Small Business Webinar Series

Introduction to social media

Contents

Introduction

Welcome to the Department of Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games - Small Business Webinar Series.

Our aim is to help you gain valuable knowledge and skills related to business to assist you in creating a better business; or growing your existing business.

Learning objectives

The desired learning objectives are for you to:
- identify the major players within social media and the size of the Australian social media market
- understand the benefits of using social media networks on an individual and business basis
- identify of the types of business objectives you may be able to fulfil through social media
- identify the important considerations when deciding to set up as an individual, or business, or both, in the various networks
- understand the importance of listening, conversing and not just 'selling' on social media
- recognise the need for a social media policy
- identify the tools which can assist you to be more effective with your social media activities and assist you to measure the impact of your social media activities.

Section 1 - The social media landscape

With all the hype around social media these days it is important to understand what social media is and what it can do for your business. Social media is one of the biggest growth areas of online marketing. In short, it is technology that allows you to socialise online for personal, business, or any other purposes you may wish. You may choose to connect and view other people's content, and/or add your own content, graphics, articles, videos, etc.

Twitter, Facebook, Linkedin and YouTube are the social media giants on the internet, especially in Australia, and all are offering to promote your business online with no cost to you other than your time, along with some paid opportunities too.

Social media in Australia

Below are some interesting statistics to give you insight into how Australians use social media.

- 62% of Internet users have a presence on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn.
- Facebook dominates 97% of social networking users, so Facebook is most likely to be the social network your customers will use.
- In the past year the proportion of small businesses with a social media presence increased from 14% to 27%. Facebook is the dominant form of social media presence for businesses.

Other small businesses are seeing the value of having a Facebook presence:

- 10% of internet users access social media more than 5 times a day
- 26% of internet users access social media every day

A number of social media users can be classified as 'heavy users':

- 46% of 14-19 year olds access social networking sites everyday

Younger audiences are accessing social networking sites frequently, so if they are in your target market, then it's important to make sure your message is there for them to see.

For more information on how Australians use social media go to the [Yellow Social Media Report (2012).](#)

As a result of the nationwide uptake of social media, many businesses are generating great results from social media activities. However whilst social media is huge and growing at a rapid rate, many business owners continue to bury their head in the sands with cries of "I just don't have the time!" or "I just can't get my head around it," or "I just don't understand how it can provide me with commercial returns." These are natural concerns so let's first discuss the benefits which will hopefully mean you will at least

consider experimenting with social media networks, if not actually start using them extensively for the benefit of your business.

The Benefits of Social Media

Benefit 1 – More traffic to your website

The more people that visit your website, the higher your ranking among the search engines. Helping your business to achieve a high ranking with search engines can give your website much better visibility and online exposure, and keep the new customers coming.

Benefit 2 – Grow your 'online community'

Social media is changing the way we communicate with one another. Building a large, relevant and active customer database is important to any business, and social media now offers us one of the easiest ways to establish a database in the form of an online community that we can network with and leverage from.

Social media can grow and expand your customer list. In Facebook they are known as fans, in Twitter they are called followers.

These fans or followers are a great way to spread the message of your business. Customer satisfaction means happy and loyal customers who will put in a good word for your business resulting in more relevant and targeted lead generation.

Benefit 3 – Instant customer service and feedback

Social media is a conversation, and unlike traditional broadcast and print mediums which are often one-directional, social media is very much a two-way street. Not only can businesses communicate with their customers, but their customers can communicate with them and with each other as well. This type of communication is a positive thing — businesses can form personal relationships with customers and customers can become part of a community around the brands and businesses they want to support.

On the other hand, you also open yourself up to negative feedback. Negative feedback, however, is as important as positive because it allows your business to take corrective action where necessary and resolve issues in a proactive way. Here's three quick tips for dealing with negative feedback on social media:
1. determine if the negative feedback is warranted
2. decide how to react
3. respond appropriately and promptly.

