



THE RIGHT PLAN

Ensuring Social Media Success for Your Business

By Ross Cumming

Despite a relatively slow start, businesses of all sizes and in all sectors are realizing the immense value of social media in driving business growth and building authentic relationships with their consumers. Incorporating social media into your business strategy is essential, but how successful you are may depend on a number of different factors. How do you ensure your venture into social media is a success?

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Investing in social media allows businesses the opportunity to appeal to mass markets, increasing brand exposure and driving business growth. The Arab Social Media Report, published in 2014 by the Dubai School of Government's Governance and Innovation Program, identifies the size of these available markets. Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn have a user base of over 11 million, 3.2 million and 3.1 million respectively in the GCC countries alone. In order to make the most out of this substantial market, it is essential that your business has a detailed plan on how an approach to social media should be made.

HOW CAN SOCIAL MEDIA BE USED?

The diverse nature of social media and its users means that it can be used in a variety of ways to benefit your organization. For most SMEs, priority will be towards business growth through developing brand awareness and generating sales leads. Creating these leads is developed by having an active online presence, communicating well with your audience, and sharing interesting and relevant content, which is then shared by existing customers and reaching a new audience. As the popularity of using social media for business grows, more and more organizations are using it as a means of



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gathering and responding to consumer feedback – both positive and negative. Remember to respond to all feedback, especially when negative. Use customer feedback to look inwards at your business. There is always room to improve.

APPROACHING SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN SME

Before presenting your business online, know your target audience. With this knowledge, a decision on how best to project your voice can be made. It is all about what works for your organization, but more importantly, what your audience will respond to best. The creation and sharing of original, interesting content is central to social media. In this respect, it is necessary to facilitate conditions which allow two-way communication between your business and your consumers and potential customers. Doing so ensures greater brand awareness, as interesting and relevant content will be shared outside your customer base, reaching a wider audience.

HOW TO MANAGE YOUR TIME

Many small businesses may find it difficult to spare the time for social media management. Just remember that it is an extremely cheap tool which can generate real and measurable returns. Perhaps you may wish to start with only a select few media channels and that is fine. What is important is that you have some relevant online presence which can be used for building authentic relationships with your audience. Although finding and managing content can be time consuming, there are many social media management tools which can make the process easier. Queueing posts for automatic publishing at a later date and simultaneous publishing across platforms, as well as a range of analytical tools are a useful, if not essential part of fulfilling your social media strategy. When promoting your message online, remember to ensure that each message aligns with your brand values.

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF ANALYTICS

Although you should start with a good idea of your customer base, it is essential that as part of your social media strategy, some kind of analysis is performed in order to track and measure the value and return on investment in social media. A number of analytical tools are available to make this easier. Identifying core characteristics about your audience such as dominant language, age, gender, and profession can enable a much more targeted response in your social media marketing campaign. Tailoring your message to align with the dominant characteristics of your audience will ensure that your message is relevant and interesting to the right people. You can use these tools as a performance indicator, altering your message and identifying which receives the best response allows you to constantly improve.

TOP TIPS

PLAN *your social media approach*

USE *feedback to engage with customers and improve your business*

MANAGE *your time to include daily social media tasks*

ANALYZE *the reach and effectiveness of your campaign*

SPONSORED CONTENT AND ADVERTISING

Although it is sufficient to use social media as a means of connecting and having conversations in real time with your audience, you may also take advantage of paid advertising options available on many of the social media platforms. Geo-targeting on Facebook and Twitter allows sponsored posts to appear directly in the news feed of those in a specific location, ensuring only the target audience is reached, meaning a higher customer conversation rate. Remember, the most important aspect of your venture into social media is creating authentic connections with your audience, listening and responding effectively is essential in creating a successful and memorable experience, developing your organization in the process. **BIG**



Ross Cumming works as an associate at Beckett-McInroy Consultancy, a business and education consultancy comprised of qualified and experienced Coaches, Trainers, Researchers, Psychometrists, Writers and HRM Consultants ensuring that their clients'

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