

Business Owners: How Not to Botch Social Media

Conversations You Can't Afford to Miss



55 2nd Street, 2nd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105
415 520 3400 tel
415 520 3420 fax
privacyseals@truste.com
www.truste.com

Online conversations about your business, complimentary and critical, happen every day. They occur on consumer review sites, blogs, Twitter and Facebook and they will, in many cases, become permanent records of your business's successes and failures. And, unlike word of mouth, these online conversations can spread like wildfire—at the click of a button.

When dissatisfied consumers take to the Internet companies risk substantial fallout. United Airlines learned this lesson when a disgruntled customer posted a homemade music video on YouTube criticizing the airline for negligently damaging his guitar. The video received nearly six million views and came at an untold public relations cost to the company.

This anecdote, while extreme, underscores the power of social media. Consumers can leverage this power and you can too. When done right, it can reinforce your company's good standing, build your business, and ensure the continued satisfaction of existing customers. When done wrong, it can and will damage your brand. In reviewing three social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and consumer review sites, we'll go over the dos and don'ts of social media for businesses who (smartly) want to participate in these online conversations.

FACEBOOK

Do:

1. Create a Facebook Fan Page for your business.
2. Add Facebook applications to enhance your Fan Page. Mashable.com has a nice list¹ of apps for businesses, ranging from online voicemail to finance apps.
3. Reward your Facebook fans with exclusive offers and discounts.
4. Engage your Facebook fans with creative content (games, recipes, quizzes etc.)
5. Interact with your Facebook fans and respond to their questions and concerns.
6. Consider using "Facebook Connect" to enhance your business Web site with social networking capabilities.
7. Consider buying Facebook ads to market your business. They're targeted to specific demographics and relatively inexpensive, even for small businesses.
8. Join Facebook groups related to your business to improve your networking capabilities.

¹ <http://mashable.com/2009/01/22/business-facebook-apps/>

Example

Splenda ran a highly successful campaign via their Facebook Fan page, offering free samples of their new Splenda Mist product to their Facebook fans. They distributed all 16,000 samples in one-sixth of the planned program time and gathered important market data from more than 1,500 fans that responded to a detailed survey. For more ideas and examples of how to successfully use Facebook for your business check out Facebook's marketing page: <http://www.facebook.com/marketing>.

Don't:

1. Spam - your Facebook fans come to Facebook primarily to share and socialize, not shop. Hard marketing pitches will not win you fans on Facebook.
2. Invade fans' privacy or violate Facebook's terms of use.

Example

When Burger King offered free burger coupons to their Facebook fans who "un-friended" ten friends the social networking site stepped in and pulled the plug on this advertising promotion. While Burger King's marketing team had the right idea in offering Facebook fans an exclusive promotion, they failed to realize that the campaign violated Facebook's terms of use by notifying users who had been de-friended and moreover violated the Web site's ethos of establishing (not severing) connections.

TWITTER

Do:

1. Engage in dialogue - query your audience. Listen to your followers. Respond.
2. Humanize your tweets- these are 140-character tweets not press releases. It's ok to speak informally or have a sense of humor. Businesses often identify the employee(s) behind the tweeting with a picture and name.
3. Re-tweet content you find interesting. Promote others (doesn't have to be competitors).
4. Track conversations mentioning your name or brand with Twitter Search.
5. Reward your Twitter followers with exclusive offers or discounts.
6. Use Twitter to advertise job openings.
7. Follow experts and competitors in your industry.
8. Use Twitter Lists to organize and manage your followers.

Example

Comcast saw Twitter as an opportunity to bridge the gap between customers and customer service and created Twitter accounts that allow customers to directly message Comcast employees with near immediate response times. Moreover, their customer service team proactively seeks out dissatisfied customers on Twitter and tries to resolve their complaints. That's great customer service and it's no surprise that consumers have celebrated Comcast's Twitter initiative. Twitter itself has a number of instructive case studies documenting businesses' successful use of their service, available on their Web site: http://business.twitter.com/twitter101/case_dell.

Don't:

1. Automate tweets – Twitter is a conversation platform, not an RSS feed.
2. Spam –again, like Facebook, you need to socialize your marketing messages and use them sparingly. Give your Twitter followers compelling reasons to re-tweet (spread) your content.

Example

When furniture store Habitat UK Ltd. joined Twitter they blasted their followers with stereotypical marketing messages designed to appear in search results for items unrelated to their product line, such as iPhones. This behavior wildly upset their Twitter followers and the company scrambled to retract all offending tweets. Don't be afraid to ask your Twitter followers what *they* want to see from you on Twitter, you might be pleasantly surprised by their response.

