10 GAME-CHANGING SOCIAL MEDIA TACTICS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

HOW TO FIX COMMON MISTAKES AND INTEGRATE CONTENT MARKETING FOR SUCCESS

Community Futures Saskatchewan

WITH 88.5% OF CANADIANS ONLINE AND MORE THAN **50% ACTIVE ON AT LEAST ONE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM**, SOCIAL MEDIA IS AN IDEAL WAY TO REACH PROSPECTIVE CUSTOMERS AND INCREASE BUZZ AROUND YOUR BRAND. THE PROBLEM IS THAT MOST SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START.

They are experienced regarding the elements of their business—making delicious food at their cafes or helping clients at their gyms, for instance—but have no idea how to gain traction with social media marketing. Consider this e-book your starting point. In this guide, we will delve into:

- 5 common social media mistakes that can sabotage your social media efforts and brand
- Straightforward solutions to these common mistakes
- Why content and social media are an ideal, affordable marketing combination
- How to create a content and social media calendar from scratch in just 5 steps

By the end of this e-book, you will understand how to best leverage social media to build your brand and reach the right people to fuel your small business. Should you have any questions or just need additional help, please **contact Community Futures** and check out our calendar of **educational events** developed specifically for entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan.

NOTE: THIS EBOOK SHOULD BE USED AS A HELPFUL GUIDE, BUT SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED AS A REPLACEMENT TO APPROPRIATE LEGAL AND ACCOUNTING ADVICE. COMMUNITY FUTURES ACCEPTS NO LIABILITY FOR ERRORS OR OMISSIONS CONTAINED WITHIN THIS PUBLICATION.

5 COMMON SOCIAL MEDIA MISTAKES THAT SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS MAKE

Whether you are just starting out with social media promotion or have been at it for a while without significant results, knowing what *not* to do is just as important as knowing how to conduct social media marketing the right way.

Below are five of the most common social media mistakes that small business owners make, as well as simple solutions, on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Yelp, YouTube, Google+, Snapchat, and more.

1. TRACKING THE WRONG METRICS

When most people discuss social media success, they often speak about the number of "likes" or "follows" on their pages. These can be indicators of an effective social media strategy or well-built brand, but in many cases, likes, shares, and followers are just vanity metrics (data points that don't necessarily correlate to return on investment in terms of customers acquired or revenue generated).

As a result, your small business could end up with a Twitter page that has 1,000 followers but doesn't drive traffic to your website or customers through your door.

SOLUTION:

When creating a social media campaign and setting goals for your profiles, decide how you will judge progress and ultimate success. For example, let's say that you run a promotional Facebook campaign to drive traffic to a landing page on your website (a standalone webpage on your site dedicated to achieving a specific objective, such as selling a certain product or convincing prospects to opt into your email list).

Before starting your campaign, set a realistic goal—such as gaining 5 new customers from your landing page—and then work backward to determine which metrics will indicate success.

1. If you expect that your landing page conversion rate will be approximately 5%, then that means you'll have to drive 100 visitors to your landing page to gain 5 new customers.

2. If 10% of your Facebook page visitors click on "learn more" button to go to your landing page, that means you'll have to generate 1,000 Facebook page visitors in order to drive 100 visitors to your landing page.

3. You can then determine that "success" for this campaign means 1,000 Facebook page visitors, 100 landing page visitors, and 5 new customers.

4. Therefore, the social media metrics you will need to track for this campaign are Facebook page visitors and the number of clicks on your "learn more" call to action button. Additionally, you will need to calculate website metrics like number of landing page visitors and conversion rate from visitors to customers.

Rather than just tracking the number of likes or shares on your page, which can be misleading when considered outside of your marketing goals, the system above ensures that you're paying attention to social media metrics that are directly tied to your marketing/sales objectives—allowing you to determine return on investment (ROI) and identify areas for improvement.

