

CITY OF HOUSTON GUIDE TO SOCIAL MEDIA



CITY OF HOUSTON
OFFICE
of
BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY





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MISSION STATEMENT

The Office of Business Opportunity is committed to creating a competitive and diverse business environment in the City of Houston by promoting the growth and success of local small businesses, with special emphasis on historically underutilized groups by ensuring their meaningful participation in the government procurement process.

WHY IS SOCIAL MEDIA IMPORTANT IN BUSINESS?

Below are a variety of reasons why you should consider the use of social media now rather than wait.

EVERYBODY IS DOING IT

Most everyone is using some form of free social media. Social media has become a part of everyone's life and it is something that influences their daily life, activities, and social business interactions. Social media has played a big role with how people interact with each other and its use is expanding daily.

PEOPLE LIKE BRANDING

People enjoy being part of a business that brands themselves proactively. Studies have shown that customers in certain verticals would rather give their money to a business with an active Facebook fan page rather than without. People tend to look favorably on a business which builds an online community for itself and its customers. The ability of customers and clients to provide instantaneous feedback to a business is invaluable and often used in product and service development.

DISTANCE YOURSELF FROM THE BAD APPLES

The internet is growing daily and with that growth comes both good and bad results. One way to distance your business from the "bad apples" is by starting a community and growing a following in the social space comprised of your core audience. No poorly run business is going to take the time to grow a quality online community to build their brand. The power and strength to build an online community can drive a growing brand identity.

COMMUNITY IS EVERYTHING

The online world is surrounded by communities of all types of "cheerleaders"- groups that can vouch for, and support your business. People like to feel like they are a part of something unique and special and that usually comes from being a part of a community. Community strength is a very powerful branding force that can significantly grow a business on and offline. Social media is an amazing way to grow an online brand, but it takes creativity, passion and consistency to keep things moving in the right direction. If you have not yet entered the social media space take the time to start thinking about a plan to enter the space and start building your online community.



WHY IS SOCIAL MEDIA IMPORTANT IN BUSINESS



CURRENT TOP 5 SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS



FACEBOOK is the world's largest social media platform with over 1.15 billion users. Founded in February 2004, Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them. Facebook utilizes individual profiles to form networks in which individuals can monitor as a newsfeed. For small business applications, Facebook is an excellent vehicle for networking your businesses with Facebook users. By creating a company page and posting updates of your company on a regular basis you maintain a social relationship with your clients.



TWITTER is an online social networking service and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based messages of up to 140 characters, known as "tweets". Twitter rapidly gained worldwide popularity, with over 250 million active users as of 2013, generating over 340 million tweets daily and handling over 1.6 billion search queries per day. Since its launch, Twitter has become one of the ten most visited websites on the Internet, and has been described as "the SMS of the Internet." Unregistered users can read tweets, while registered users can post tweets through the website interface, SMS, or a range of apps for mobile devices. For small business applications, Twitter allows for an instantaneous newsfeed network for your company with the ability to attach the company with trends within the twitter feed via hashtags and tagging.



LINKEDIN is a social networking website for people in professional occupations. Launched in 2003, it is mainly used for professional networking. As of January 2013, LinkedIn reports more than 200 million acquired users in more than 200 countries and territories. LinkedIn's mission is simple: connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful. When a user joins LinkedIn, they get access to people, jobs, news, updates, and insights that can help a small business network and grow. LinkedIn offers a basic free service and premium services as well. For small business applications, LinkedIn is a social media network for employers and employees. It allows a company to represent itself as well as gives it the ability to explore profiles of potential employees.



YouTube is a video-sharing website, created in 2005, on which users can upload, view and share videos. The company uses Adobe Flash Video and HTML5 technology to display a wide variety of user-generated video content, including movie clips, TV clips, and music videos, as well as amateur content such as video blogging, short original videos, and educational videos. For small business applications, YouTube is a free video sharing social network search engine that allows businesses to upload their company videos, commercials, workshops, and public announcements. The videos can then be linked to key words to connect to trends.



