



Crafting the right social media strategy



By Jennifer Clark, Content Strategist

When you think of social media, what comes to mind? Teenagers taking selfies? Sounding boards for customer complaints? Forums for celebrities to share their latest endorsements? What about a platform for engagement, sales development, lead generation and distributing company products and information? If the latter was not part of your initial definition of social media, then keep reading.

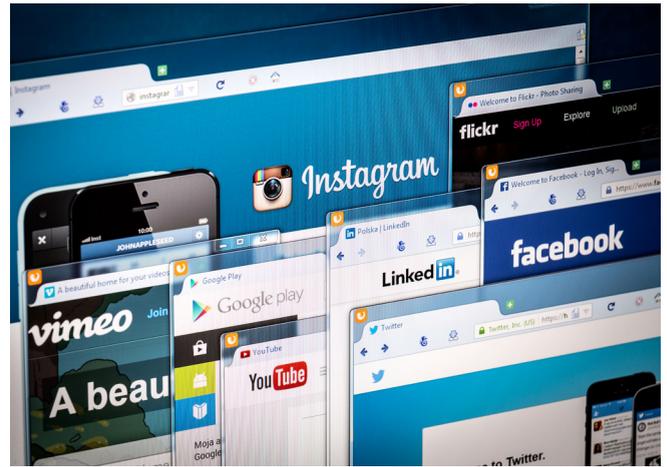
Social media no longer falls to giants Facebook and Twitter as the catch-all for sharing any and everything, but instead, it's now segmented by age and audience. The youngest demographics have shied away from the old standards and now use more conversational apps. Instagram and Flickr are more for photos; Tumblr and Wordpress fall into blog categories; YouTube is for videos; Facebook is for longer and mixed social content; Twitter is for shorter content; and LinkedIn is for businesses.

STRATEGY

Before you sign up for a Twitter account or start posting content to LinkedIn, you need to sit down and design a strategy. You'll need a dedicated person or team to keep up with your content and identify what type of information you will be disseminating. In order to help you determine the right platform, you'll want to see what resources are readily available to dedicate to this undertaking. Look at what kind of posting frequency you can realistically manage. It's okay for your Facebook page to go a week without anything, but not your Twitter page. If you can realistically put out content on a daily or weekly basis, that can help determine which social site might work best for you.

NOW, HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT CONTENT TO GENERATE?

While company news and awards are easy go-tos, don't forget about product launches, new hires and external interviews or places your name is mentioned outside of your own organization. Social media is a place for people to be social with the media. Anything that can spark conversation or



prompt people to remember your name, comment and engage with you is helpful. Don't shy away from controversial issues, either. If you're not afraid to put your stance on a certain issue or topic, you could potentially gain new followers or customers. But, the adverse is also true, so be strategic about what your content says about your mission and value statements as a business.

SOCIAL HURDLES

The biggest hurdle to developing any social media strategy is understanding that it requires a lot of time. Content and dedication to developing said content is the biggest hurdle. Committing to a social presence, and to have it succeed, is better left to quality content versus having a presence on every platform. If you have a Twitter page, a Facebook page, a YouTube page and so forth, but really only have the time for one, it can make your business look out of touch or uncaring to put anything on your page. Having a page that isn't regularly updated tells users you don't really care what they think about you and is an instant reputation killer. Just like your website is similar to your storefront, your social presence also tells people who you are and what you're about. Twitter users won't necessarily know your Facebook page is filled with great deals and news and vice versa, so pick one or two sites and develop rich, timely, engaging and routine content for it.

WITH SO MANY CHOICES, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

Let's start with LinkedIn. When LinkedIn first arrived, it appeared to be more of a digital resume for job seekers to connect with other professionals and share their experience. There wasn't a news feed and you didn't typically engage with other users. Today, it boasts 450 million profiles and is the ideal place for businesses to network with em-

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employees, customers and future customers.

LinkedIn truly is a social network. It proves the adage of, “it’s not what you know, but who you know,” can be true when people see how you’re connected to others they may know. This instant referral system aids job seekers in a completely new way. Think of it as your personal CRM, complete with referrals and testimonials.

But LinkedIn isn’t totally for those seeking new employment. This platform attracts customers and resellers, vendors, employees and those in the tech community looking to share information about both their individual achievements and overall business’ accomplishments. Think of it as an easy way to boast about your latest and greatest awards without having to frame a certificate in your lobby.

NOW, LET’S LOOK AT HOW THIS MIGHT BENEFIT

TECH-DRIVEN BUSINESSES.

Your company wins an award that puts you ahead of your competition. While your marketing team might think to write a press release or perhaps take a photo, you might not realize the promotional value a post on LinkedIn could have for you. Tooting your own horn gives you the opportunity to see who else might be interested in this news. From there, as people engage with your post and profile, they become potential leads. Are they repeatedly liking your content? Do they comment when you share company insights? Why not reach out to them via LinkedIn or their professional email?

The key to this, however, is distinguishing yourself as someone who is truly interested in them personally and professionally and not just generating mass-produced emails that come off as dishonest and impersonal. As you begin to track the potential leads based on who likes your content, why not turn that group

of individuals into a new lead nurturing database?

You’ve now got a new platform from which to track and cultivate leads all while spreading the word about your business and keeping in touch with colleagues and industry competitors. This, in theory, is the crux of how social media can work as a lead-generation tool.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I TRY?

If you’re asking, “So, what else is out there for me besides LinkedIn,” the answer is both easy and hard. First, you need to understand the commitment that comes with managing multiple social platforms. While LinkedIn certainly isn’t the only answer to social media, it’s an easier entry and the most professional of all social networks. However, if generating lots of content in short-form quickly is more your speed, Twitter is perfect. If combining photos and specials, longer narratives and status updates that need more longevity, Facebook is ideal. Also, if you’re able to say more about your products or business through stunning photography and only need captions or a link, consider Instagram. Having a dedicated social media employee or team will help with the strategy behind what content should go where.

While it may seem overwhelming at first, the biggest mistake would be to not take advantage of any social networking. Having an audience at your fingertips, who often read news across social sites rather than via emails, means you have yet another avenue for spreading your message. **c**

