount of information out there, decide what social media platforms are best for your company and get cracking, as it certainly doesn't show any signs of slowing down.

If you would like help understanding benefits of social media, advice on how to get started or how it can help your business:

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