

Small Business Social Media Strategy

Understanding the options and effectively reaching prospective customers

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Susan O'Neil

My March column reviewed the importance of executing a search engine marketing (SEM) strategy to increase traffic to your business website (SEM includes pay-per-click and display advertising on search engines like Google and Bing). Today, I'd like to help you determine whether advertising opportunities afforded by social media sites like Facebook, Pinterest, and LinkedIn would benefit your small business.

Social media advertising isn't appropriate for every small business. In order to explore whether it's right for you, let's determine if your target market is using social media.

A 2015 [eMarketer study](#) found that more than half of the U.S. population – 179.7 million people – are using social media. The largest group of participants is 25- to 34-year-olds at 35.3 million, followed closely by 35- to 44-year-olds (29.7 million) and then 18- to 24-year-olds (28.3 million). Those in their 40s and 50s follow. While not surprising, over 65-year-olds are the smallest group of participants at 14.6 million – but are expected to experience the largest growth in 2016.

If the heavy social media users fit your customer profile, then you absolutely want to get your brand and messaging in front of them where they spend their time online.

Here are five ways to consider using social media to garner prospective customer attention:

1. Facebook: If your business is B2C, create an attractively branded, inviting Facebook page and send page “like” suggestions to jumpstart your audience. Update your page frequently to engage your base with posts that feature news, data, sale, and other items of customer interest. Adding photos and videos that both tell your story while capturing your

followers' attention is ideal. Visual aides are readily shared by Facebook users, which will assist in expanding your page followers.

2. Should you advertise on Facebook?

Facebook is by far the largest social media player out there, with 156.5 million users in 2015. The largest number of users is 25- to 34-year-olds, followed by 18- to 24-year-olds. But Facebook has high usage and appeal across all age groups.

If your Facebook page isn't getting as much attention organically as you'd like, you may want to start small and do a “boost post” ad for a nominal fee. You can select the geographic area, demographics, budget, and length of campaign to get your post in front of prospective customers that aren't currently following your page. Display ads that lend visual interest can also be placed on Facebook to get clicks to your website or Facebook page.

3. Pinterest: With 44.5 million users, Pinterest is an online bulletin board that is rich in visual interest. Users can post (or “pin”) photos they collect of food, recipes, crafts, fashion, home décor, do-it-yourself ideas and more. This saves ideas for users, but when they “re-pin” something, they share it with their followers and others – making images reach much farther. According to a [Shopify study](#), shoppers referred by Pinterest are 10 percent more likely to purchase online than other social media site users – and spend twice as much as Facebook users!

If you sell products that fit into the visual interest category, Pinterest has

“promoted pin” advertising opportunities that hone in on your target audience.

4. LinkedIn: The online place for networking and career-building, this popular social media site has 433 million members. Profiles resemble resumes and include spots for skillsets (which connections can endorse). Users can share posts, articles, news, and more to communicate with their network, build it, and even seek employees – or jobs.

5. Should you advertise on LinkedIn?

If your small business is B2B, LinkedIn is a great option for advertising. It provides the opportunity to target ads by location, job title, industry, company size, member skills, member groups, and more. Text ads (pay-per-click) and sponsored content ads are budget-friendly, as they can be self-managed by users. Display and sponsored “InMail” (LinkedIn email) ads are pricier and require LinkedIn sales representative support.

Social media isn't going anywhere, and participation in its various networks is steadily increasing. Ascertaining which platforms are the most appropriate for your business and jumping in will assist you in expanding brand awareness and generating leads.

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