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A beginner's guide to using social media to create more leads

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Date: 18th September 2015



Marketing your business through social media is an effective way of both maintaining customer relationships while also reaching out to new members of your target audience.

Each platform is designed to be easy-to-use and convenient. Most are also centred on the idea of gaining loyal followers and gaining insight through the collection of user data. However, their various audiences and the different ways that these interact on-site means each platform isn't necessarily right for every business. So, it is recommended that you focus your attention on a few relevant platforms when starting out, rather than spreading your resources too thinly.

Before you decide on which platforms to pursue, here is a brief description of some popular options and practical ways to get the most from each:

Use Twitter to follow prospects and answer their questions

Twitter is an invaluable resource for creating and maintaining relationships with potential customers, which in turn can help to generate interest in your products and services. The key is to try and engage your audience through continual dialogue. This can be achieved through following prospective customers and valuable members of your community, taking part in discussions and being on hand to answer questions and discuss issues. In turn, this can help you to raise brand awareness and strengthen your credibility with your customer base.

Top Tip: Hashtag your posts with relevant search terms as this will increase your visibility.

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Accurately target your advertising on Facebook

With over 1 billion users, Facebook provides businesses with a huge platform as well as a highly sophisticated targeted advertising at an unrivalled price, giving you the opportunity to reach out to the right people. Budgets can be set at as little as £1 a day. What's more, your bidding campaign can be broken down into one of three ways:

- Cost per mille (CPM) - you pay for each 1,000 screens that your advertising appears on (mille is Latin for 1,000).
- Cost per click (CPC) - you pay for each time a customer 'clicks' on your advertisement.
- Cost per action (CPA) - you pay for every lead generated.

This allows you to tailor campaigns by customising the way your advertising messages are delivered.

Unlike Google AdWords, Facebook allows you to target people based on their interests and demographics such as age, gender and location. By producing such highly targeted adverts, this can help to improve the click-through rate to your site.

Top Tip: There is also a paid advertising feature on Twitter – similar to Facebook, it is affordable and easy to target the right customers.

Host Google Hangouts with industry professionals

Building a community of like-minded folks is a great way to generate leads, and Google Hangouts can be highly effective at helping you to achieve this goal. Simple to use and with the ability to invite industry members to take part, the challenging aspect can be encouraging people to join in.

Make sure that the content you cover in your Google Hangout is appealing. From conversing with customers and introducing them to a new product or service, to hosting a panel on pressing issues and cutting edge improvements, there is plenty to talk about. By choosing an intriguing topic and promoting your event across other social media channels, you can make sure attendance numbers are high.

Create works of art for Pinterest

Pinterest is a platform driven by imagery and can be a successful way of showcasing the aesthetic appeal of your brand, including products and packaging. The site currently has around 6 million monthly users and by producing high quality and engaging visuals, you can begin to attract attention from potential customers.

Top Tip: Share ideas and interact with your audience by allowing users to contribute to your board.

Upload instructional videos to YouTube

Answering people's search engine queries is a good way to drive traffic to your pages and gain exposure for your brand. Creating short 1-2 minute instructional or 'how-to' videos can give you the opportunity to address such questions or issues your customers regularly face.

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So that your audience can find your videos when they search, it is important to get the keywords, tagging and titles right. Tags should accurately pinpoint your video's contents, your brand name and industry, and you can also choose to select from YouTube's auto-suggest tool.

Top Tip: Experiment with YouTube's video editor to ensure your videos are entertaining and professional looking.

So that your activity can remain as efficient as possible, use a social account management tool like Hootsuite, Buffer or Stacker to streamline the process of posting and replying. Also, be sure to integrate your various channels by linking from each platform to all others.

Any social media activity that you do carry out should be regular and constant so that you are able to maintain any customer relationships that you build. Your work should also be regularly monitored and reviewed so that you give yourself the opportunity to build upon the results you achieve well into the future.

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