

# SOCIAL MEDIA PR AND MARKETING FOR YOUR BUSINESS



Once a trigger for rolled eyes and snickers, social media tools are no longer just for letting random followers know when your teeth are brushed or the dog is fed. As newspapers dwindle and new generations rely on online sources to access and share news and information, business owners and gaming operators can no longer ignore the ever-growing presence of social media platforms as serious communication tools.



For those who are unfamiliar with it, social media is a collection of online and mobile tools that deliver real-time information that have been used effectively for a number of organizations. More companies have recognized the effect tools like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and blogs have at reaching the massive audience of customers, vendors and stakeholders that communicate online. Put in the simplest of terms, social media communication can be thought of as online public relations and marketing. PR and marketing firms are now integrating successful online communications strategies into traditional PR and marketing campaigns, operating under the idea that, to be used effectively, social media programs require research, planning, targeted efforts and consistent messages.

So why would businesses want to use social media to communicate their brands? Well first of all, there's little to no hard costs. As advertising dollars shrink, businesses must pursue new avenues for reaching target audiences. While online communication

efforts do require the investment of time, they allow access to hundreds of thousands of audience members at no charge. Second, it's direct. If online communities are where your audiences are, that's where you should be. In many cases, potential clients are looking to read about your specific topic of interest. And finally, it's fast. Posts take just a few minutes to write and are instantly available at the click of a button to current and potential customers, employees and investors.

Additionally, blogs and online profiles provide enormous feedback from your target audiences. More than just blasting messages, social media can also be a powerful listening device. Businesses launch social media campaigns to serve as a tool for relationship building and to enhance reputation management. This strategy establishes two-way communication with key stakeholders and empowers businesses to speak with them, not at them.

The best social media campaigns are tied to an organization's overall integrated public relations and marketing efforts, complementing traditional communication tactics to effectively establish and maintain a brand. The most effective PR and marketing firms combine online communications strategies with a full scope of brand management services, including media relations, executive visibility, events planning and corporate social responsibility, as well as public affairs practices such as issues management, advocacy and community outreach.

As you can see, social media is comprised of many different platforms. Rather than trying to participate in all of them, begin with one or two that seem to make the most sense. First, let's start with the basic of online marketing then examine how some of the most popular social media platforms can benefit your company.

A comprehensive and user-friendly website lays the foundation for any business' online marketing plan. Websites are the number one resource tool that potential customers and media professionals use when researching information about you. Essentially, each social media tool (LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.) should link users back to your website.

To utilize your website even further, you can create a blog on the site to share information and gather feedback while counteracting any negative online comments. Video can also be uploaded of a company spokesperson commenting on relevant issues. This personal touch can go a long way in offsetting any harmful beliefs that wrongfully resonate in the community.

Other strategies to increase the effectiveness of your website include concentrating on optimization strategies. What are the key search terms online users are using to search for your type of business? Those terms must be reflected in the content on the website.

If desired, initiate a pay-per-click campaign(s) in order to guarantee first search page placement for viable keywords and phrases pertinent to your business. Such services include Google AdWords.

The website can also be linked to Google Analytics, a free service that generates detailed statistics about the visitors to your website.

## Analysis of the Top Social Media Platforms

### Blogs

The main purpose of a blog is to communicate with customers, investors and/or employees to share knowledge and expertise. Blogging should be informative and provide

new content, yet should be entertaining to read to keep users coming back for more.

Blogs can be linked your company's website, helping to increase site traffic. The more often your company blogs, the more credits you receive in search engine optimization.

Blogging software is very easy to set up and use. Simply write your thoughts, link to resources, and publish your blog, all at the push of a few buttons. Websites such as WordPress and Blogger offer free blog publishing tools.

Blogs are real time. If your company has breaking news and wants to distribute information as fast as possible, a blog is perfect for instant communication.

The thought of allowing user "comments" frightens many business bloggers, but allowing user comments will not only provide essential feedback about your business, but will also allow a representative to respond to any complaints directly and quickly. Remember, it is better for negative feedback to be posted on your website as opposed to a third-party website, where you have no control over the content.

### Facebook

Facebook is a social utility that connects people with friends, co-workers, family members and others in their lives. While initially used as a personal social networking tool, more and more businesses are using this type of connectivity for promotion of products and services. But take note: A Facebook page will only be effective if your company is active in pursuing and making new connections. To create a profile and leave it stagnant is a waste of time.

#### Why should your company have a page on Facebook?

- Facebook is a great resource for generating brand awareness. The social networking site can create an interception point for building a relationship with business associates, co-workers and staff.
- Facebook is a great way to communicate special projects and announcements; it can be used to entice engagement with your company.
- With the "Share" tool, Facebook acts as a portal point for driving traffic back to your company's website.
- Facebook is a useful tool for seeing what

business associates/clients are saying about your company.

- A Facebook profile, with links to your website, will contribute to your site's search engine optimization.
- A Facebook profile provides an opportunity to find clients you may not have otherwise targeted.

### LinkedIn

LinkedIn is an interconnected network of experienced professionals that allows members to find, be introduced to, and collaborate with qualified professionals with like-minded goals. LinkedIn is an ideal site to generate referrals and recommendations. By joining, members can create a profile that summarizes their professional expertise and accomplishments, and then invite trusted contacts to join LinkedIn and connect to them. A network consists of the members' connections, their connections' connections, and the people they know, creating a vast network of qualified professionals and experts.

#### Latest LinkedIn Facts:

- LinkedIn has more than 43 million members in more than 200 countries and territories around the world.
- A new member joins LinkedIn approximately every second, and about half of the members are outside the U.S.
- Executives from all Fortune 500 companies are LinkedIn members.

#### LinkedIn members can:

- Manage the information that's publicly available about the member as a professional.
- Find and be introduced to potential clients, service providers, and subject experts who come recommended.
- Create and collaborate on projects, gather data, share files and solve problems.
- Be found for business opportunities and find potential partners.
- Gain new insights from discussions with like-minded professionals in private group settings.

### Twitter

Believe it or not, Twitter can be used for business purposes. Twitter is a social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read other users'

updates ("tweets") in real time.

Twitter helps to promote connectivity. Your company's "followers" can stay up-to-date with happenings of the day, interesting links, announcements, etc.

Twitter can also be used to direct traffic to your company's website.

### YouTube

Whether you run a small business from your home or work for a large corporation, you can use YouTube to promote your company. YouTube is a video-sharing website where anyone can upload and share videos for others to view.

Video can be used to highlight testimonials from employee, customer or business associates.

Video promotes click-through and engagement – two key responses you want users to experience when visiting your website.

Content-rich video can add value to a site, including interactivity and extra content to engage target audiences.

Video helps develop personal engagement between your company's employees and your target audiences.

Hopefully now you see that the potential payoff for businesses that engage in social media is enormous. These businesses will have the means to highlight their products and services, enhance networking, comment on relevant news and trends and engage target audiences. Establishing new contacts and staying connected is essential for anyone looking to build their business, and utilizing social media tools can make the task easier. Social media is an incredible PR and marketing tool for your business and/or gaming establishment, providing you with more customer insight, direct communication channels and the ability to measure the effectiveness of these conversations very closely.

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