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**Brief:** Social Media – is it for you? A basic guide for businesses that are yet to create a social media presence for their business.

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## **Starting Out On Social Media**

Our Tips for SMEs

### **Are you ready to join the party?**

With over 2.59bn<sup>1</sup> active users worldwide, most of us expect businesses to be on at least Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn. So whether you like it or not, Social Media is here to stay. And if your competitors are setting up on Social Media sites, you're giving them a big head start.

Done well, it's an opportunity to have ongoing conversations; speaking and listening to customers. Social Media has been likened to being at a party. You want to be that great guy that everyone likes, doing most of the talking. The one who's the life and soul of the party, being interesting and interested.

### **Supercharged Word-of-Mouth**

It's long been known that word-of-mouth is one of the most effective ways of marketing a business<sup>2</sup>. Social Media has the potential to be your online equivalent. And you could reach way beyond your local network – globally even. If word gets out, online communities amplify the good (and bad) in everything you do. Now everyone's a journalist, so you've got to be ready to respond appropriately.

### **Be Useful and Informative**

Don't try and sell yourself online, we're all too savvy for that. Being overly pushy could even damage your reputation. Be useful. Create 'content' that people will want to read, watch and share. Inspire your audience with your own stories and experiences if you can. Once out there, you'll be able to cultivate the advocates (who may not even be potential customers) who'll help drive traffic back to your website.

### **Words of Caution**

Does it make sense? Just because everyone else is doing it, doesn't make it right. Don't just jump in and create a monster you'll struggle to control. Building and managing a Social Media presence isn't a one-off effort. It needs constant planning and evaluation to maintain and grow. For the most part, it's free. But like any business activity, your time and effort should show a clear ROI. So start small and take time to develop a clear strategy that complements your other activities.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://econsultancy.com/blog/65700-the-current-social-media-landscape-statistics> (correct as of 03/11/2014)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.businesszone.co.uk/blogs/iat-ltd/iat-blog/power-word-mouth-marketing> (correct as of 23/10/14)

Ask yourself some key questions:

- What business objectives can Social Media contribute to?
- Do my customers use Social Media, and which ones?
- What problems can you solve?
- What processes can you streamline?
- How are your competitors using Social Media and to what effect?
- How will you measure success?

Really think about how you'll use Social Media to improve your business **in the eyes of your customers.**

## **How Should a Small Business Make a Start?**

### **Six Simple Steps**

#### **1. Identify Who'll Be Responsible**

Try to get everyone thinking about what customers would find useful, not just you. Having said that, it's a good idea to have someone in charge of it that has the autonomy to interact with customers and make decisions

#### **2. Define Your Audience**

Don't set out to try to have lots of followers or friends who'll never buy from you. A single engaged person who regularly interacts is worth more than a thousand of those. Know which customers you're targeting and find out which Social Media they use. And if you don't know, you can do some market research - just ask them

#### **3. Have a Clear Strategy**

It doesn't have to be a formal document. Just ask yourself all those questions above to work out if you're improving things or just creating unnecessary work

#### **4. Create a Calendar**

You don't have to have a Social Media presence to be social. If you already have a website, you can be proactive with a blog. You might want to put together a 'content' calendar for the next few months or year. Your trade or industry publications and websites will often have an editorial calendar you can tap into. Try to have a mix of 'formats' – videos and infographics are easier for customers to digest. Have buttons on your website and include hashtags, if you can, so that it can all be easily shared

#### **5. Choose Your Platform**

Now you know where your customers are and what you have to bring to the party, go ahead and dip your toe in with one, or maybe two, social sites. Most B2C companies start with Facebook and Twitter, whereas LinkedIn is more favoured by B2B<sup>3</sup>. If your business is visual or creative, then it's easy to set up a Pinterest or Instagram account to showcase your portfolio. The most important thing is to be where your customers are

#### **6. Start Small and Be Patient**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/linkedin-tips-what-you-must-know-b2b-marketing-jerome-knyszewski>  
(correct as of 31 January 2015)

Relationships aren't limited to office hours and neither is Social Media. Make sure you can attend to questions and requests immediately. In fact, over half of people asking a question on Twitter expect an answer within an hour. If it's a complaint, then 72% want a response within the hour<sup>4</sup>. Also think about how many posts/tweets would be appropriate. So kick off with what you can easily manage and build from there. It takes time to see the true result, so don't panic, be patient and enjoy the ride

### **Spread the Word**

It may seem like a bit of a minefield. But making yourself available through Social Media creates transparency. It enables you to show the real identity of your business; to share what you're doing at the moment and to demonstrate the true culture of your firm. It's a chance to be both proactive and reactive in building lasting relationships with your customers. So what are you waiting for?

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<sup>4</sup> <https://econsultancy.com/blog/65018-what-social-customer-service-is-really-worth-stats/> (correct as at 16/06/2014)