

Social Media Education 101

The Next Big Thing is Already Here

Social media sites are the fastest growing category on the web, doubling in traffic over last year. Don't be left behind. Reduce the cost of communications by joining the conversation and tapping into a growing audience of more than 300 million potential customers. Customers, investors, employees, critics, and fans are participating in a complex, organic online conversation that is quickly making traditional business communications obsolete.

- **Twitter** is a microblog that people use to follow their friends, and companies use to market their product or service. Tweets are limited to 140 characters, about one sentence. People use Twitter to follow friends, and companies use it to promote their product or services by sharing new information and helpful links and building credibility. Perception of Twitter has evolved from a fun indulgence to a key communication tool with the power to impact global politics.
- **LinkedIn** connects 35 million professionals representing every company on the Fortune 500. Online profiles build credibility by articulating your value proposition, conveying information about your people and organization, and displaying your credentials. Fifty percent of participants are decision makers; eighty percent are college graduates and the average age is 41. You can join groups and communicate with a laser focus on your target market.
- **Facebook** is used by 190 million people and provides a mini website for your business where you can share photos, video, and messages within a social framework. This platform is about community. This powerful and free relationship tool signs up 600,000 new users every day.
- **YouTube** boasts one billion views per day, and is second only to Google as a search engine.

These are just a few social media platforms within an open communication network powered by blogs, message boards, podcasts, and social networks.

Why it Matters to You

The power of a company to define and control its brand is rapidly diminishing. Individuals and communities are taking your brand online and you need to be there to influence the

conversation. Your participation will drive visibility that creates valuable exposure for your business. With social media marketing, you can:

- Create new business by converting lookers to prospects. Social media gets your message out to many people much more quickly than traditional campaigns, and produces qualified sales leads faster.
- Identify and recruit influencers to spread your message, and create new strategic partnerships with the relationship-building aspect.
- Enjoy greater influence with online recommendations than with advertising. Many people use social media sites to research products and services before making a purchasing decision.
- Improve search engine visibility and increase traffic to your website.
- Use networking to grow your lists for e-mail blasts and newsletters, and to create publicity for important events.
- Boost your standing as a subject matter expert in your field with engaging, ongoing content.
- Control and protect your online reputation from competitors and imposters, and manage your communications in real time during a crisis.

A Practical Approach

Launching and nurturing a complete campaign that brings success across multiple channels can be a real challenge. Developing a business plan to effectively implement social media begins with a customized strategy based on clear goals. Start with a three-step approach.

Step 1: Set your strategy.

- Assess your goals and your target audience, which could consist of several niche groups. Goals could include reducing marketing costs, increasing recruitment, generating leads, or improving search engine rankings.
- Articulate your message to boost brand equity and strengthen your reputation. Create messages that effectively communicate why your solution is unique and valuable and position yourself as a market leader and subject matter expert.
- Understand the time commitment to create your campaign and maintain it over time.

Step 2: Implement the tools.

- Choose the right tools for your needs. You want to select the platforms with the largest

opportunity for growth.

- Customize your social network accounts, and create and setup a highly effective and keyword-optimized profile.
- Learn the customs and culture of each social media platform. Observe the habits of other participants, along with their conversations and the types of content they post.
- Create education-rich content that adds to the conversation, posting strategic, keyword-driven communications with customers and prospects.
- Establish measurements to track the effectiveness of your efforts.

Step 3: Maintain content.

- Implement a listening strategy that helps you direct the conversation and transform relationships into clients. Monitoring the social media sites and reading other people's blogs are part of your listening strategy.
- Engage your target markets to develop a solid understanding of their pain points and gain understanding of how to fulfill their needs. Listening tools include <http://search.twitter.com> and <http://www.google.com/alerts>.
- Stay involved. Ask for advice and opinions, and share them in return. Use surveys and questions to capitalize on participants' willingness to collaborate. You will be able to mine valuable market research very quickly.
- Update content regularly. Build credibility and establish expertise by contributing discussion board topics, distributing helpful articles or links, and adding recent news.
- Participate in ongoing networking and conversations to properly maintain presence and nurture relationships.

Social Media Marketing Best Practices

Social networks speed communications between groups of individuals or organizations that share common interests. Millions of existing and potential customers, along with competitors, use social networks to communicate. Here are a few best practices to keep in mind:

- Develop a business plan and strategy to effectively implement social media. Position yourself as a subject matter expert, and your company as an industry leader.
- Create value and offer information that lets you grow relationships in a helping model rather than with a sales approach. This technique builds relationships based on credibility.
- Expand your reach to strengthen your brand and protect it in a crisis with proactive

listening. Create new brand ambassadors to attract prospects and build relationships with existing customers.

- Choose quality over quantity as you craft, launch and maintain your social networking presence.
- Measure results to assess and to maximize your social media marketing return on investment.

To learn more, register for the next Springboard Works webinar [Social Media Education 101](#). Enter code **GFORCE** for a special discount available exclusively for GrowthForce newsletter readers.

Springboard Works offers a Social Media Portal package that includes a strategy session, tools implementation and content maintenance. Springboard Works' methodologies and services are based on more than 20 years of successful business development, sales and educational leadership of individuals, early stage companies and Fortune 500 corporations. Contact Shelley Roth, Founder & President of Springboard Works, at 713.937.1006 or email info@springboardworks.com.

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