

Choosing the Right Social Media Platforms for Your Business

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If your business doesn't have a compelling presence across popular social media platforms, you're missing out on a prime opportunity to reach, engage with, and persuade your current and potential customers.

Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are the most prominent social media channels; they have a strong impact on purchasing behavior and even more dynamic influence over brand familiarity and engagement. To maximize the social content you share on them, you'll need to consider where each piece of content you share will have the most substantial impact. Following is a breakdown of the three, with suggestions on how to leverage their advantages to speak appropriately to your audience and make your content thrive.



Facebook

If there is one social media platform that your business absolutely must have, it's Facebook. Not only does it have more users than any other social network, Facebook is also the platform on which users spend the most time – an average of 20 minutes per day. Think of it as almost a secondary website. Your business's Facebook page should be well-branded and include updated information about your store's hours, location, contact information, products,

Facebook can serve retailers as almost a secondary website.

additional social media handles, and awards and recognition. Facebook allows the opportunity to provide more information in the "About"/"Bio" section than any other platform, so take advantage of it!

When planning social media content, it's always a good idea to keep your audience in the back of your mind. The largest group using Facebook is aged 25-34, and there are more female than male users. With the advent of newer social media platforms, Facebook users are skewing older and the site is becoming less popular with younger users, especially Generation Z.

So what are Facebook's strong suits? Aside from using this profile to identify and establish information about your brand, Facebook is great for posting longer copy, images, video and especially live video. Unlike Twitter and Instagram, Facebook has an expansive character limit – over 60,000 – so it's a great space for posting lengthier blurbs

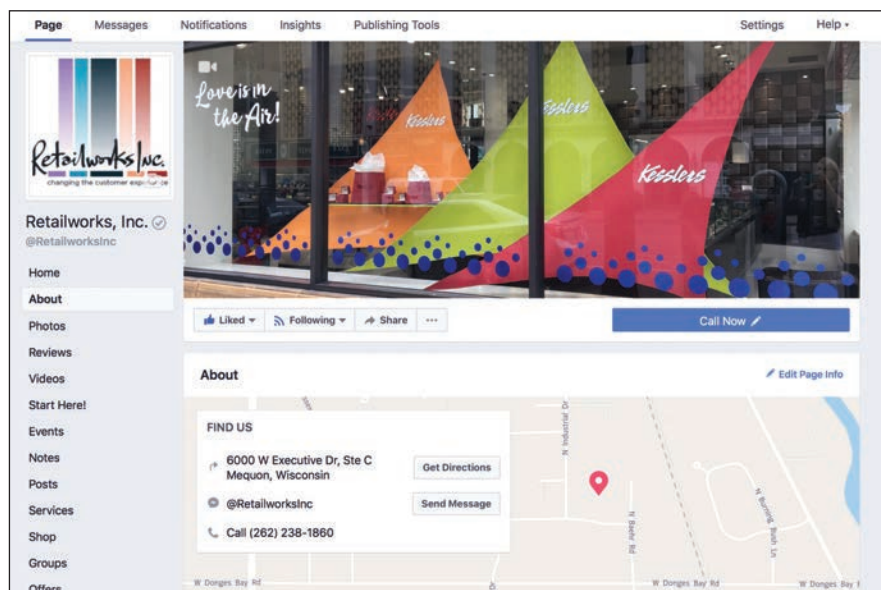
of information. This lofty character limit, combined with the fact that there is no limit on the number of links you can include in a post, means that Facebook is one of the strongest platforms for driving users to your website. Whether you're posting about your product or a recent blog, it is good practice to include a link to your website to encourage customers to take action.

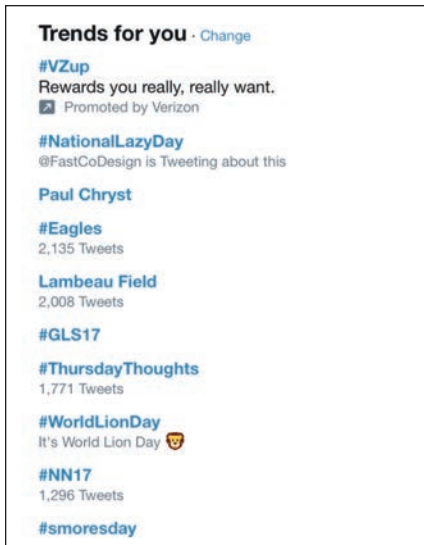
Additionally, videos are some of the most viewed and engaged-with social content, and Facebook is a great platform for sharing them. Facebook allows users to post videos that are up to 45 minutes long, which is longer video than most other platforms.