Benefit 4 – No cost except your time

It is free to sign up or register for an account in most of the top social media websites and free to use their services. However, you will need to consider how much time and effort you realistically have to devote to get established, participate and monitor your social media activities on an ongoing basis.

You need to choose a social media site or sites that best match your audience and your brand and begin to establish and nurture relationships. The main cost is your time so be efficient and disciplined in your approach.

Benefit 5 – A cost-effective marketing tool

Social Media is the most cost-effective, targeted and reliable marketing tool available to business owners. If you need to get a message out to customers about a product, sale or opening hours then social media provides a cost-effective way to get information out to them quickly.

Benefit 6 – The viral effect

With a well constructed, creative and clever campaign (and an established online community) you can let your community do the rest as they forward, retweet and mention your business to others. Talk about the compound effect!

Once you have built up a reputation, it is easy to continue to send messages to your followers to announce new products, promotions and special offers. Don't overdo this or people will become immune to it, however every now and then a creative and well thought out new campaign will build interest and bring you business.

Benefit 7 – Network your heart out

With social media you'll have the opportunity to network and share with like-minded people. Comment on their posts and tweets and participate in their social media conversations. Support them when they ask for support and they'll support you when you need them.

Benefit 8 - Build your profile and credibility

What others say about you is also key to your brand credibility and success. Use social media to establish a profile and create a positive perception about your brand. Your clients and prospects will believe what others say about your brand more than anything you can say about it yourself.

Benefit 9 – Search engine optimisation benefits

In December 2010, Google's Matt Cutts released a video confirming that Google looks at social sites like Twitter and Facebook to help determine ranking positions. Cutts went on to say that not only was Google incorporating social networking sites into their ranking algorithm, but that Google was also figuring out how to take into account the credibility and authority of the author behind a Tweet or Facebook post.

Case Study – Coastal Cruises Mooloolaba

A Mooloolaba tour boat company has launched itself into online marketing and is reaping the rewards.

Coastal Cruises Mooloolaba operates lunchtime and sunset cruises, as well as cruises for special functions. The company's vessel, the Pacific Star, can carry up to 30 people.

Director Darren Smith said the company previously relied on traditional media for marketing, including local newspapers.

The company now uses 5 different social media channels.

'Social media is a massive part of our strategy. As we grow, we are expanding our digital presence,' Darren said. 'We have set it up so that you can come in through any portal and find us.'

Darren uses social media management software HootSuite, which creates a dashboard for posting and managing multiple channels. It can also autopost at specified times and provides traffic analysis.

Coastal Cruises Mooloolaba is also looking at ways for customers to make bookings through its social media channels.

'All small businesses need to use the internet as a tool. It's going ahead in leaps and bounds and it's such a great way to do business. If you're not on it you'll be last in the marketplace, and you don't want to be in that place.'

PROs and CONs of social media

While there are a number of different pros and cons in relation to entering social media, there are a few main ones that we will focus on.

PROs	CONs
Cost effective to set up • While there can be costs associated with running social media, such as resourcing and time, it's important to note that the actual set up will not cost your company. This means you can create a presence online without the cost typically associated with a website build.	**Provides platform for people to complain** • People are going to complain on social media with or without your permission and with or without your platform. The advantage of having a platform that you control is that you can find out when a complaint is made on your platform and can reply for everyone to see.
It allows your brand to be social • Social media platforms allow for your brand to communicate differently compared to how they would in other channels. Your brand can be more conversational, relaxed and can discuss topical news or recent events with your fans. It's about humanizing your brand so that customers can relate to you better.	**Risks of not responding to complaints** • There are risks of not responding to complaints on your Facebook page. Other members of the community might think that you are ignoring the problems of your customers. For this reason it is imperative that you respond in a timely manner to all complaints, even if it is to say that you're looking into the issue.
Quick, cheap updates to customers • Social media platforms allow for speed to market for updates. If you need to get a message out to customers about a product, sale or opening hours then social media will be the easiest and quickest way to get information out to them.	**Risk of sensitive information being posted** • In cases where businesses use social media for customer service it is possible a customer may post information that is sensitive on Facebook to try and get their issues solved. In these situations it's best to just remove the comment then remind them that those posts are public and you have removed it for their safety. Then refer them offline for further assistance.