Google+ is a multilingual social networking and identity service owned and operated by Google Inc. It is the second largest social networking site in the world, having surpassed Twitter in January 2013. As of late 2012, it had 500 million registered users, of whom 235 million are active in a given month. Google+ is described as a "social layer" that enhances many of its online properties, unlike conventional social networks generally accessed through a single website. For small business applications, Google+ is a social media search engine that allows businesses to customize their place of business with a profile page while utilizing Google Maps to show the location of their business to individuals observing the area through Google Maps (the premiere map system used by individuals).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA



- **WHAT ARE THE BUSINESS ADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY?**

The benefit is connecting with customers and potential customers. It allows you to share, collaborate, and communicate thoughts and ideas with your prospects and customers. It would be advantageous from a competitive standpoint to take advantage of this opportunity.

- **WHAT DAMAGE CAN BE DONE IF SOCIAL MEDIA ISN'T HANDLED PROPERLY?**

Consumers who feel products or services underperform can be incredibly corrosive to your business' reputation. If social media interaction is handled irresponsibly or there's little to no follow up, it can work against a small business- magnifying the negative experience and broadcasting it to hundreds, if not thousands of potential customers.

- **HOW WILL SOCIAL MEDIA EVOLVE IN THE FUTURE?**

Consumer expectations are changing. Social media is more than just networking, it's a way of building a brand. There's a saying that most human behavior is goal-directed. We need a purpose that has to be obvious and in the absence of this behavior, the task itself will not happen. This applies to social media and how we are going to act in the future. Without a cogent social media strategy, a business will suffer online. A lot of companies are weighing the benefits of spending their efforts on social media because time is money. Most human behavior is aimed at gaining pleasure or avoiding pain. In the beginning, the social media was just the pleasure of connecting with people in new and unique ways. This had its difficulties when it came to how much time one can devote to social networking and how to communicate with potential customers online. Looking to the future, networking via social media has to have a demonstrable, tangible benefit otherwise it may not be worth it.

- **HOW MANY PEOPLE USE FACEBOOK ON A DESKTOP VS. A SMART PHONE?**

According to Facebook's most recent SEC filing, more than two-thirds of Facebook users access the service via a mobile device at least some of the time and 1 in 6 people use ONLY a mobile device to access Facebook's services. These statistics and metrics change constantly and differ for each social media platform.

- **ARE THERE RESTRICTIONS OR LIMITATIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA THAT MIGHT IMPACT MY COMPANY?**

No business and organization is the same, so a one-size-fits-all social media strategy is generally a bad idea. If you're a non-profit you might want to look for a social media professional with experience in that sector. If you operate in a regulated industry such as pharmaceutical, tobacco, alcohol, finance, insurance, or others, it would be a good idea to find a professional who has significant experience in your industry and understands any limitations or restrictions related to advertising and marketing the product or service.



SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS

CREATE A SOCIAL MEDIA VOICE PEOPLE WANT TO HANG OUT WITH

It is better to see individuals post for the brand instead of the brand itself posting because it seems more authentic and gives consumer value.

MAKE YOURSELF AND YOUR TEAM VISIBLE

Feature names and photos of the employees behind your social media and blog posts. Keep in mind the employees you designate to run your social media are the faces of the company with the power to damage your reputation in just one post so choose your employees carefully.

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS

You should know what work your consumers are trying to do, why they make the choices they make, what role your brand plays in their lives, how they experience your service and products then use social media posts to solve a problem or to achieve a mutual goal.

MIND YOUR SURROUNDINGS

Social media also allows you to learn from your consumers and competition. With consumers you can see what they respond to, talk about, or favor. With your competition you can simply follow their social media page. Social media is a two way medium in terms of information.

BE CONVERSATIONAL

No one likes spam emails, spam letters in the mail, or blunt tv advertisements. Make your posts conversational in the sense that you are talking directly to the consumer as a friend with a secret underlining objective of promoting your business. Consumers liked to be wined and dined for their business.

