

GROW YOUR BUSINESS

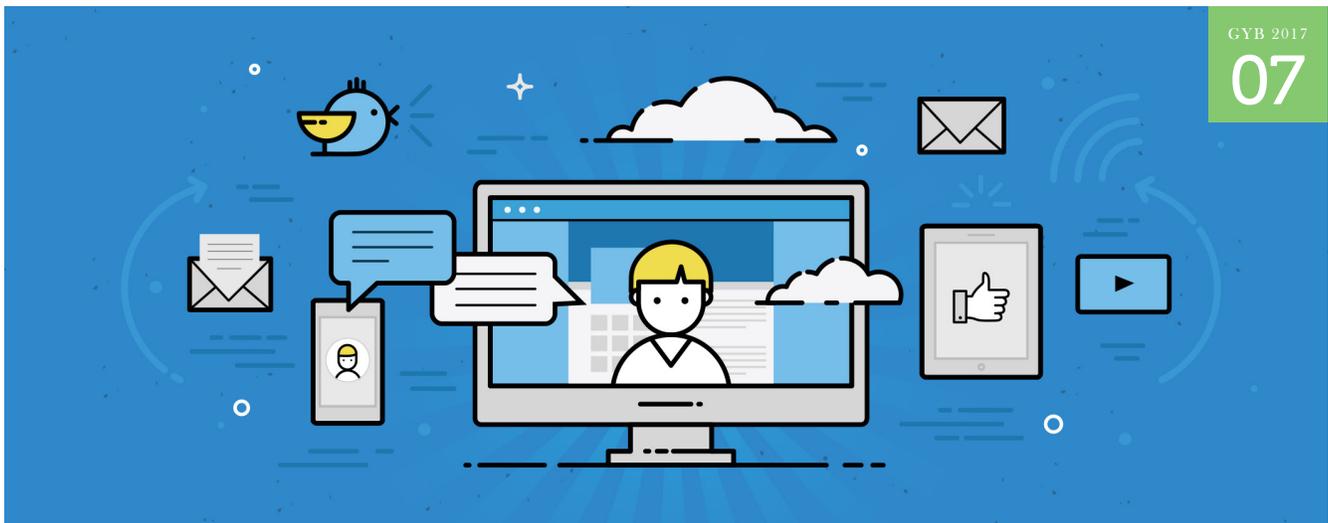
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Building a Social Media Marketing plan

There is one most important factor here- its not rocket science- its simple. It's the common sense commodity of planning ahead.

This is almost always the step that small businesses skip over, and then wonder later on, where they went wrong.

It is vital to begin your plan, with a plan and to ask and answer questions before you sign up for anything. Really, we mean it! Anything.

Concept is key here, and in order to define where you want to maximize impact through social media, ask yourself:

1. What is the goal or objective of adding social media to our existing marketing agenda? Is it long-term, multi-plat formed, short and sale-oriented? You may tweak and work this many times over, so its wise to build out a calendar for

the upcoming year, and lay plans into it, with roll out dates and end games.

2. Where am I and what am I doing? Sounds like someone's lost! Well, its true- social media is overwhelming and its easy to feel that way. Audit your practices and then compare them to the industry standards of your market- are you utilizing what your competitors are? How could you do it differently? Can you identify any niche's that are lacking in attention?

Now that you have a goal-oriented plan, let's step it up and do some hardnosed research. Even if you know your plan will utilize only a few of the available platforms, industry knowledge on what's out there never hurt anyone.

You never know when your plans may take a new direction and being armed with an arsenal of knowledge will no doubt impress your millennial staff!

The selection process is where you need to really focus. Carefully curated content takes time and energy; both are wasted when you are plastering them in the wrong channels. Oversaturating, or blanketing is also a waste of time because social media takes a lot of time.

Don't race to the finish here, really take the time to see what your audience is using, how they are engaging and what will be the most beneficial for your campaign.

Once you are up and running, just remember that the nature of social media is fluid- its in constant flux. You should be observing, tweaking and adjusting things along the way. A constant, consistent message is the directive, one post a day won't cut it. You need to be engaging customers, current, new or old, if you want to feel the effects.



Better Blogging - ten tips to tap more readers

Sure, that cooking blog you publish in your spare time seems like a breeze, but business blogging? Well, its different. For one thing, its really hard!

That's because its not simply a platform for people to record their thoughts, reflect on recipes, communicate with friends and family, etc. Those are the reasons we start personal blogs.

