



STONE WARD

Social Media for Small Business

by Emily Reeves / 4.2013

Overview

Small business owners could be doing more with social media. But what? And where? And how? Imagine a customer walks into your store and you turn your back. That's essentially what happens online when a small business has a Facebook business page but doesn't actively engage with customers. The importance of building online relationships will grow even greater as customers use more mobile devices to pre-shop and research and multi-task by content grazing online while watching television. This digital whitepaper covers tactical ideas for small business owners to immediately implement through social media.

Small Business Could Be Doing More Online

Just one-quarter of small businesses post to Facebook daily, with that figure falling to 13% on Twitter and less than 5% for the other platforms. The numbers aren't much better when expanding to weekly postings: 32% report posting with that regularity on Facebook, 18% on Twitter, and no more than 10% on any other platform. So while many small business owners are using these platforms, they're not active on them.

Just Being On Social Media Is
NOT ENOUGH

Those Small Businesses Using Social Media See Its Benefits

Which channels do you find effective?

*Different Channels Are Right For Different Reasons*

Websites remain the most widespread online marketing tool among small businesses. About 3 in 10 said they have a mobile website. Interestingly, although male owners are about 12% more likely than female owners to rely on their company website for marketing (65% vs. 58%), female owners are 41% more likely than their male counterparts to rely on social media (48% vs. 34%).

On Twitter, people have short attention spans. They want quick news bits and move on. They're not on Twitter to shop. Consider using Twitter as a surveillance tool, to keep tabs on trends and competitors. If you notice complaints from rivals' customers about something, take advantage of that subject and tout that you can do it better.

However, Twitter can't support images as effectively as other outlets like Pinterest and Facebook, which makes it a hard sell for firms that rely on visuals to attract customers. If your product is visual, use channels that give images a large presence.

The use of location-based services almost doubled from 5% to 9%. One-quarter of those using location-based services said the application is important for sales generation. If you have a bricks-and-mortar location, consider location-based services in your social media toolbox.

Content Considerations for Small Businesses on Social Media

Content (articles, photos, videos, menus, white papers, newsletters, etc.) is where most small businesses stumble. Having a website, blog and social media pages isn't enough without good content to go along. The simple act of offering a helpful PDF download can produce big results. Content, in effect, becomes your new ad "creative." Here are some idea starters for content:

Share Your Expertise

Video consumption will continue to explode. Already, 72 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute. There are channels for every interest — over a million of them. Seek out channels that interest your customers and try communicating your message there. Other ways to share your expertise:

- Online videos
- Webinars
- SlideShare presentations
- Ebooks

Product Use Information

Inspire purchasers and potential purchases with ideas for how your product can be used in ways they may not have realized. Show them the ins and outs and let them discover why your product is right for them.

- How-to videos
- In-use photos
- Results demonstration videos or before/after photos
- Customer testimonial videos

Community Content

In today's virtually connected world, give your target audience a reason to congregate in person. Think beyond making a big sale by having other lower priced offerings to drive additional or supplemental revenues. Think in terms of when your customers are available rather than when you're at work. Examples include wine tastings for local wine shops and cooking classes for food specialty shops and/or restaurants. Leverage the power of these gatherings to create content. Think beyond the single event.

- Organize your community. One way to engage your audience is through the use of the social media platforms.
- Create event related content. Think images, videos and customer input that can be shared across social media platforms.
- Use a Twitter hashtag to extend your reach. Make sure that you test the hashtag to ensure that no one else is using it for another purpose.
- Leverage existing niche communities where your prospects and customers naturally congregate. Set up a group in this niche's social media site.

Related Information

Think bite size content chunks. Use information that's ancillary to your business. For example, a massage therapist can create a Twitter stream, podcast or blog for meditations to put people in a more serene state of mind.

- Give prospects a laugh. Don't underestimate the power of funny content. .
- Use trivia to get prospects engaged. Everyone loves testing their knowledge. What fun questions can you create around your business?
- Offer content related to the information your audience shares related to their hobbies and special interests. This is easy. Give your audience the type of information for which they're already looking.
- Engage with them on the social media platforms where they already are. Think Facebook, Twitter and Google+.
- Get them to take and share photographs and/or videos. Use those social media platforms .
- Write great text such as blogs or Tumblr. Understand that long form content still works.