2. SPEAKING AT—RATHER THAN WITH—PEOPLE

Social media provides a golden opportunity to speak directly to your audience. Unfortunately, many entrepreneurs take this to mean that they should continuously promote their companies online. This simply creates a one-sided monologue that alienates prospects rather than an engaging conversation that draws them in.

SOLUTION:

Focus on speaking with your audience rather than at them.

- Post educational material that they would find valuable
- Respond to comments (especially negative ones) and address any questions or concerns quickly
- Use posts to ask questions that spark conversations about relevant topics
- Join in on industry or niche groups where audience members gather (for instance, an entrepreneur who owns a fitness facility could join a Facebook group about weight loss and healthy eating) and contribute your expertise for free

The more value you can deliver, the more organically you promote your brand. You will truly connect with customers in an authentic way, differentiating your company and creating unique appeal around your brand.

According to a study conducted by the Boston Consulting Group, consumers rated **authenticity as one of their top qualities in terms of brand attractiveness**. On social media (and in all marketing efforts), be honest, transparent, and helpful, and your potential customers will take notice.

3. POSTING SPORADICALLY

With so many things on your day-to-day task list, it's difficult to find time to post on Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Yelp… the list goes on and on. Many small business owners feel overwhelmed by the need to "be everywhere" all the time, plus manage their companies and deliver great customer service.

As a result, they spread themselves too thin. Their social media profiles are like ghost towns and they are lucky to post new content once every few weeks, which doesn't help to connect with prospects and generate revenue.

SOLUTION:

Automate and outsource as much as possible to stay consistently active on social media. There are dozens of tools out there designed specifically to help busy entrepreneurs, including:

- **Buffer** or **HootSuite**: social media management platforms that enable you to schedule posts for your favorite platforms—Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, and Pinterest—from one convenient dashboard
- **Quuu**: a website that curates content suggestions based on your industry and chosen topics, so you never run out of articles to easily share
- **IFTTT** (If This, Then That): an online tool that automates actions between websites, apps, and smartphones—you can easily research what your competition is doing and streamline social media activities, such as posting Instagram photos as Twitter photos rather than just links
- **Upwork** or any number of freelancer sites to help you locate the right social media talent to manage your efforts

By using these tools and/or delegating social media responsibilities, you can stay active online without sacrificing your focus on other essential tasks.

BONUS TIP: CONSISTENCY IS JUST ONE KEY TO SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS. LEARN 7 MORE FOUNDATIONAL WAYS TO **MAKE YOUR SMALL BUSINESS SHINE ON SOCIAL MEDIA**!

4. SPEAKING TO THE WRONG AUDIENCE

Similar to the problem above, trying to develop a presence everywhere can also cause you to use the wrong platforms and engage with the wrong audience on social media (not to mention leaving you **burned out** and ineffective). Perhaps they land outside of your ideal customer profile or don't have the capability to purchase your products. In the end, these unfit prospects eat up valuable time and resources without delivering ROI.

SOLUTION:

Develop a detailed buyer persona—a semi-fictional representation of your ideal customer based on research and actual customer data—for each of your buyer segments. Reach out to your current and past customers to discover their specific pain points, challenges, buying patterns, motivations, values, and what made them work with your company. As we explain in our article "**Become a Marketing Maverick: Three Game-Changing Shifts**," asking questions will uncover valuable information to ensure that you're meeting future customers' needs and wants.

TIP: IF YOU COMPLETED SIGNIFICANT MARKET RESEARCH WHEN DEVELOPING YOUR BUSINESS PLAN, USE THIS INFORMATION TO GUIDE YOUR CUSTOMER PERSONAS. HAVEN'T COMPLETED A BUSINESS PLAN YET? FIND A TEMPLATE, MARKET RESEARCH GUIDES, AND MORE ON THE COMMUNITY FUTURES TIPS & TOOLS WEBPAGE.