Oh, and sometimes, financial gain and or employment!

But the very nature of a business blog is so different than this- financial gain will not see itself in the form of advertising paying for space (though that may happen). Likely your business blog is an external marketing tool used to engage with current clients, and hopefully, target new ones.

But reflections and photos won't

cut it. A business blog has one goal- engagement.

In order to engage readers you need to knock off a few things you are (most likely) doing. Top two are trying to sell things and using industry lingo and jargon.

These two things will quickly cause click away's- if they wanted to hear a sales pitch they would set up an appointment, watch an advertisement or call in. The blog is meant to circumvent the hesitant mentality of "ugh, they want me to buy something".

Whether it be a product or a service, there is a time and place for the pitch and or push. Your blog should feel like a safe space from all that pressure.

Address a common FAQ, interview a veteran client, profile a new client, ask

an expert, be the expert, share videos or operations, get personal. These tactics will help provide grounds for unique content that will allow for a more broad range of reader.

Don't get pigeonholed in your own niche, either. Consider guest blogging for others, and invite bloggers to post for you. Do you sell paper? Maybe reach out to local paper clip company. Okay, that is simplifying it, but still- you get the point!

While you are shying away from the hard sale, each blog is a product or service and should be treated that way. As one expert says " a product is only useful if others want it!".

This mantra will help you consistently provide what your reader is looking for, usually without even knowing they were looking!



Marketing vs. Sales- A small business breakdown

While both concepts are indeed, based around persuasion, sales and marketing actually have very different agendas, especially when it comes to small business management.

It's a little like the old "which came first, the chicken or the egg" philosophy- they rely on each other in order to exist (and more importantly, to be effective).

Let's define the terms first:

Marketing is the systematic planning, implementation and control of business activities to bring together buyers and sellers. *

A sale is a transaction between two parties where the buyer receives goods (tangible or intangible), services and/or assets in exchange for money. *

In a nutshell, these two are relational concepts- each with their individual

identities, but they work symbiotically in the business world.

Typically, sales are a people-oriented practice and marketing is media-oriented. A sales person is interactional with the client, in a literal, face-to-face scenario, representing a company's message, brand and concept.

Marketing manipulates and modifies the message, brand and concept through the use of media, through public relations management and advertising.

In most business to business companies, you will traditionally see more of the sales engagement occurring- actual people out in the field, making connections, networking and providing start-to-finish timelines from lead generation to point of purchase.

If you are, however, a business engaging with consumers, you will find that while word of mouth will always remain a strong referral source, your marketing tactics are how you will see most of your lead generation.

While both strategies are methods of communication both internally and externally within your business, experts suggest that two very different types of personality best suit these job roles.

Sales and Marketing are like the yin and yang of business. Most businesses fill a "Sales and Marketing" role, though you may consider treating the two as a team, made up of two people who compliment one another's strengths and aid in weaknesses.

**Both definitions borrowed from Diffen.com*



Benefits of an Internal Business Audit

With limited resources, it can be a daunting challenge to consider an internal audit process in a small business, though this is not an area in which skimping is recommended.

They say when it rains it pours, and an internal audit can help blow the storm clouds clear away from your business!

An internal audit is a balancing act- while you may remove something here, you are usually adding to something over there. While you conduct checks and balances, you are also performing perfunctory operational checks and allowing for identification for constant tweaking and improvement functions.

While an external audit is mostly a financial function, an internal audit allows you to see some of the risks that may be underlying, that don't relate to money. The consultative process

allows for assessment on a more multi-faceted level.

Its most helpful in an internal audit if the auditor has familiarity with the business, is capable of being empathetic to the employees of the business, has a genuinely positive nature and understands the business goals.

Encourage your employee's to employ self-audit tactics by being a prime example yourself. Evaluations at incremental phases can help when it comes time to unearth the big stuff- by making it far less scary!

Certain scenarios in a small business atmosphere may incline a business owner to conduct an internal audit, such as fraud or suspected theft, regulatory inspections or changes in your industries laws and limitations, low production outputs, slowed sales

processes or the simple need for a business loan.

An audit opinion will be submitted and the tidy little package will feel like a mission accomplished. BUT. The internal audit requires one last step- action.

With the recommendations made by the auditor, sit down with the board, with the managers, with the team and get some opinions on how things can be modified.

Take the auditors role seriously- as an impartial third party, they have no agenda other than to provide you with the best assessment of your businesses current systems, processes and operations.



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