

by Michiel Van Kets

It was not so long ago that social media was thought by many to be a short-lived trend and not an Internet marketing tool that could be facilitated by the business world. However, as the number of users of popular social networking sites increases every day, can your business really afford to continue ignoring this phenomenon?

Having a website for your business simply isn't enough if it doesn't have a high visibility. Your objective should be to get your website noticed, and the way to do that these days is by writing about it, and getting it written about in blogs and other social media sites.

Some of the social media tools that you can use to help achieve your objectives include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and related forums and blogs.

Twitter is the newest social media tool to appear with a reputation that has grown extensively in a very short period of time and now ranked as the third most used social network. Twitter's attraction is that it offers a very simple way for people to connect with each other, even President Obama is known to use it. Twitter is an effective business marketing tool to point to your website and/or blog updates.

Facebook is one of the largest social networking site around, with more than 200 million active users worldwide. It offers fantastic business features and the opportunity of making business contacts. Facebook now has "Pages" you can promote your business on and get "fans". Another attractive feature of Facebook is the advertising opportunities which reach your specific demographic. There is also an "Events" feature to help with your internet marketing.

Integrating blogging into your marketing plans is an effective way to connect with your target audience. Blogs are useful places to post questions and get feedback about products and businesses. A business blog is an effective internet marketing tool because it contains specific industry related content. Search engines will pick up on the keywords and phrases used and attract a high number of visitors.

Here are some tips to get you started in your social networking and internet marketing.

1. Set up a business blog. For an online business, they are perfect as you can build awareness, establish expertise and create a practical communication channel between you and your customers which is ideal for building trust and reputation. Business blogs are generally successful because they allow you to connect directly with your customers and give them an avenue to communicate directly with you.

2. Track and identify those blogs where your consumers hang out and integrate yourself into this community. Post interesting content, make contacts and form relationships. Time spent creating awareness around your brand in this environment is time well spent because you are so significant within that position.

3. Append your signature to all blog comments and outgoing email messages as it offers a

personal and effective, and free, way to market your business. Insert your keywords, into your URL in your signature line. Make the actual link your URL. The keyword link to your site may help your search engine rankings.

4. Use video to show your product or service, particularly popular are 'How to..' videos. Put it on your blog and website and send it to YouTube. You can also post it at YouTube and simply embed it into your sites.

5. Open an account in a couple of social media networks such as Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn. Create content that is highly relevant and link worthy. DO NOT SPAM the groups, you'll lose followers and fans very quickly if you do. Some groups such as Facebook will close your account.

6. Learn Twitter etiquette. The main rules are, don't spam, spammers don't last long on Twitter. Always give credit for retweets, don't do spammy auto direct messages.

7. Add links from your Twitter and Facebook pages to your blog, website and email.

8. Have a plan as to how you will research and investigate social media networks and follow it. Don't rush things, learn the ropes first.

9. Don't directly promote your business all the time. Instead, offer ways to help others such as providing resource links, articles and helpful tips.

10. Link to other blogs and websites. Links are what search engines and users make good use of, and search engines need them.

Consumers don't only want to communicate with each other; they also want access to the businesses and companies they buy their goods and services from. Your customers want to connect with the real people behind the company and know what you are doing and planning to do.

Business owners are becoming more aware how important using social media as one of their internet marketing methods really is. Consumers are more internet savvy, have more access to information and can search and compare easily. They expect (or at least want) a company to provide them the information they need and want with the ability to interact with the company. Social media marketing is a way to connect to consumers on a more personal level. Now is the time to put your energy into looking at and learning about these social networking sites as they are set to radically change the way businesses communicate.

Our friend, Michiel Van Kets, provides article services for Idea Design, a Tampa Bay web design firm committed to working with clients to develop their online Web presence.