Section 2 - Defining your social media strategy

Before you start with social media (and if you already have, it's time to back track) you need to define the business objectives you are hoping to achieve by being active on the social networks.

Ask yourself what you are trying to achieve in business in general:

1. What do you do? If you have a broad offering, can you focus on one or two key services that are most in demand? List your specialities or niche areas.
2. How do you do business? Is there something special, unusual, or significant about the way you do business? What do you do which no-one else does? Do you offer 24 or 48 hour turnaround? Do you deliver for free?
3. Who are your customers? Look at their characteristics i.e. age, interests, location (local, interstate, international), stage of life, family situation, etc.
4. What do your customers want? Is it your low prices, personality, location, reputation, or something else that attracts customers to your business? List the benefits that customers derive from you. What can you do that matches or exceeds expectations? What do you do to make sure the customer gets what they want?
5. How can this be made different from your competitors?

Consider which social media objectives best apply to your business.

Objective	Description
Foster product development and innovation	You can foster product development and innovation by using social media to gain feedback or ideas from your fans.
Generate awareness	You can use social media to post relevant and shareable content which increases your fan base through word of mouth and fan Likes and retweets. You can also use social media to assist the promotion of any upcoming events, product launches or company updates.
Drive preference and differentiation	Build preference and differentiation for your brand over your competitors. People will discover your brand through referrals from their friends. It's then up to you to drive preference by interacting with and rewarding your fans.
Increase traffic and sales	Social media turns purchasing into a social decision by enabling people to show what they like and have purchased, both online and in the physical world. Your social media strategy should focus on getting people to share things to do with your business, purchases, experiences etc. This combination of word of mouth and your ability to deepen engagement with your customers at the point of purchase (either on your website or in store)

Objective	Description
	can help drive traffic and sales.
Build loyalty and deepen relationships	When people Like your page or Follow you on Twitter they are indicating that they want to have a relationship with your brand. Based on the information they provide on certain platforms about themselves you can create custom and personalized experiences to drive engagement and loyalty over time. Feeding this information into your marketing activities will also help increase the effectiveness of your campaigns.
Amplify recommendations and word of mouth	Everything you do on social media can be considered 'viral'. For example, on Facebook, your posts will appear in the newsfeeds of your fans and, when they interact with your page, it will also appear in the newsfeeds of their friends.. On Twitter, if a fan sees your post in their feed, they may retweet it to their followers, and so on. It is important to incorporate 'sharing' in all marketing or campaigns that you do to maximise the potential for this type of recommendation.
Gain insights	Social media is a great way to gain insights on your customers, how they interact in social media and how they interact with each other. Feeding these insights back into your marketing activities will help increase the effectiveness of your campaigns.
Attract potential employees to your company	Social media provides an accessible avenue to promote your business to potential employees. Through your social media platform, such as Facebook or LinkedIn, potential employees can get an understanding of your business and its culture before applying for a position.

NOTE: Not all of these will be relevant or feasible for your business, so make sure you prioritise those you consider most beneficial.

Target market

As with any marketing campaign, you need to profile your target market and make sure that the social media campaign you have in mind will attract your target audience. After all, it is not possible to 'market', be it online or offline, without an identified 'target market'!

It may be that you have more than one target market for each product or service offering you have. If so, consider your different target audiences for each characteristic i.e. age, sex, marital status, educational level, lifestyle habits, employment status, aspirations etc. Also consider any key points of difference/benefits of each area/buying motives.