Once you have your buyer personas in hand, compare them to the **demographics of each social media platform** to see where you match up. For example, if you aim to target women aged 18-29 who possess at least some college education, and make less than $30,000 per year—and your product is very aesthetically appealing, like food plates or handmade crafts—then Instagram may be your best bet.

Matching your buyer personas to your social media efforts ensures that you're focused on speaking to the right audience in order to attract the right customers.

5. NOT OPTIMIZING SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES

A half-completed social media page looks unprofessional and hurts your chances of being found online. This includes not adding logos or photos to your social media profiles, leaving the "story" and "about us" sections blank, or making your profile names inconsistent across platforms.

SOLUTION:

Take the time to set up your profiles correctly in the beginning, and then regularly check in to see if anything needs to be updated, added, or further optimized. Social media platforms usually provide specific tips for profile improvement but here are a few additional rules of thumb.

- Add a logo, header image, and/or professional profile picture. According to **LinkedIn**, profiles with photos receive 14 times more views than profiles without.
- Share your **small business story and mission**. Why do you do what you do? How did you get to this point? What do you hope to accomplish? How do you help customers or clients and what differentiates you from the competition? Typically, social media platforms have areas where you can write a brief business bio or lengthier story, just be sure to check the character limits for each platform.
- Try to keep your brand consistent across platforms, with identical or very similar profile names—this will make it easier for prospects to find you.
- Ensure that your website URL or other contact information is front and center on your profiles. Add "Contact Us" or "Learn More" buttons if possible to prompt action.

COMBINING CONTENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA INTO ONE EFFECTIVE STRATEGY

Along with utilizing the 5 social media best practices above, integrating content marketing into your social media marketing strategy can help to advertise your company online. Think of content and social media as the right and left hands of your marketing strategy. Alone they are only so strong, but together they are a powerful force for:

- **Increasing brand awareness**
- Engaging with prospects and customers
- Identifying your audience's pain points and showcasing how your small business addresses those challenges
- **Nurturing prospects into leads and then customers** (many prospects won't buy right away, meaning you must continuously provide value for weeks or months in order to eventually convert them)

The key is to think of content—anything from blog articles to e-books to videos—as marketing fuel and social media as the car. Without great content that informs and/or entertains, your social media marketing isn't going to get far because prospects will not see the value of connecting. Likewise, without a social media strategy to disseminate your content, no one will read or watch what you've produced; your marketing budget will go to waste.

In this section, we will briefly describe how to brainstorm a combined content and social media strategy that puts your brand in front of potential customers. All it takes is 5 simple steps.

STEP 1: DECIDE WHAT KINDS OF CONTENT TO PRODUCE BASED ON AUDIENCE AND RESOURCES

Before you can produce fantastic content, you must decide what kind of content to create. Start by considering what would deliver the greatest value to customers, which content pieces you can reasonably afford to produce (in terms of time and money), and what is working for competitors.

If you own a hair salon that serves primarily women, for example, short hair styling tutorials could be a great way to promote your services while assisting your audience. Working with a tight budget? No problem. Try using a smartphone with a good camera and microphone, and then utilize free online or app-based video editing software to polish the final product.

STEP 2: CREATE AN EDITORIAL CALENDAR

Now that you know what type of content to produce, schedule it on a calendar. Putting your plan down on paper not only keeps you accountable and ensures consistency, but also creates a clear path toward your goals. **36% of companies** with a documented content strategy rate their content marketing efforts as "very effective" or "extremely effective."

Color-coded paper calendar or digital schedule accompanied by email reminders—no one system is best. Choose the best format for you and decide:

- How many pieces of content you can produce every week, month, and/or quarter (note: if you don't personally have the time or expertise to produce one hair styling tutorial per week, to use the example above, then consider delegating or outsourcing the process)
- How often your audience prefers to receive new content
- How often you should be producing content based on your marketing goals

Don't be afraid to start small with just a few pieces of content per month and then add to your calendar as you gain experience. It is always best to prioritize quality content that delivers value over pumping out mediocre content just to "put something out there."

