

SOCIAL MEDIA: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES THAT DON'T CONSUME ALL OF YOUR TIME

By *Maribeth Kuzmeski*

The Power of Social Media is Everywhere

Business owners who haven't already are looking to unlock the power of social media as a means of spreading the word about their product and services. But is social media right for *your* business? Is it a viable alternative to traditional marketing and advertising?

The answer depends; on your business, your target audience, where your target audience spends their time, and on *you*. Traditional advertising and marketing is not dead; but an integrated approach combining the traditional with social media is a healthy strategy. The extent to which you add social media to your marketing mix will vary in regards to your particular situation and company.

What really is 'Social Media?'

Social media is the act of sharing content between online social networks. It began with online discussion forums and opinion sites, and has expanded to include video sharing (YouTube), photo sharing (Flickr) and microblogging (Twitter) sites. Social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn are driving the collaborative nature of the medium. To that end, Social Media Marketing (SMM) is the practice of creating compelling online content from a marketing angle that can help to increase visitors to a website; and ultimately enhance business under the right conditions.

Social Media is Immediate

Traditional media is regulated by time and space constraints. There is almost always more information than is possible to be released, which forces professionals who work in those mediums to tailor their messages to the space available. Traditional media also has deadlines that dictate when messages can be delivered. The "always on" world of social media is dramatically different, however; there are no restrictions, rules or deadlines in terms of time and space.

Social Media is Measurable

Social media users share more than just their opinion; they share a lot of clues about who they are and how they think via information found in social bookmarks, comments, engagement, influence, friends, followers, downloads, favorites, views, votes and links.





These user actions allow you to measure what's important, what ideas are gaining ground and who -- or what -- is having the biggest impact on your or your client's brand.

Active Participation is the Key

Many companies have embraced Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube by diligently creating their profile pages -- and then waiting for the business to flood in. However, despite the hype, social media is not a get-rich-quick scheme. If you don't have a group of people who are listening to what you are posting and are ready to share it with others, it will just sit there.

If you want to attract new visitors via social media, drive traffic to your website, and ultimately sell something, you have to actively participate. Becoming involved in online conversations; delivering and sharing valuable content; and regularly interacting in a community are the first steps to getting involved. But, before you begin to devote all of your free time to social media, ask yourself if it can really help your business.

Social Media Business Benefits

If you want to get more involved in social media, it's helpful to consider some of the positive returns that you could derive from a well-structured campaign. Some of the benefits of social media are:

- **Low cost method to get the word out about your company and products.** Your social media strategy is an extremely low budget, sometimes free, replacement or compliment to traditional advertising and marketing. You likely can reach the same target audience for a fraction of the cost.
- **Exposure for your brand.** A successful Social Media Marketing campaign leads to augmented discussion of your brand online. When your message resonates with your users, they will spread it more effectively than traditional methods might.
- **Immediate gratification.** Exposure on the front page of major social video, news or bookmark site has the potential to send huge amounts traffic almost instantly to your website. And while traffic doesn't always equate to sales, it does generate momentum in the right direction.
- **Create Influencers.** Social Media can create an army of people that may recommend your company. These influencers can have dramatic effects on sales from a simple recommendation – one that is broadcast to the world.
- **Increase Sales.** You can ultimately increase your sales by creating more exposure for your product and service. If done correctly, social media gives you methods to gain extraordinary coverage.



So What's The Catch?

After considering some of social media's advantages, you may be asking yourself what else you should be doing, and how you can benefit from social media. But the only way -- and I mean the *only* way -- that social media works is if you have compelling content. People will not share your information, writing, videos or pictures unless they are interesting. So your first step in getting involved in social media in a more impactful way is to constantly come up with material that you feel others will find appealing, valuable, helpful, shocking or inspiring.

Strategies for Gaining Followers

If you create great content, but no one is listening -- you haven't left the starting blocks with social media. There are several tactics to get people following you and what you say; but remember, without valuable information, they won't stick around for long.

