

Evaluating & Optimizing Your Business' Social Media Presence

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As the digital world continues to expand in prominence and importance, it's crucial to ensure that your brand has a presence in this space. Optimizing your business' social media profiles will help you interact digitally with current and potential customers and communicate with consumers – Millennials in particular – on the platforms where they comfortably spend hours per day connecting.

Establish a Uniform Presence

Each of your social media profiles is an extension of your brand, so begin by ensuring that you're maintaining a uniform presence across each platform. Your brand should be immediately clear to any person visiting your social media pages, and your online presence should echo and complement your business' physical presence and interior.

People are drawn to images, so visually showcase your brand by integrating it into your business' social media profile and cover photos. As a general rule of thumb, most brands use their logo as their profile picture so their social pages are immediately recognizable. While your cover photo should also incorporate some element of your brand, it is a great place to get more creative. Consider using this prime, top-of-the-page real estate to display new, aesthetically arranged product, a snapshot of your store's interior, or something seasonally related to your brand. Attract attention to your cover photo by swapping it out every so often. On most platforms, when you change the photo, it will appear on your followers' social media feeds. Be sure to caption your photo so that your followers know what they're looking at and why it's important.

Once you've attracted your viewers' attention visually, be sure you're providing them with complete and concise

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information. Each social media platform should quickly and clearly answer the questions, "What is your brand?" and "What do you do?" Communicating this succinctly is key, not only because viewers will spend only so much time search-

ing for and reading this information, but also because some platforms, such as Instagram, constrain your brand's bio to a limited number of characters. Provide updated contact and location information so that potential customers can easily get in touch. Each of your profiles should present a way for visitors to take action, leading to positive outcomes for

Audit Aid

Since social media are comparatively new methods of communication, and since it attracts audiences of different ages and interests, evaluating a business' or brand's effectiveness with social media is somewhat subjective. Following is a set of questions that will help you evaluate your social media presence.

- > Do your social media platforms all share some common visual branding component?
- > Do you post your logo on all platforms?
- > Do you link to your website on all platforms?
- > Do you link to your additional social media platforms on each specific platform?
- > Do your profiles provide updated contact, location and hours of operation information?
- > Does your bio provide a clear overview of your business?
- > Do you post content at least once per week?
- > Do you post on multiple platforms?
- > Do you respond to followers' comments and shares in a timely manner?
- > Do you share pertinent posts or articles from industry influencers?
- > Do you use relevant hash tags to get your posts noticed?

your business. Link to your website and email address so that customers can find additional information, engage further with your brand and hopefully make a purchase. You can also cross-promote your social media profiles by using each one to link to the others.

Curate Relevant and Entertaining Content

Give people a reason to follow your social media profiles by creating and sharing content that makes them want to read and engage. When deciding what to post, always keep your target audience in mind. What tips and tricks can you share that will be beneficial to them? Which additional sources and industry influencers do they consider to be important? Your customers use social media platforms to socialize and communicate, to be entertained and informed. You'll make the biggest impact by speaking to them in their own language.

At first, creating and finding enough content for several different social media platforms can seem overwhelming. Make the task manageable by creating a calendar of content. Your social media content should follow the 80/20 rule: 80 percent should be content that your followers will find interesting, entertaining and informative, while 20 percent should be directly promoting your brand or enticing customers with a call to action.

Get started creating a social media schedule for the month ahead by marking a calendar with dates that are important to both your brand and your customers, such as holidays and in-store promotions. What kind of content needs to accompany these important milestones? How far in advance do you need to begin promoting them? Furthermore, is there a certain "type" of content that you'd like to be presenting to your followers frequently? For example, would it benefit your brand to share a weekly tip about your industry or products? Fill up space on your content calendar by scheduling this kind of post once per

Creating Content

Social media content shouldn't be too long or complicated. It should be fun, and prompt viewers to engage. Content should also be varied so it feels "fresh" to recipients. Following are some content ideas:

- > Consider showcasing a different pair of shoes each week with a short "Did you know..." fact – like, "Did you know these shoes come in six different colors?" or "Did you know this boot style was first marketed in 1985?" or "Did you know pumps were our best sellers last month?"
- > Introduce your employees by sharing a photo and a short sentence about each employee's favorite activity when he's not at work – or a photo of an employee wearing a favorite pair of shoes.
- > Suggest holiday gifts, within a varied affordable price range – such as socks, belts and shoes.
- > Announce new products when they arrive.
- > Say "Happy Birthday" to customers (but don't give out ages!)
- > Remind people of special events. For example:
 - "June is graduation month. Have you purchased cards for your graduates yet?"
 - "September is Back-to-School time. Most kids want to see what other kids are wearing, so save some of your planned budget for two or three weeks after school opens."
 - "Valentine's Day is coming – start thinking of ways to please your special person on that special day."
- > Check out the social media profiles of competitors and of other brands your customers find relevant, to get ideas on types of content consumers are already engaging with – and then think of ways to adapt it and make it your own.
- > Remember that it's not necessary to come up with original content every time you post – sharing content from other accounts is good, too, and shows that you're staying up to date with trends. Just make sure you give appropriate credit when sharing other brands' articles or posts.
- > Ask your customers a question or for their opinion to get them engaging.
- > Share a testimonial or quote.
- > Find a way to show customers how easily your product fits into their lives. For example, *Footwear News* published an article about amazing travel destinations and the best pair of shoes to wear to each one.
- > Invite your customers to share photos of themselves wearing your products. This idea gives you several posts – the invitation itself, followed by announcing a drawing of one photo sharer's name to receive a discount on the next purchase, followed by posts of customers wearing your products, followed by announcing the drawing winner.
- > Participate in popular hash tag trends, such as #ThrowbackThursday. Can you share old photos of your store, or a fun, old-school pair of shoes?

week, and suddenly you'll be trending on #TipTuesday and have more ground covered. Once you have enough content gathered to populate your social media profiles and schedule in advance, you can increase your social media success by differentiating content based on the

platform on which you're posting. Enjoyable content composed of text, articles, images or video works well on Facebook, while more serious or educational pieces are better suited for LinkedIn. Know your audience, know your platform, and then choose the

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content that will suit them both best.

Evaluate and Adjust

Once you've optimized your social media platforms and started posting exciting and engaging content, monitor activity on your profiles. One of the great things about social media is that you can receive almost immediate feedback, and then easily make adjustments to improve your performance moving forward. Start small scale – have you gained any new followers? Has anyone commented on your posts? If people are interacting with your brand via social media, be sure to respond to them in a timely manner. Get in the habit of checking your social media accounts on a regular basis.

Social media platforms track the engagement on your pages and produce comprehensive reports on the amount of attention your profile is receiving and the demographics of your followers. You can view this information by clicking on each platform's "Analytics" or "Insights" tabs. Based on each platform's analytics, you can evaluate your performance and adjust your content to alter it in the future. For example, did you lose followers when posting content multiple times per day? This may be a sign that you need to scale back and post less frequently. Some platforms will even tell you which type of content you've posted that is performing best. For example, Twitter will display which of your tweets received the most interaction each month.

Keep track of what kind of content your followers are responding most positively to, and then keep that content coming! By keeping track of your social media analytics, even every other week or once per month, you can understand your social media followers, measure the popularity of your content, and set and meet social media goals that will help you attract more followers and prompt them to action.

Social media has a lot of layers, and each platform has its own best practices. By assuring that your business' social media profiles are effectively showcasing your brand, communicating important information and engaging followers with pertinent content, you can start making a positive impact with your brand in the digital world. Devoting even a small chunk of time each day to implementing these practices and optimizing your profiles can make a big difference. As you get more comfortable engaging with customers in the digital, social media space, you can continue refining your skills and improving your brand's social media presence. ■

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