

## **Top 4 Tips for Using Social Networking Successfully**

There is lots of noise out there about using Social Networking to market your business. But first, what the heck is social media? Wikipedia defines it as “primarily Internet - and mobile-based tools for sharing and discussing information”. They are tools that can be used to increase your market share, to drive traffic to your website, to find new customers, to build loyalty with existing customers. Used wisely they are less expensive, more targeted and more versatile, than traditional marketing tools.

But, how does one get started? I am currently in the middle of building a social networking strategy for my company and I was quickly overwhelmed by all the information and choices out there. So here are my top 4 tips for using Social Networking successfully as a small business owner.

### **1. Choose the Right Fit**

There are a lot of social networks to choose from: Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Flickr, Twitter, Digg, StumbleUpon and YouTube and lots more.

The first thing you need to do is to figure out what your goals are (what do you want social networking to accomplish for your business – drive website traffic, increase sales, find new customers?) Then decide who your target audience is and do some research on which networks they use. For instance, LinkedIn is best for building professional business contacts. Use Facebook Fan Pages and YouTube to promote to teens and young adults.

What you don't want to do is to go crazy and sign up for all the social networks out there. You won't have the time to use any of them properly. Successful social networking does not depend on you joining all of them; it requires that you choose one or two and use them strategically. Otherwise, it is a waste of your time.

### **2. Give Presence to Your Profile**

Make sure you fill out your profile as thoroughly as possible. The more information you can provide, the more people will get to know about you and want to engage. Put up a great picture of yourself – people want to know what you look like as well. Leaving a question mark or a cartoon character instead of a picture doesn't always make the best impression. If you are reading this and thinking this is an invasion of my privacy, then social networking is not for you. Find another marketing tools that suits you better.

### **3. Take Action Regularly**

Don't sign up for a social network, do a burst of activity and then go into stealth mode! For social networking to be effective, you need to be active regularly. People have to know you are there. So respond to messages in a reasonable amount of time. Update your profile regularly; add content that will keep you on people's radar. You can link your blog to Facebook. If you are going to use Twitter, then make sure your messages have value – just don't spam people. When you meet new people, invite them to join you on LinkedIn or Facebook. If social networking is a key marketing tool for your business, set aside regular time in your calendar to do what needs to be done to grow your business in these arenas.

### **4. Submit Interesting Content**

You don't have to be a Hemingway to be successful in social media. Not all the material you submit has to be from your very own pen. You can bookmark stories and websites and post links to your social networks of existing Internet content that you find interesting. Think of it as sharing expertise and knowledge. Just make sure that you have read through an entire story before you post it, to make sure that it's something you're comfortable posting under your name. The more eye-catching the material that you post, the more people will follow you and be interested in seeing what you submit next. Like any other marketing tool you use, it has to be interesting!

And finally – don't get stressed out about social networking. It should be fun and easy to use – a chance to interact with regular customers and associates and find new ones. If you think it is a waste of time or see it as an invasion of privacy or know that you will only post a Tweet once in a while and never look at LinkedIn after signing up, then don't do social networking. Put your energy and money into marketing tools that you will use to build your business. Otherwise it's like joining your local chamber, never going to an event and then complaining that it was a waste of money because you never got any new business from your membership.

Fiona Walsh, CEO  
FM Walsh & Associates Inc.,