REALIZE THAT FANS AND FOLLOWERS ARE OVERRATED METRICS

You can have over a few thousand fans, friends, or followers but this doesn't automatically translate to accurate metrics. Social media can be very passive with the amount of content the consumer allows on their page. Most of the content is primarily tailored to their personal friends therefore businesses are the supplemental component to the social media. With respect to this, businesses should focus on the interaction with their consumers. Be aware of what posts they like, which they share, and especially read the comments consumers are leaving.

SOCIAL MEDIA GLOSSARY

- **APP-** An application/ program for a mobile device such as a smart phone or tablet.
- **AVATAR-** An avatar is an image or username that represents a person online within forums and social networks.
- **BLOG-** Blog is a word that was created from two words: "web log." Blogs are usually maintained by an individual or a business with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning *to maintain or add content to a blog.*
- **CHAT/IM-** Chat can refer to any kind of real-time communication over the internet but traditionally refers to one -to-one communication through a text-based chat application commonly referred to as instant messaging applications.
- **CHECK-IN-** To connect your location to a social media site. Facebook and Four Square are common social media options that utilize check-in.
- **COMMENT-** A comment is a response that is often provided as an answer or reaction to a blog post or message on a social network. Comments are a primary form of two-way communication on the social web.
- **FRIENDS/FOLLOWERS-** Individuals and groups you consider to be friendly enough with you to see your Facebook profile and engage with you.
- **GROUPS-** Groups are collections of individuals with some sense of unity through their activities, interests or values.
- **HASH TAG-** A hashtag is a tag used on the social network indicated by a hash symbol (or '#'), it is a tag used to index tweets by adding context and meta-data. Hashtags can be used to search and organize tweets on similar subject matter, in the same way that keywords can be used to find content through search engines.



- **HTML** - Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) is a programming language for web pages. Think of HTML as the brick-and-mortar of pages on the web. It provides content and structure. HTML has changed over the years, and will change with the introduction of a new version: HTML5.
- **HYPERLINK/ LINK-** A web reference that allows users to navigate from one document or page to another.
- **LIKE-** A “Like” is an action that can be made by user to proclaim they like a post from another user’s social media page. Instead of writing a comment for a message or a status update, a Facebook user can click the “Like” button as a quick way to show approval and share the message.
- **MEME-** A meme on the internet is used to describe a thought, idea, joke, or concept to be shared online. It is typically an image with text above and below it, but can also come in video and link form.
- **NEWS FEED-** A news feed is literally a feed full of news. On Facebook, the News Feed is the homepage of users’ accounts where they can see all the latest updates from their friends. The news feed on Twitter is called Timeline (not to get confused with Facebook’s new look, also called Timeline).
- **POST-** Post is the act of a user commenting, sharing, or blogging on their social media page.
- **PROFILE-** An individual’s identifying information requested when that individual signs up for a social networking site or other service. Profile information may include a username, contact information, personal or business interests, a photo, bio, or other data.
- **QR CODE-** A matrix bar code providing encoded information, most commonly in the form of a URL, which can be read by a QR scanner, camera phone or smart phone.
- **RSS FEED-** RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is a family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated content such as blogs and videos in a standardized format. Content publishers can syndicate a feed, which allows users to subscribe to the content and read it when they please, and from a location other than the website (such as reader services like Google Reader).
- **SHARE-** Is the act of posting a hyperlink a user would like to share to their social media page or another user’s page.
- **TAG-** A tag or “tagging” refers to linking individuals, groups, or pages to the user’s status/comment to be referenced from. Ex: “Having a great time @Starbucks enjoying the coffee with @JohnDoe.”
- **TRAFFIC-** This refers to the number of visitors to a specific website or web page.
- **TRENDING-** A word, phrase or topic that is popular on Twitter at a given moment.
- **TWEET/RETWEET-** A 140 character post through Twitter.
- **USERNAME-** Your name or handle that is displayed on your social media page.
- **VIRAL-** Anything shared across social networks that get passed along rapidly. YouTube videos are a great example.
- **WALL (FACEBOOK)-** A shared message board regarding an individual user that appears on the user’s profile. A user’s friends can post content, such as text, photos, or URLs, to the wall, and others can either like or comment on that content.
- **WALL (GENERAL)-** A web reference that allows users to navigate from one document or page to another.



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