

SiteProNews: February 2, 2011 Feature Article

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How to Use Facebook for Your Small Business By Kandice L. Day (c) 2011

Leveraging Facebook to generate leads, increase site traffic, and even make a little money is every small business owner's goal. But in most cases, it's not as simple as getting on once a week for an hour, posting a bunch of 'interesting' information, and getting on with your life hoping that the leads will start flowing in. Facebook is a remarkable tool for creating a 'buzz' about your small business and inviting new friends to check out your services, but done in the wrong way Facebook can also hurt your overall brand image.

Facebook reaches millions upon millions of people: 500 million to be exact. And 200 million Facebook users are mobile, getting their Facebook fix from their Android, iPhone, and Windows devices. According to the Facebook Press Room, in 2010 the average Facebook user was connected to 80 community pages, groups, and events; created 90 pieces of content each month; and shared more than 30 billion links, news stories, blog posts, and pictures.

Marketing your business on Facebook is no longer a 'maybe we'll do it this year.' It's nearly a requirement to establish your brand as credible, available, and trending. We've put together the top three things you must do on Facebook to be successful, as well as the top three things you absolutely should not do on Facebook. Let's start with the bad news first and end with the good news.

Top 3 Mistakes Small Business Owners Make on Facebook

1. Over-Posting - I see this mistake made over and over again. In most cases it happens because small business owners have great intentions and want to be active on the social networks, but they either don't have time throughout the week or they just plain forget. When they do remember, or do have some marketing time, they jump on Facebook, don't join any conversations or start new ones, but post about five status updates, links and news information in a 15 minute time frame.

2. Not Enough Time - Maybe 15 minutes is all the time that you have for Facebook, and if that's the case then you might want to consider adding some help to your marketing team. By over-posting, you're not giving followers a reason to be interested in your company, you're giving them a reason to "unfriend" you. Take your time with posts. If you do only have 15 minutes on Friday evening to get your Facebook marketing done, put up your most interesting status update in the first minute, spend 12 minutes seeking out new friends and conversations, and in the 15th minute post your second most interesting status update.

3. Unbranding Your Business - Facebook is a great resource for keeping up your small business brand. It's important to 'stay in character' and to 'stay in business mode' while spreading information about your business brand. Playing games, talking about personal issues, or posting inappropriate pictures will kill your brand. Spending time on Cityville and Farmville from your Facebook business pages will only show that you're not professional and not concerned with how your business brand appears to others.

Top 3 Things A Small Business Owner Must Do On Facebook

1. Brand Your Business - Send a clear message with every status update, photo upload, and conversation piece about your brand. For example, a client of Linwright Design happens to be in the field of pain management, and a lot of patients are living with things like RA and fibromyalgia. So we seek to join conversations around these topics, spreading our overall brand message by suggesting information from our website and our branded blogs on these conditions. As a small business owner, your profile picture can be your logo with information about your business, or if you are proud of your team and want to make your brand a bit more personal, it can be a "family" photo of your employees.

2. Seek Out Conversations - Don't be over-active in 'friend requesting' strangers. For one thing, you will get penalized and possibly even blacklisted from Facebook all together, which is the last thing you want. Seek out conversations in your industry by doing searches with keywords. For example, for our pain management client mentioned above we search keywords 'fibromyalgia' (and more) to listen to and join conversations that people are already having about this condition.

(Tip: Go to the search box at the top of your Facebook Page. Enter the keywords that you are searching for. Go to the bottom of the search results where it says "see more results." Look to the left and click on "posts by everyone." This will take you to the world and all conversations on Facebook regarding your industry. Listen to what people are talking about, get ideas for blogs, and join conversations.)

3. Be Consistent - Facebook, as with any other social media platform, is all about consistency. So you only have an hour a week to spend on Facebook? Spread that hour out throughout the entire week. Even 15 minutes every day will help more than one hour in one day. You have to be available to your Facebook friends and you have to be able to monitor your brand. If someone leaves a comment or asks a question, you need to be able to answer those or respond. Even 15 minutes, at the end of your day, every day, will make a small but crucial difference over time.

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Kandie Day is founder of Linwright Design, specializing in digital development and distribution. Mainly Arizona SEO [<http://www.linwrightdesign.com>], social media marketing, branded content development, and in-depth analytics.
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