BONUS TIP: NOT SURE WHERE TO START WITH YOUR CONTENT CALENDAR? COSCHEDULE, A MARKETING CALENDAR TOOL, OFFERS FREE CONTENT EDITORIAL TEMPLATES HERE.

STEP 3: OVERLAY SOCIAL MEDIA

Let's pretend that your hair salon decided to produce one hair styling tutorial video every Wednesday. Add another layer to your calendar to attract viewers after production; overlay a social media dissemination schedule. For instance:

- Mondays at 1:00 PM: Share a Facebook Live video of you recording the week's upcoming hair tutorial, to tease content and start promoting interest
- Mondays and Tuesdays: Produce and finalize the weekly video
- Wednesdays at 10:00 AM: Host the video on your website and on YouTube
- Wednesdays at 3:00 PM: Announce the new video on Facebook with a link back to your website video page (Wednesdays at 3 PM tend to see the highest click through rates for Facebook)
- Wednesdays at 7:00 PM: Announce the new video on Instagram with a link back to your website video page (evenings are a popular time for Instagram users)
- Thursdays at 1:00 PM: Repost a tutorial video from the last 2-4 weeks on Facebook, like a "just in case you missed it" post to capture viewers that didn't catch it the first time
- Saturdays at 12:00 PM: Post again about your new weekly video on Facebook and Instagram to capture weekend viewers, ensuring that you word the post a little bit differently from your original post

It may seem like a lot, but these consistent efforts can pay off. More than 80% of marketers found that dedicating as little as six hours per week increased their traffic, according to **Social Media Examiner**.

STEP 4: AUTOMATE

Now that you have a calendar of to-dos, automate as many processes as possible to take them off your plate. In the Common Social Media Mistakes section above, we mentioned some affordable tools like **Buffer** and **Hootsuite**. Use these scheduling tools to send your posts out like clockwork… without sacrificing your time and sanity.

Don't forget to automate and/or delegate your content production cycle as well! Hundreds of apps and inexpensive online tools exist to streamline each step of your content creation process. Additionally, freelancers can be an affordable resource for writing, video production, sound editing, photography, graphic design—the possibilities are endless.

STEP 5: ASSESS RESULTS AND ADJUST ACCORDINGLY

Every powerful social media strategy got that way with constant oversight and improvement. Each week and month, look at your metrics (discussed in Common Social Media Mistake #1) and ask:

- Am I making progress toward my goals?
- Which posts are succeeding and which are failing?
- How can I improve the quality of my content and the performance of my social media posts?
- What is my audience asking for?
- Am I posting at the right times for maximum engagement or should I experiment?

Then, adjust accordingly. You will soon notice trends and pinpoint what resonates with your audience so you can iterate on the most successful posts.

EMBRACE THE SOCIAL MEDIA MACHINE

Social media is a machine that runs 24/7/365. When leveraged correctly, it can act as a constant promoter for your small business, increasing brand awareness and engagement day after day. The key is to invest as much energy into online marketing as in any other essential element of your company, and give content and social media the attention they deserve.

Don't forget to try the social media tools listed above to make the most of your time and effort!

- **Buffer**: Social media management platform to schedule posts ahead of time
- **HootSuite**: An alternative to Buffer
- **Quuu**: Curated content suggestions for your social media profiles
- **IFTTT**: Web-based tool that combines your favorite services (website and apps) for streamlined processes
- **Upwork**: Freelancer site to connect with social media talent
- **CoSchedule**: A free content editorial template to get you started

DO YOU NEED HELP WITH SMALL BUSINESS PLANNING, FINANCING, BRANDING, OR MARKETING? COMMUNITY FUTURES HAS RESOURCES TO HELP ENTREPRENEURS IN THESE ESSENTIAL AREAS AND MORE!

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