

Social Media For Your Startup

The 10- Step Guide to Social Media

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GET GOING!

The 10- Step Guide to Social Media

Facebook is long past the days of being a simple application for posting your vacation pics. There is a reason for the 600 million-plus users and the \$50 billion valuation. Facebook is a big part of the social media phenomenon that is fast becoming an indispensable - not to mention, easy and low-cost - way for businesses to interact with existing customers and attract new ones.



Startups that leverage this medium now will benefit through improved relationships with customers and increased profits in the long term. In an hour a day or less, you can create an effective social media strategy for your startup - and it's far more efficient than handing out flyers on a street corner for an hour or mailing out brochures.

What exactly is social media? At heart, it's simply media used for social interaction, but with far broader and more advanced potential. Services such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube employ publishing techniques of unprecedented accessibility and ease of use to turn basic communication into interactive dialogue. LinkedIn and Facebook blow the old Rolodex out of the water, using these tools you can find vast networks of connections and ease the way to getting in touch with new and long-lost contacts. In short, social media represents a robust way in which you can create a "conversation" with your target market, whether it's via Twitter, LinkedIn or YouTube, by blending technology and social interaction. The benefits are threefold: creating value to sell more products, improving service, and generating a strong community following.

What are some popular social media tools and channels?



twitter



HIGHLIGHTS

- What is social media?
- What are the social media tools you'll need for your business?
- Why is social media relevant to your startup?
- Basics On Blogging
- Building A Community With Social Media

Why Is Social Media Relevant to Your Startup?

If you're starting a business and you want people to find you, then social media must be a solid part of your strategy for attracting and retaining customers. Think about it: How often do you use Google or other search engines to find a business? Well, in today's environment - and going forward - it's all about helping customers find you; If they can find you via 'word of mouth' from a trusted online community, so much the better. For example, if you're selling organic baby food, then making sure you have a presence with new moms is going to be key. You can use social media to create an online presence that helps get you a top spot on Google search. Your online presence will guide folks towards finding your company and your social media tools will showcase your product/service either directly (through your own online marketing efforts) or organically (through the comments and reviews of your existing customers).

Additionally, while you can spend dollars in traditional advertising, you simply can't spend enough as a startup to attract busy moms - at least, certainly not as effectively as you can by leveraging social media. Online, you can simply reach out to moms who run blogs or associations that already attract new moms and get them to try your product. If they like it, they'll recommend it - and their devoted followers will buy it, over and over again.



The following 10 steps will help get you going with social media for your startup. You don't have to dive into these all at once. The good news is that as you learn more, you can always incorporate more social media elements into your overall business strategy. But for now, here's your primer:

1. Embrace social media

As a startup, you're in a great position to build social media into your business strategy from the get-go. Recognize and embrace the value that social media can bring to your business. Because of the channels that are immediately at your disposal, you'll be able to begin reaching out without having to spend the big budget like the big guys used to do not so long ago. The playing field is leveling - but only for those who take advantage of this opportunity. You'll be able to build a customer-centric culture that enables direct two-way interaction with your customers and prospects.

Companies that fear this type of connection will ultimately fail. Social media helps create transparency, thus building greater trust with the consumer. All of the remaining steps outline ways to enhance your website's visibility by strengthening its search engine ranking, creating awareness, and helping define you as an expert.

2. Create a Facebook fan page

If you already have a Facebook account, great. However, for your business, you can create a free "fan" page at Facebook. Simply choose between creating a 'community page' (a page to rally



supporters for a local cause ex: bake sale, marathon, campaign) or an 'official page' which would be more appropriate to showcase a company, brand, organization, artist etc.

This fan page will operate like your personal account except it will be for your business. It's here that you want to upload your logo, a brief statement about your mission, and anything else that your prospective clients might find useful. Once it's up, notify all of your Facebook friends and suggest that they "like" it, which will help increase your presence.

Upload pictures and videos of people using your product or service. You can post news articles or anything of interest to your prospective customers. It's here that you can also make special offers and discounts available. Keep it fun but maintain professionalism at all times. Find ways to engage your fans - from offering specials for Fans only to asking them for new product or service ideas. They're going to talk on your page anyway, so make sure you check it regularly. For example, take a look at our fan page.

3. Create a Twitter account

Go to Twitter and set up an account for your business. With a Twitter account, you can send out short messages - "tweets" - of 140 characters or less via whatever a connected device - computer, cell phone, smart phone, etc. - to your followers.

Twitter users are accustomed to seeing a lot of messages, so you don't have to worry about tweeting too often and turning them off. What should you tweet? Links to your blog entries, press, a promotion, something cool or innovative that is happening at this very moment.

You can also "retweet" - forward - a profound statement from some guru who you're following. All information should be useful for your community, and it should not always be directly self-serving. The idea is to position yourself as an expert. The more people who find your information useful, the more followers you will attract. And if one of your followers retweets one of your tweets, some of that person's followers may begin to follow you.



