



Using Social Media to Grow Your Business



Technology such as mobile phones and computers enables business owners to connect with current and potential customers through social media. © Yuri Arcurs/Shutterstock

Social media offer businesses a variety of tools to inform existing customers and connect with new ones. Business owners can use social media to cultivate customer loyalty, raise awareness about products and services, and reach new customers and markets — all from the comfort of a home or office.

What Are Social Media?

Social media — from networking and microblogging websites to video- and photo-sharing platforms — are technological tools that enable people to communicate and share easily with their friends, families and communities on the Internet.

However, they differ from traditional forms of online communication such as email and static Web pages. A business's website is like a book — formally written and rarely revised. Its social media presence, on the other hand, is like a conversation — casual and constantly changing. The following tips will help you harness those differences to increase both your sales and your customer base.

Keep It Brief

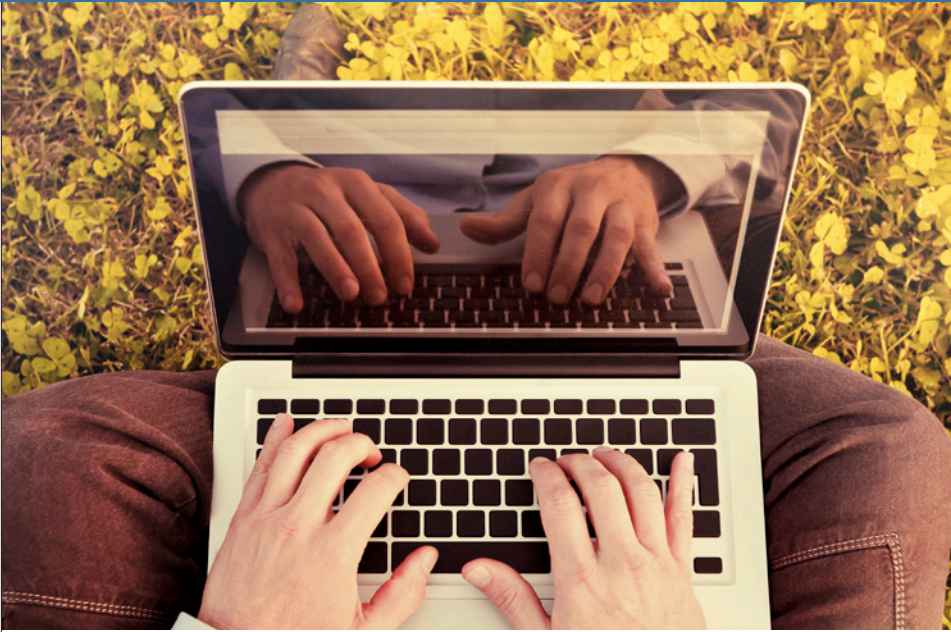
First, unlike your business's Web page, your social media content must be short. On some microblogging sites, for instance, you can type only 140 characters per

entry, or "post." Other platforms allow longer posts, but you should still strive to be concise. Do not try to say everything at once.

Instead, schedule your posts over the course of a day or week, focusing on one key message per post. Your customers are more likely to read and remember short, focused messages rather than long, rambling ones.

Keep It Fresh

On social media, old posts rapidly recede from view in a continuous stream of new content. This flood of information can overwhelm your followers, who may see hundreds of updates



Business owners can use social media to cultivate customer loyalty and raise awareness from virtually anywhere.
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every day from friends, acquaintances and other businesses.

Stand out by posting timely, eye-catching content. Use images and videos whenever possible, and be sure to post frequently. Staying fresh in the minds of your followers will increase the chances they will visit your store, buy your products or use your services.

Keep It Personal

Social media allow you to give your business a personal voice. Make new followers feel welcome by adopting a casual and friendly tone. Make existing ones feel special — and increase sales — by offering exclusive online promotions.

For example, try posting a “word of the day” to your followers and offer a discount or free item to followers who come to your business and use the word. The more approachable and customer-focused your

business seems, the more likely it is to retain and expand its customer base.

Keep It Interactive

Just as you would in a face-to-face conversation, resist the temptation to talk only about yourself. Think about the sort of impression you want to make. Keep your followers engaged by posting articles, links and other content you think they will find interesting.

Conversations depend on two-way communication. Encourage interaction by asking questions and running contests. If you own a restaurant, for instance, try asking your followers to name a new menu item. If you sell sports equipment, post the latest scores of sports teams and invite your followers to post photos and comments from local sporting events. If you sell kitchen equipment, ask your followers to post their favorite recipes.

Keep It Responsive

To engage customers in a conversation about your business and its products, you must listen to what they are saying. Ask for feedback. Reply to messages and comments. Do not be afraid of criticism — acknowledge it and take steps to address it.

Keep It Purposeful

Every social media platform is different. Some, for instance, use “hashtags” — labels that allow posts to be sorted by topic — while others do not. Do your research. Familiarize yourself with the rules of each platform before diving in, and decide which is right for you.

Finally, be strategic. Which social networks are most popular with your target customers? Does a network provide access to a population you had not considered before? Invest your time in those that offer the best opportunities for growth.

Business owners can keep customers engaged by posting content that is relevant and interesting.
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