



Getting Started with Social Media

Social Media has become the #1 source on how residents and customers find out what is happening in a community and in your place of business. Here are some ways your small business can utilize social media to engage with your customers.

A variety of free tools make social media a relatively inexpensive way to generate leads and increase brand awareness. The bottom line: your audience is on social media, and you need to be there too. Social media is like word-of-mouth for the 21st century. It IS the yellow pages for the technology age.

1. Choose the right networks for your target audience

According to customer surveys from 2018 MSI Market Analysis research, the top three channels used most by Iowa consumers in Main Street communities include Facebook, You Tube and Pinterest. Start with one or two options. Instagram can also be very powerful for businesses that sell clothing, gifts, home décor or yummy –looking food. But if you have a very narrow customer base you need to find out which channels they regularly use and be there.

2. Create a business account

You want to have a business account so that you will have access to the analytics available through most channels. Personal accounts do not have this feature and you will definitely want to review to see what's working and what's not and adjust your strategy accordingly.

3. Determine what you want to accomplish

Your #1 goal should be to build customer loyalty and engage your customers. 75% of consumers under age 65 do research online before going to a store. (*Purdue University*) You want to use social media to build a relationship with your customers so they feel loyal to your business and would encourage their friends and family to do business with you. 70% of consumers trust brand or product recommendations from friends. (*Forrester Research*)

4. Start to gather content, photos, and videos

Content is the short narrative that you use in your posts to create interest or inform your customers about a product, service, or sale that you wish to promote. The great news is that you don't have to create this all by yourself! Start to look for interesting stats, great photos, or tips related to your products or service that you can share with your followers. Be sure to give credit to the original source. Follow similar businesses or those that you admire to get ideas.

5. Follow the 60-30-10 rule

Not all content needs to be created by you. 60% of the content you share can be shared from other related sources. Make sure it is relative to the brand image you are trying to create. 30% should be original content that you create and 10% should be special offers or calls to action to visit your location or purchase an item.

Getting Started with Social Media—page 2



6. Create a calendar to plan your posts.

- Decide how often you will post—once a week, once per day. Start with what’s manageable.
- Follow holidays or trends related to your industry.
- Incorporate local events—festivals, sporting events, recreational activities
- Be consistent, professional and polite

7. Start to build followers

Start with your family, friends and employees. Ask all of them to like your page and to share with their family and friends as well. Again, follow similar businesses and those you admire in your industry. They may follow you back as well.

8. Educate yourself

There are lots of great online resources to help you learn how to set up an account, add pictures, along with tips and tricks to help make it all easier. Just Google “How to _____” and you will get tons of ideas and videos to check out. A few of our favorites include:

- ⇒ Socialmediaexaminer.com
- ⇒ Wyoming Business Council—great video tutorials on how to use the top social media channels
- ⇒ Sproutsocial.com
- ⇒ MariSmith.com
- ⇒ CreateBuzzNow.com

9. Be a Social Listener too

Social media is not just about posting and pushing out a lot of random pictures or information about your business. Be sure to thank people who share a post or ask a question. And if you have a complaint be sure to address it within 24 hours. Ask your customers questions in order to better understand their wants, needs, and problems. When you can solve one of them—you could gain a customer for LIFE! Share positive customer testimonials to better reinforce your brand and build customer loyalty.

10. Have FUN!

Social media should be fun so don’t forget to keep it light. Customers still like to be entertained so always try to have some posts that are fun, light-hearted, and help your customers get to know you and your products better. If all else fails—post a video or pic of a kitten, puppy or cute baby!



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