Leverage Other People's Audiences to Enlarge Yours

This works for businesses that don't directly compete with your company. The goal of this activity is to build your reputation in your niche.

- Contribute meaty comments on the top blogs.
- Write guest blog posts to share your knowledge and broaden your audience.

Tips

- Instead of trying to be everywhere in the social media space, determine what online activities work best for your business and focus your attention there.
- Get to know the online influencers in your small business niche.
- There is gold to be mined with Twitter Search if you are willing to use it to listen, engage, and provide value.
- Uploading well titled and tagged videos to YouTube and photos to Flickr can drastically improve your search engine visibility.
- Consistent small business blogging pays the greatest returns.
- Technology changes daily. Read often.
- You should not fear customer review social sites like Yelp; embrace them.
- Helping people online when they least expect it can bring you great rewards.
- Even on your worst day, you have to remember that every interaction counts.
- Jamming your business down the throats of customers only drives business away.
- Not everyone is going to like you, so be prepared to read negative reviews.
- If you are using social media as a customer service tool, when something goes wrong, being sincere, humble, and apologetic will be greatly appreciated by your customers.
- Your company story matters and weaving it into your online business persona is important.
- Social media is a lot like exercise. Doing a little bit consistently everyday will produce better results than one eight hour marathon session per month.
- When starting your social media marketing efforts for your small business you will get frustrated. Try to keep a long term outlook like six months to a year. Social media in the short term does not work. You must be in it for the long term and be persistent, consistent, and committed.

- Don't discount the power of niche forums that are related to your small business.
- Use Talk Walker Alerts (an alternative to Google Alerts) to see who's talking specifically about your business and anything related to your business.
- Utilize free email lists like Help A Reporter (HARO) can help you find valuable public relations and news opportunities for your business.

Don't Underestimate The Importance of Mobile

As the power and sophistication of mobile devices grows, they've become the "central processing units" for our lives. People already spend an average of 2-5 hours daily on a mobile device. This raises the ante for making sure your business is visible on mobile. About 55% of the U.S. population owns a smart phone, and 78% of them don't leave home without it. No single device or "screen" dominates. People move effortlessly between a PC, smart phone, tablet and TV. According to Google research, 90% of consumers begin a task on one device and complete it on another. Content (such as an ad) viewed on one device can trigger behavior on another device. This means businesses can no longer construct campaigns specific to a single device.

Interested in learning more?

Contact Emily Reeves at ereeves@stoneward.com for help planning your brand's digital engagements.

About Stone Ward

Stone Ward is a full-service ad agency. Established in 1984 by Larry Stone and Millie Ward, today the agency employs 52, with capitalized billings exceeding \$40 million. The agency's offices are in Chicago and Little Rock.

About Emily Reeves, Director of Digital Innovation & Insight Planning

As the agency's digital champion, Emily Reeves proves that Stone Ward has the offerings, expertise and alliances to bring sound, measurable digital innovation to our clients' marketing efforts. A seasoned communications strategist with a passion for all things digital, Emily has distinguished herself as an avid blogger, social media speaker, industry observer and moderator. In her role as digital thought leader for Stone Ward, Emily collaborates with our team of agency leaders in creative, brand management, public relations, media, digital technology and video production to create relevant ways to tell our clients' stories in the digital space and to provide meaningful measurement and analytics as a tool for calculating our efforts. Emily's focus on measurement extends to her duties as the agency's research leader, where she works with Stone Ward clients to develop and execute research plans that inform integrated client marketing efforts.

Sources:

[Small Firms Say LinkedIn Works, Twitter Doesn't](#)

[21 Social Media and Content Tips Tailored for Small Businesses](#)

[12 Digital Trends that Will Rock Small Business](#)

[How Small Businesses are Using Social Media](#)

[30 Valuable Lessons Using Social Media for Small Business](#)

[Small Biz Use of Location Services Up, but Remains Low](#)

[More Small Business Owners Say They Find LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube Effective](#)