Twitter

Twitter is an excellent place to have a conversation with your customers and to foster engagement with your brand. Its brief, conversational style and tagging feature make it ideal for answer-





Above, Instagram is growing in popularity because photos are its primary focus. Left, Twitter fosters engagement via conversation about trending topics.

ing customers' questions and garnering a sense of how they feel about your brand. The largest age demographic using this site is 18-29, and there are more male than female users.

Twitter is a highly fast-paced platform. Posts must be succinct to adhere to the 140-character limit, so copy must be attention-getting but concise. Because Tweets are short amounts of information, it's beneficial to post multiple times per day. However, due to the multitude of Tweets, each one is fleeting. The average lifespan of a Tweet is 18 minutes – so brands need to post regularly in order to make an impression. The best content to share on this platform is information that is highly relevant and timely, since this platform allows global, real-time communication. Pay attention to Twitter's Trending Topics – this is a great way to get your brand involved with a conversation that is getting a lot of attention.

Hashtags are commonplace on

Twitter, but the character limit means brands must be selective when choosing them. A hashtag is a single, searchable word or short phrase that allows people to zero in on trending topics that interest them. When choosing a hashtag, think of a popular word or phrase that summarize the topic of your post, such as "#shoes" or "#backtoschool." Try to save some of your sacred characters for hashtags (the golden number is two hashtags) because they'll garner more engagement for your Tweet. Each letter, space, or character (such as the hashtag symbol, "#") in your Tweet counts towards the character limit, so it's important to be as concise as possible to save room for valuable hashtags, which will help your post get noticed. Pack more "information" into your Tweet by including an image – it won't take up character space, and it is likely to get you up to 150% more Retweets.



Instagram

Instagram is swiftly increasing in popularity, especially with younger generations – 90% of its users are under age 35. Instagram is easily the best platform for sharing stunning visual content, because photos are its primary focus, although clever and humorous copywriting can win engagement, too. Instagram is the newest of these three platforms. People and businesses "follow" each other, as they do on Facebook

and Twitter, but this platform is used for sharing photos with captions. Instagram has a 2,200-character limit, but keep in mind that only 140 characters will be visible unless a user takes time to click "see more," so it's important to make a strong impression with your copy right away. It is especially beneficial for retailers to establish a presence on this platform simply because it's a great way to show off store products – both standing alone and in action.

Instagram makes it easier than Twitter to get noticed using hashtags – although the platform limits the number of hashtags that can be posted, the limit is only 30 hashtags, which gives users a lot of opportunity. It's best practice to post hashtags as a comment on your photo instead of in the caption. This method of "burying" your tags makes your post look neater and affords you more characters for copy.

Being a highly visual platform, Instagram is also favorable for video. Video posts on Instagram have a 30-second limit, so be sure to trim your video to show the best, most engaging part on this site. A newer feature, Instagram Video, can be used to post updates to your followers. Use this function to reward customers for following you by showcasing product sneak peaks, special discounts, or behind-the-scenes footage.

Instagram is extremely brand-friendly and makes it easy for brands to stand out and attract engagement. However, the platform has a few downsides when it comes to informing consumers about your brand. Your Instagram bio must fit inside a 150-character limit – meaning you must summarize your brand very concisely. Instagram allows businesses to post only one link on their bio – which should almost always be to a website. Finally, Instagram does not allow users to post links in posts, making it difficult to use Instagram to drive website and blog traffic.

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media platforms might, at first, sound intimidating. But getting comfortable with social media really isn't difficult, especially if you have relatives or employees who use social media frequently – they're likely to be flattered at being asked to put their skills to use for your business, and will also likely be happy to teach other employees how to engage customers on social media as well. In a changing marketplace, the more options you exercise, the better your results will be. ■

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