1. Create accounts where your clients and prospects are already visiting. Though most businesspeople today use LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, there are many more options. You need to find out where your customers and potential customers are gathering, and choose your social media outlet based on what fits your target market best.

2. Create an effective avatar. Your avatar is your personal online brand. Create one that doesn't look like you shot with a camera phone in your bathroom mirror. Use a simple, informal, straight-up picture. When people view your social media conversations, your avatar should stand out.

3. Search for friends and contacts to connect with. If you are looking for others in the business with which you are associated -- i.e. financial services -- then search for terms like "financial advisor" or "financial service firms." Invite potential contacts to connect with you.

4. Keep them coming back. Now that you have established a database of friends or followers, you need to make sure they return for more of your valuable material. Create unique content, share value, and post weekly blogs to keep followers coming back for more.

"Establish yourself as a subject expert," says co-founder of Alltop.com, former chief evangelist for Apple, Inc, and author of nine books including *Reality Check* (Portfolio Hardcover, October 2008) Guy Kawasaki. "That way, you'll be interesting to some subset of people. Kawasaki also notes, "If and when you're an expert, don't be afraid to





express your opinion. It's better that some people refuse to follow you than no one knows who you are."

5. Blog, blog, blog. Blogging is the best way to convey your content. You can use the other social media tools to drive people to your blog, and ultimately your website. Video blogging is another way of generating interest; but always make sure that all of your social media sites automatically update when you make a new blog post or video submission. This is easily done with all of the tools that are now coming out on an almost daily basis.

6. Update Your Website to include and integrate your social media sites. You want your customers to see a social media presence on your homepage that directs them and other interested people to several outlets to where they can interact with you: LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and so forth.

7. Go from Online to Face to Face. Transitioning from online conversations to sales is the ideal result in social media; and since sales conversions are usually conducted face-to-face, you might consider hosting an event for your followers. Twitter users call this a "tweetup" – which, according to a definition by PCMag.com, is gathering of users brought together via Twitter. For example, Twitter is used by conference attendees to arrange to meet after the show for discussion, cocktails and parties.

Monitor Your Brand Online

Monitoring is the first step to determining whether your social media efforts are garnering results. In an article appearing on Mashable.com, Social Media Specialist at EMC Corporation Dan Schawbel says, "Brand monitoring has become an essential task for any individual or corporation."

When people talk about you or your company these days, it's out there for everyone to see. Word of mouth advertising was just a whisper ten years ago compared to what it is today because of online message travel. Conversations about you and your company -- either positive or negative -- may happen on the web whether you like it not. And the key is not to fight it or ignore it, but to address your web reputation head on; because these conversations can *dramatically* impact your brand.

For instance, Comcast has a Twitter account entitled @comcastcares to help Comcast users in need. It's constantly monitored as a way to hear about and respond to customer issues. If you complain about Comcast online, you can be sure that @comcastcares will lend a helping hand.

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15 Minute Client-Builder Social Media Exercise

Once a month, review the following (and add in a few more of your own).

1. Review and discuss effectiveness of your Social Media activities.

2. Assess progress towards your goals.

3. What are your next steps?

About Red Zone Marketing:

Red Zone Marketing (www.redzonemarketing.com) is a marketing and management consulting firm devoted to business development. Their focus is on designing sales and marketing strategies, customer service programs, branding and differentiation strategies to help increase your flow of sales. Red Zone Marketing also offers a full selection of [marketing and business freemiums](#) including articles, e-courses and whitepapers.

Maribeth Kuzmeski, President of Red Zone Marketing, is author of 7 books including the bestsellers *...And The Clients Went Wild!* (Wiley), *The Connectors* (Wiley), and *Social Media For Financial Advisors: A Step By Step Guide for Creating a Social Media Presence and Driving Traffic to Your Firm*. You can find out more about these books and tools at www.redzonemarketing.com/books_products/.

