

Lions and Tigers and Social Media, Oh My.

The Five Things You Should Know About Social Media Before Getting Started

Social media... A dangerous medium? Just for teenagers? Thinking of it that way makes it easy to disregard it as a viable marketing medium. Not so fast.

Let's start by defining social media. It boils down to any website that facilitates peer-to-peer communication. Traditional marketing is all push. Corporations push their message to the masses. It worked for as long as the masses trusted the corporations. Now consumers have the tools to get full transparency on the products and services they buy.

1. **Should you participate?** A lot of businesses cite the desire to not give up control as the reason for not getting involved in social media. But the fact is, if you sell to consumers your customers are probably already talking about you. And the only way to combat negative or inaccurate content is to participate in the conversation.

If you sell to businesses, you have a little more leeway, but don't forget that businesses are made up of people too.
2. **Just because you build it doesn't mean they'll come.** When you do decide to participate in social media, go where your customers are already having a conversation, whether that's Twitter or their own blogs. People often respect the fact that you found and reached out to them on their turf. Besides, creating your own social media site is a little like broadcasting a new radio station. You might have the most brilliant things to say, but until your audience knows to tune their dial to your frequency, you'll be hearing a lot of dead air.
3. **Make a commitment.** If you participate half-heartedly or sporadically, people will notice and start to disregard you entirely. In social media that means responding to comments in no more than 24 hours. For some organizations, being able to respond that quickly is difficult. It's important to have the system for timely communication in place before you jump in.
4. **Be in it for the long haul.** Sales gives you instant gratification (or disappointment), but good marketing takes time. And marketing yourself or your business through social media is no exception. You can't build a reputation in your real-world, professional network by attending one mixer. Similarly, it takes time to build a following and earn trust online.
5. **There are advantages.** It can be intimidating, but participating in social media comes with payoffs too. For individuals, it's a way to create a personal brand outside of the organization you work for. For businesses, customers reward transparency and a candid voice with loyalty and referrals.

Bottom line: Marketing has evolved from a presentation on a soap box to a candid conversation. Joining that conversation has its benefits, but it requires a commitment.



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