On Facebook you can also target your posts by location, age, relationship status and more - once you have reached over 5,000 'likes'. Facebook haven't made any mention as to whether they will decrease the number of 'likes' required as yet, so for now you may need to target your content to the largest segment of your audience or the segment most active on social media. For more information go to:
http://www.facebook.com/help/352402648173466/

Selecting a social network

This will be determined by the personality of your brand and the audience that you have chosen to target. As a guide:
- Facebook = The masses
- Twitter = Middle aged professionals or young teens
- Pinterest = Females
- Google+ = Android die-hards
- LinkedIn = Professionals

Section 3 - Defining your social media policy

To minimise risk related to your social media activities, it is important you give some consideration to defining a social media policy. You will need to have some structure around what kind of information you put out through pages with your business branding and determine who is responsible for keeping that information up-to-date. You also need to be perfectly clear with your employees what is appropriate to share about your business and what is not.

Setting some parameters around your social media activity:

Take a moment to answer these key questions which will help you define your social media policy:

1. **WHO will be allowed to post** – Only you? Certain staff? Another company? What if the usual person is away?
2. **WHAT are they allowed to post?** Random musings? Work related?
3. **WHEN are they allowed to post?** – As often as they like? A few times a day? Daily? Weekly?
4. **HOW are they allowed to post?** Logged in to a certain persons profile, via a syndication tool (e.g. Hootsuite or ping.fm), as themselves?
5. **WHERE can they post to?** Just Twitter? Facebook Page & Twitter? All networks?
6. **What is the screening process?** Free for all? None at all? Scheduled but approved?

Once you have considered these questions, you are encouraged to prepare a social media policy which you formalise and communicate to all key personnel. Fortunately there is a wealth of information out there on social media policies, with many businesses publishing them online. It may help to look at a few of them and tailor them to your needs.

A range of social media policies to gain inspiration from include:

- Business Victoria includes guidelines on expected behaviour from employees or contractors who use social media for work or personal purposes in their the HR manual template at http://www.business.vic.gov.au/tips-and-case-studies/starting-your-social-media-strategy
- Business.gov.au: http://www.business.gov.au/Aboutbusiness.gov.au/Pages/Social-Media-Policy.aspx
- Telstra: http://www.telstra.com.au/abouttelstra/download/document/social-media-company-policy-final-150409.pdf?red=/at/m/d/smcpf150409pdf
- Deloitte: http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-Australia/Local%20Assets/Documents/Services/Consulting/Deloitte_SocialNetworking_v6.pdf
- Public relations institute of Australia (PRIA): http://www.pria.com.au/newsadvocacy/prias-social-media-policy
- Thomson Reuters: http://thomsonreuters.com/social-media-guidelines/

It may also be advantageous to get some legal advice from specialists in social media policy. To do this contact the Law Society at www.qls.com.au.

Section 4 – Getting started in social media

There are many social media platforms you can choose from, each one with a slightly different format and audience.

Types of social media

There are a number of different ways to classify types of social media. One way of classifying them is in these five areas:

Social networks	Content communities	Blogs	Collaborative Projects	Social gaming
•Facebook •Twitter	•YouTube •Flickr	•Wordpress •Tumblr	•Wikipedia	•Farmville •Cafeworld

Social networks and content communities as these are the most relevant to small businesses.

The big 4 networks

With social networks and content communities there are four big players in the market: Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and Twitter.

Twitter is an information network where you have 140-characters to create messages called Tweets. It's an easy way to discover the latest news ('what's happening') related to subjects you are interested in.

Messages from users you choose to follow will show up on your homepage for you to read. It's like being delivered a newspaper whose headlines you'll always find interesting – you can discover news as its happening; learn more about topics that are important to you, and get the inside scoop in real time.

Facebook is a website which allows you to find and communicate with friends, share information and compare your likes and dislikes. Who better to explain Facebook to you than Facebook themselves? This excerpt comes direct from their website at the time of publishing:

> *Most of Facebook's features depend on the idea that there are people in your life that you like to stay in touch and connect with. Whether these people are best friends, family, colleagues or acquaintances, once you connect to them, they are considered Facebook friends.*

LinkedIn is a professional network that connects you to your trusted contacts and helps you exchange knowledge, ideas, and opportunities with a broader network of professionals.

