

SPECIAL FEATURE

Using social media marketing in the business world

Facebook announced this month that they have 500 million users worldwide. If the users were a country, they would be the third largest in the world. Recent statistics show that over 17% of all internet time in the UK is spent on Facebook, with 27 million of us, spending on average 6 hours per month logged onto the site. Twitter is not as successful, but it can boast the worldwide hosting of more than 50 million 'Tweets' every day. The success of social networking sites, particularly Facebook has resulted in businesses adapting their marketing strategies to take advantage of access to a wider audience than traditional methods allow.

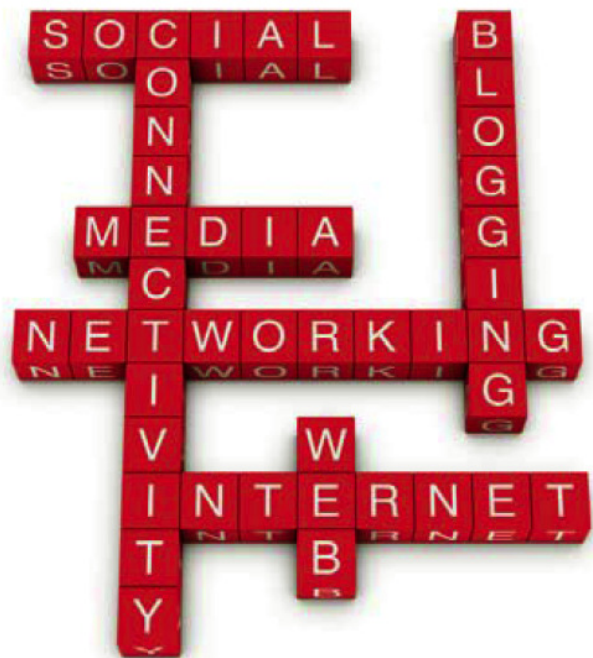
For those that are new to Social Networking, Facebook, Twitter, Bebo, LinkedIn, You Tube and many, many other sites are free to access, with users being able to create their own profiles, identify what information they receive and by whom, enabling users to participate in groups, offer opinions in discussions and update their friends and followers on their thoughts and activities, as often as they choose to.

Multi-national companies have had incredible success in using Social Media Marketing (SMM) and there are many lessons that can be learnt by small businesses too. This year Starbucks reached 100 million fans on Facebook and there are many ideas that small businesses can incorporate in their use of SMM, namely the underlying strategy for the use of Facebook. "The key here is we are connecting directly with our loyal customers who will be driving our future growth" says Howard Shultz. CEO Starbucks.

To increase the chances of success in SMM, it is important that there is no hard sell, as users will be more likely to be switched off by marketing gimmicks and direct selling techniques. The strategy for SMM should be to develop relationships with customers and potential clients, offering free advice and expert opinions, which should lead to the growth of fans and followers for the business profile.

Random searches for business types identified some interesting groups. Searching for 'windscreen' in Facebook found a group with 193,272 members, all wishing to be a part of a group called 'I hate the little triangle that the windscreen wiper misses'. How can this be of any use to business? There are two opportunities here:

- 1 The first is that all of these individuals have a vehicle. If as a business, your market includes vehicle owners, drivers, or even passengers then this is a group that you should join. Become involved, add to discussions and offer expert opinions and you enter into real communication with your target market.
- 2 The second is that this search has identified a potential gap in the market, could your business solve this problem? Perhaps your business has the skills and expertise to design and launch to market a new type of windscreen wiper.



Social Media Marketing

SMM can provide businesses with a direct line in communication to its potential customers, enabling businesses to respond to customer demand, and the best part is that you don't have to spend a penny to do so!

Top Tips for starting and/or growing your business SMM profile:

- 1 Look around.** Are your customers frequent users of the chosen Social Networking site? SMM is not for every business, or for every market and you must be clear on the chances of success in proportion to the amount of effort that will be required to increase your business profile.
- 2 Join groups.** Add your 'expert' opinion and advice to others within forums, discussions and 'tweets', which are relevant to your business.
- 3 Create a business profile.** Make it relevant and offer a reason to visit. Provide incentives, with ideas including discounts for fans/followers, competitions, free downloadable resources and advice. Ensure that at all times the content is current and above all, honest and trustworthy.
- 4 Signpost.** Once established as a member of other groups and discussions, signpost users to your business profile and ask users to become a fan/follower. Include the details of your SMM profile on your traditional marketing and on business stationary, as well as a link from your own website.
- 5 Keep it up to date.** This does take time and commitment, which reinforces the importance of understanding whether your business can connect to its customers using this method.



This information and advice about SSM has been provided by Lisa Hall, Business Consultant from PAGE Consulting Ltd.

PAGE Consulting Ltd is a Business Improvement Specialist, which offers coaching and mentoring to Business Owners and Senior Managers, looking to be released from daily operational activities, to enable them to strategically develop and grow their business. Packages and services include training and one to one mentoring, to support individual business needs.

For more information contact 01430 440079, visit www.consultwithpage.co.uk or email enquiries@pageconsulting.ltd.uk

Sources: Facebook Press Room, and Twitter Statistics

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