Twitter is a fast-paced service, and the more people you follow, the harder it can be to keep up. Using a Twitter management interface, such as [TweetDeck](#), [CoTweet](#), [HootSuite](#) or one of the many other free/low cost Twitter clients is almost necessary. Using a Twitter client gives you a friendly interface for tweeting and managing your various Twitter relationships - and a tool like TweetDeck lets you regulate incoming tweets to a small pop-up window on your computer screen.

4. Set up a YouTube channel

Video is becoming more important for social media, especially for enhancing your search ranking when potential customers try to find someone in your business on Google or Yahoo. More importantly, video creates a more personal connection with your customers and can demonstrate success stories or how your product works. You can create your own "channel" for your business by simply going to YouTube to set it up. You'll need a free YouTube account first. If you already have one, just sign in. If not, sign up. Once you're signed in, simply click on your username and choose "My Channel." Once there, you can post videos relevant to your business.



Remember to tag your videos with key attributes, such as your business name, keywords related to your business, and the type of video. This will allow people searching YouTube to find you more easily. Take a look at our YouTube channel.

5. Start a blog

We're all familiar with blogs but now is the time to start your own for your business. This is how you will solidify your credibility in the marketplace as an expert in your industry. No one has your voice or your authenticity- so you own that! Write about product attributes or experiences that show your expertise. Be real, though, and if you speak from the heart, you'll convey your message appropriately. You only need to commit to writing 1 blog entry per week that's 1 or 2 paragraphs. Setting up a blog is easy- you can do it for free at [blogger.com](#) or [WordPress](#) check with your web hosting service (e.g, 1and1 or Word Press, which have blog functionality built in as part of your package).



Be prepared to spend several months blogging as it does take a long time to build a following, however, once published online, it stays there! For an example, look at our blogs on our website, which is a customized from WordPress:

<http://www.wickedstart.com/blog/>

6. Start A Monthly Newsletter

Starting a monthly email newsletter with tips and inspiration or how-to stories can be a great way to connect with potential customers. Getting started is easy. There are several services out there that could be of value to you. I've been using Constant Contact for several years. Their service is reputable and solid - and it has an easy to use interface with templates to get you started. Once you have your newsletter in place, put a link on your homepage so website visitors can sign up to receive it. For a newsletter example, have a look at one of ours.

7. Digg!

Drop in on Digg "conversations" pertaining to your industry to keep your finger on the pulse of what's going on. You'll hear what experts, consumers, and advocates have to say by being able to sort through the latest news about your identified industry. Once you find blog or forums where people are talking - share the conversation, using services like [Digg](#), [StumbleUpon](#) or [Reddit](#) to "Vote" on the articles and let others know they are of value. You can also use the buttons included on many articles to share content via your Facebook or Twitter pages.

8. Answer Community Questions

Search the Internet and keep a list of blogs and communities relevant to you industry. Then, answer questions to help consumers make a better decision or share an experience so someone can learn from you.

While you shouldn't use this channel to directly sell yourself or your product, if you answer enough questions, you'll become known as an expert and customers may actually seek you out. If you find something really interesting for your users, you can post it in a blog, tweet it or post on Facebook. Services like Aardvark and [Quora](#) also categorize topics and let you answer questions in your field, helping you gain credibility.

9. Set up Google Analytics

This is the behind the scenes way to track Web traffic -visitors - coming to your website. Using the metrics collected by [Google Analytics](#) you can actually find out which social media strategy is more profitable by calculating a conversion rate. Let's say, for example, you had 1,000 visitors to your site yesterday and you see that 500 of them came from a blog entry that you wrote. Of those 500 visitors, 50 of them made a purchase on your website. This means that 5% of visitors who clicked over from your blog entry made a purchase. Not bad!

Over time, you'll be able to identify trends and understand what's driving traffic to your site so you can focus your attention on those particular traffic-and sales-generating tactics. A big advantage to being online is that everything is measurable, so you know early on what's working and what isn't. If you really want to get professional, optimize your website pages by tagging them with relevant terms that will help you get closer to a #1 Google search ranking.



10. Commit!

If you can commit an hour a day to your social media strategy, you'll be able to get through these 10 steps successfully. If you can do more, even better. Remember that this strategy takes time to develop. Be prepared to spend several months getting your social media strategy in place. Over time, if you find that certain channels are really working for you - say, Twitter, or your blog - you can always spend more time there.

Now, you can certainly set up your social media strategy on your own. However, if you need help or want more strategic guidance, there are plenty of social media experts out there. Do your homework to make sure they really can help you: Ask for references and go online to check out the fruits of their labor - don't accept just anyone who calls himself or herself an expert or guru. It's easy to do. Hubspot.com is a reputable firm. How do I know? I've had colleagues use their tools and swear by their value. While I haven't personally engaged them online, I did read a very compelling book that the founder wrote called "Inbound Marketing." Even if you don't or can't afford to hire them, the book is an excellent read that really helps you dive deeper than these basic 10 steps. Good luck with your startup's social media strategy!

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