LinkedIn gives you the keys to controlling your online identity. LinkedIn Profiles rise to the top of search results, letting you control the first impression people get when searching for you online. By connecting on LinkedIn, you'll stay in closer contact with great tools to communicate and collaborate.

YouTube is a video sharing service that allows users to watch videos posted by other users and upload videos of their own. The service was started as an independent website in 2005 and was acquired by Google in 2006. If you have a complex or technical issue you want to demonstrate or you want to get across a lot of information in a short space of time in a visual way then YouTube is the way to go.

YouTube is completely free for users to watch any video on the website, and you have an unlimited amount of content that you can upload. YouTube also offers users the ability to embed videos in other sources. This means that a video on YouTube can be put onto other websites and played.

Which social media site should you use?

Each network harbors different types of people and can provide different functionality to a business. The good news is that you don't need to have each one, just find the one that suits your business, audience and available resources and stick with that. Once you've mastered one social media platform, you may wish to extend into another.

For businesses to start in social media it is recommended that you begin with Facebook as it has the greatest number of tools, the widest reach and is arguably the best platform to gain insight into how social media works.

Growing/emerging platforms

With social media there will always be new players entering the market. A few platforms you might want to look out for are:

Network	Description
Pinterest	A pinboard-style photo-sharing website that allows users to create and manage theme-based image collections such as events, interests, hobbies, and more. Pinterest refers to and markets itself as an online community, a place where friends and strangers alike can share their interests and inspirations.
Instagram	A free photo-sharing program and social network that was launched in October 2010. The service enables users to take a photo, apply a digital filter to it, and then share it with other Instagram users they are connected to as well as on a variety of social networking services.
Path	A social networking-enabled photo-sharing and messaging service for mobile devices. Path is meant to be a simple way to share key moments of your life, through photos, videos, thoughts and locations. Path is different from other social networks in that it wants you to only share important things with a select few.
Google+	A multilingual social network and recommendation engine that borrows some of its core elements from both Facebook and Twitter. Google+ introduces new services such as Circles, Hangouts and Sparks. Circles allows users to create custom groups of people that they would either like to receive updates from or send updates to.
Myspace	A social networking service that was in competition with Facebook but is in the process of re-launching with a greater focus on music. In its new iteration, Myspace is primarily a music recommendation site. In terms of it being a social media platform and helping with SEO, at the moment this is unknown, but certainly worth keeping an eye on.

So should your business get onto any of these platforms? Well some are more conducive to business than others and some are more conducive to certain types of businesses. For example, Pinterest is currently heavily dominated by females, so if you have a clothing or decorating business, and you wanted to showcase your products and services then Pinterest may be for you. And if you're a band trying to get your music out there to the public then maybe the new Myspace might be for you. It's all a matter of understanding your business and researching which network will suit you best.

Tips to get started

In case you are starting from scratch i.e. you have no existing accounts and no idea how to get going, we'll start with some basic tips.

1 - Identify a suitable social media name

Before you do anything, you need a user name for your social media accounts. Consider what name would be the most advantageous to register a social media name in. Your personal name? Your business name? A brand or trademark? Something that speaks of your core business expertise or activity?

To find out if your desired username is available across the social media universe visit www.namechk.com. Simply type a potential username into the field and click the 'chk' button to see where your preferred user name is available. Ideally you will keep this unified across all sites. It is also a good idea from a brand protection perspective to secure any usernames you think you MIGHT want to use in the future, or even to prevent others from using them.