CONSUMER REVIEW SITES & BLOGS

Consumers may comment about your product or services on dedicated review sites like consumerreports.org, on their personal blogs, or on the websites of authorized resellers (like Amazon.com). When consumers criticize your brand in these spaces respond tactfully. Consider the case of a San Francisco business owner who vilified an online critic on business review site Yelp.com and went so far as to track down the critic at his residence and confront him. Her actions only drew more attention to the original criticism, ensuring hundreds of thousands of people knew of it and her unfavorable response.

While extreme, this story illustrates a principle that has played out in countless other online contexts. Understand that once criticism exists on the Internet it's there to stay and trying to delete it or attacking the person who authored it will only incentivize them to seek (and often find) larger audiences. The best containment strategy involves trying to constructively resolve the complaint. If someone rants about your business on their personal blog, identify yourself in the comments and ask them, how can I help?

You can also create a company blog that provides your business with a dedicated space to respond to criticisms if the need arises. Alternatively, if you plan on paying bloggers to review your products and services, new Federal Trade Commission guidelines call for public disclosure of this monetary relationship. The FTC has since clarified that they will not use the new guidelines to go after individual bloggers, suggesting that the compliance burdens likely falls on the company paying for the blogger's endorsement.

Do:

1. Identify yourself and respond constructively to criticism. Ask, how can I help?
2. Create your own blog.

Don't:

1. Impersonate reviews – consumers can and often do spot such fraud, leading to embarrassment for your business.
2. Disparage critics or try to delete criticism – it will only encourage them to spread their criticism.

TAKEAWAYS

Social media connects you with consumers. Marketing in social media spaces can be accomplished in clever and palatable ways, but to do this you must package your message with interesting and attractive content that will compel consumers to share it with others. That's the ultimate goal and one of the real powers of the Internet and social media platforms: if you do it right your consumers can become your best advocates and sales force.

When consumers criticize your company in social media spaces, help, don't hate them. Counter-criticism or deletion attempts will only draw more attention to the criticism and help to spread it. On public spaces like blogs anyone and everyone can see what you say so when a consumer criticizes your company or your product, identify yourself and ask, "how can I help?" You may find that keeping up to date on the social media waves can become an overwhelming task. If that's the case, online services like Trackle, Social Mention, Viralheat, and Visible Technologies can help you effectively manage this task and alert you to the most important online conversations about your company as they occur, ensuring your effective participation.

When it comes to your employees' use of social media platforms creating a company social media policy can help set employee expectations and manage associated risks. While employees' use of social media can enhance your business, it also risks publicizing sensitive company data or internal criticisms. A part-time employee of

the Philadelphia Eagles took to Twitter to disparage a trade decision by the team and promptly found himself without a job. Employees at Yahoo have taken to Twitter in the past to publicly document layoffs at the company in blow-by-blow detail.

A recent survey by Robert Half Technology found that 54 percent of companies ban social networking for any purposes during work hours, while 19 percent permit such use for business purposes². In considering an outright ban on employee social media use at your company understand that employees can and will talk about your business outside the office on their personal social media platforms. By including employees in your social media strategy, however, you can bring transparency and accountability to the process and promote responsible use of social media outside of work. Moreover, a survey by AT&T found that use of social networking tools as part of everyday working life has led to an increase in efficiency³.

Take pride in your business' social media presence. If you have a company Twitter account or Facebook fan page, note that on business cards, email signatures, and your company homepage. It shows consumers your commitment to open dialogue and your interest in their perspectives and opinions. Consumers have talked about companies and their products long before the advent of the Internet and social media. The difference today is that you can listen to and participate in these conversations. And you should.

An investment in social media can build trust with your customers as can an investment in sound privacy practices. It's a well-established fact that consumers reward good privacy practices and thousands of Web sites rely on TRUSTe's privacy services, including top-fifty sites like Yahoo, Facebook, MSN, eBay, AOL, Disney, New York Times, Comcast and Apple. What does TRUSTe offer? We actively scan customer websites for vulnerabilities, provide consumer privacy dispute resolution services free of charge, and provide our customers with access to certified privacy professionals to help craft a TRUSTe-certified privacy policy so sites can take advantage of our distinctive and well-recognized trustmark. What's more, we can help ensure your social media marketing efforts and business partners comply with your privacy policy.

TRUSTe

55 2nd Street, 2nd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105
Phone: (415) 520-3400
Fax: (415) 520-3420

Sales:
smbsales@truste.com
(415) 520-3490

² <http://www.roberthalftechnology.com/PressRoom?id=2531>

³ <http://www.att.com/gen/press-room?pid=4800&cdvn=news&newsarticleid=26293>

