

SOCIAL MEDIA -

MANDATORY IN TODAY'S BUSINESS PRACTICES

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Let's put this question into perspective. Approximately 22 percent of online users are spending their time on social media platforms. The Internet has transformed the way we connect, therefore opening a door for the rapid growth of online marketing opportunities. As humans, we are empowered by the speed of discovery through our computers and mobile devices. Information is now at our fingertips, so why wouldn't your business be a part of this technological movement?

Social media platforms have given a voice to small businesses in a competitive world. If executed correctly, your business will be able to access a larger customer base and implement strategies inexpensively. Using social media is entirely effective with a well-developed campaign. As a marketing and advertising manager, the social media aspect of our services has grown exponentially over the last four years. Not only are more businesses participating in social media, they are utilizing three or more social media platforms to promote their business. Each social media network captures a different audience, with some crossover, but this practice allows your company to explore its options for reaching your preferred market.

Before you begin your adventure exploring the platforms that are best suited to serve your company's marketing needs, there are three guidelines I suggest every business follow. You may find it surprising that many businesses using social media marketing are not optimizing the full potential of these networking opportunities.

1. Social Media is a Commitment. Your online customer base wants to be involved with your service or product. It's imperative that every business is managing their social media campaign on a day-to-day basis. You'll be surprised to find that only 30 percent of businesses are responding to their engaged followers through social media.
2. Response Time. You'll find that some of your online followers will contact you through social media rather than emailing or calling your company. Only 44 percent of businesses get back to their online consumers within 24 hours and 39 percent of businesses using social media are not managing their platforms at all! Remember, social media is a way to "connect."
3. Create a Campaign. Every business should have a well-developed social media campaign before it begins. Ask yourself, "What is your goal?" "What is the call to action?" "How will you manage your social media platforms?" and "How will you track your results?" Your content must be relevant to your audience and more importantly, never overshare. Over sharing is a sure way to lose your followers' interest. If you choose to use multiple networking platforms, you can use a social media management dashboard like Hootsuite – there are plenty of other options from which to choose.

Now that you are aware of the guidelines, you should become familiar with the more commonly used social media platforms for business. The majority of companies worldwide are using Facebook and/or Twitter. Half of these companies use Youtube or LinkedIn. Thirty-three percent of worldwide companies have a presence on Pinterest or Google+, and other fast growing networks include Tumblr and Instagram. Like many business owners, time may not be something you have to give to social media. There are plenty of advertising agencies that offer these services and will develop a campaign specific to your company's needs. However, if you choose to keep this task in-house, be sure you have truly compared your options.

Successful campaigns used for business are primarily about quality content. With any networking platform, you are still competing for the user's attention, even after they have shown an interest in your business. At the end of the day, a company that has 500 engaged followers will better serve your company than having 1,500 followers that never engage.

Social media can be a wonderful marketing tool because it reaches an audience worldwide, it's affordable, and it can build credibility. However, if you do not manage your social media presence properly, it can also hurt your business's virtual appearance. Research your options, become educated – but do not wait another day to “catch up!” In the world of technology, if you are not keeping up, you will be left behind.

“How can you squander even one more day not taking advantage of the greatest shifts of our generation? How dare you settle for less when the world has made it so easy for you to be remarkable?”
– Seth Godin (sethgodin.com) QCBN