Please note that this tool is not accurate when it comes to Facebook usernames so you may need to manually search to check that your preferred user name has not been taken yet. You can do this by typing www.facebook.com/username-that-you-want into your browser. If a Facebook business page or profile comes up, then your preferred username has been taken and you will need to choose another one. For example, wedding invitation company Celebration Design would type www.facebook.com/celebrationdesign to see if another company already has that username.

2 - Get social on your mobile

You are more likely to participate in social media if you get a smart phone (that is one which allows you to browse the internet and download apps). Once you have a smart phone, download the Facebook app, the Twitter app, the Linkedin app and the YouTube app. Some phones will come with these preinstalled on them.

3 - Develop your profile/page

You will need to populate your profile or page to make it look like someone who means business! To do this:

1. Add a photo or logo to your profile or pages - some companies which have a certain person as the 'face' of the business prefer to use a personal picture, for instance personal trainers, real estate agents and car sales people. Others prefer to use a consistent brand image which has been graphically designed to suit the space. It really comes down to personal choice and your objectives.
2. Think of your profile/page as your own web page – it most certainly is potentially a significant web presence. Add some personality.
3. Include as much as you're comfortable sharing about your personal and professional life. Leaving questions blank can make you appear uninterested. The more you add, the better these tools can help you connect and the more memorable you'll be to your connections.
4. Filter yourself. There are some things colleagues and clients don't need to know so don't go overboard.
5. Include keywords, but don't get 'spammy'. These pages get crawled by search engines, but too many keywords can put off real people.
6. Keep it current. Revisit your profile from time to time.

4 - Make friends...

It's easy to develop your social media network just by connecting with people you already know. You might be surprised at how many people you know are already in the social media world once you start this process.

5 - Create more presence in the social media world than just your individual profile

Now that you have a handle on building your individual profile, it's time to consider branching out to creating business and group pages on the social networks. These pages allow others to learn more about your business's job opportunities, work culture, products, and services.

What need of your potential clients can you fill? For example, a trademark lawyer might start a group to give trademark information to new start-up businesses.

Think about your existing digital assets – do you have great images, articles or videos on file? Can you place these on YouTube (for videos), Flickr (for images) or a company blog? Consider video interviews, promotional clips, product photography – it can all have a home in social media.

6 - Show the world you've got a handle on social media

Once you feel like you've got a handle on your social media activities, it's time to start broadcasting your ties to social media. Here are some suggestions on how you can do this:

- Add web addresses and links to your emails – even if it's just in the footer or signature.
- Expand the bios for key personnel on your website to include any relevant social media contacts.
- Add your social media links to your website in a prominent location.

7 - Leverage off others

There are plenty of well established social media people online so take the time to reach out to people with the right message at the right time. Start with one client or brand, so you can be sure you do it right.

Section 5 - Social media monitoring

It is important to understand that whether you choose to participate in social media or not, there is a possibility that people will talk about you, your brand, your product, your service or your company online and quite possibly on the social networks.

With more and more people using social networks on their mobile phones, comments about your product, service, brand reviews which are good, bad and indifferent can be made anytime, anywhere.

So an essential part of your social media activity should be monitoring what social media buzz does exist out there about you/your business/your brand, your competitors, your name, your staff and anything else you think might be useful to monitor, where appropriate.

First, 'tune in' by searching for information being posted by or about you, your clients or competitors. This is a process of both listening and monitoring posts, tweets, comments, photos, videos, blogs that relate to your specific niche of business.

You can do this yourself or utilise one of the may free or paid social media monitoring tools and services available. Presuming you are a small business owner and keen to experiment with the free ones first, here is a list to get you started: [1]

- **Google Alerts:** Set up multiple Google Alerts for your company, brand, products, leaders, etc. You can choose the types of alerts (news, blogs, video) and the alerts will get delivered directly to your email inbox at the frequency you indicate (e.g. daily or as they happen) and is a great way to help you track media coverage and mentions of your brand on the web on news sites, in blogs, etc. If you have a gmail, Google analytic, a YouTube account or a Google+ account the same login can be used. http://www.google.com.au/alerts
- **Twitter:** Monitor mentions of your brand on Twitter with tools like Twitter Search or HootSuite. CoTweet is also a great tool to help manage multiple users on a corporate Twitter account and allows you to assign particular tweets to the appropriate team member for follow-up.
- **Google Reader and RSS Feeds:** Set up RSS feeds in Google Reader of searches of your brand in other popular social media sites such as Flickr, Digg, Delicious, etc. Scan the results in your reader daily for mentions.
- **Facebook Insights:** Stay on top of and participate in discussions occurring on your company's Facebook Fan Page. Use your Fan Page's Facebook Insights Dashboard (found in the left sidebar when you're on your page as an admin) to show you stats such as fan growth and page views to gauge your page's interaction and engagement.

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[1]

How to Leverage Social Media for Public Relations Success – www.hubspot.com

- **Socialmention:** Socialmention.com is a free social media search and analysis tool. It allows you to track and measure what people are saying about you, your brand, a new product, or any topic in real-time. Social Mention monitors more than one hundred social media platforms including: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google, etc.

Social media monitoring can also be extremely helpful in managing crisis communication. By staying on top of mentions of your company in social media, you'll be aware of any negative or potentially harmful conversations taking place about your brand. This will help you thwart any potential reputation-damaging discussions in a more time-sensitive manner.

Here are some helpful ways to stave off negative reactions about your company in social media during a crisis:

- **If you're in the wrong, admit it.** Keeping quiet has the potential to do more harm than good. If you notice something negative spreading about you on the web and/or in social media, its best to address it head on. To read some examples of how some companies have used social media for crisis management see: http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/how-to-use-social-media-for-crisis-management/
- **Update people early and often.** Whether it's something as small as a webinar malfunction or something as severe as a security breach, if the situation is happening in real time, continuously update the public on the status of the situation. Twitter and Facebook are great ways to release updates in real time, but use your best judgment about the best way to get the word out to your affected audience.
- **Be transparent.** Tell people what happened. If you don't yet know what happened, say you're looking into the root of the problem, and always apologise for any inconvenience it may be causing the affected people. What people hate even more than a crisis is when a company doesn't take responsibility for it. Once the actual crisis is over, write a blog article explaining everything – what happened, how you reacted, what you're doing to make things better in the future, and how you plan to keep it from happening again.

Don't know what topics to monitor?

Here are eight items you should consider monitoring on the social media networks. Remember, just because you are monitoring some information it does not mean that you need to participate in the conversation. It is a valid social media practice to listen and learn!

1. **Business name** - Obviously your business name is one of the most important things that you need to monitor. Any time your business or products are mentioned, you should know.
2. **Business URL** - It is also important to track your business URL for those times when someone links to your business but doesn't mention it by name. This

happens a lot and is just another way to make sure you are covering all your bases.

3. **Public facing figures** - Track the names of any key employees in your business who are public facing figures. What is said about these people also reflects on your business and usually when these people are talked about your business is tied in with that.

4. **Product names** - Track any of your business's product or service names as well. What are people saying about your products and services?

5. **Product URLs** - For the same reasons that you need to specifically track your business's URL you should (if applicable) also be tracking your product URLs as well.

6. **The industry 'hang outs'** - This includes blogs, message boards, important players, consumer review sites and anything else that's related to your industry. Many times the industry feedback that you can discover from the conversations at these 'hang outs' can really help you improve your product or service. It is also a way for you to interact with your potential and existing customers.

7. **Employee activity/blogs** - Things your employees do online can affect your brand image. If you have employees that blog, it is smart to at least know about their MySpace accounts, Flickr accounts and personal blogs. That is not to say that you should spy on your employees but you do need to monitor these things just in case. It is not considered spying if they already make this information public. It is advisable to let your employees know that you monitor these things. The more well known your employees are, the more important this is, many times these employee bloggers turn into company ambassadors.

8. **Competitors** - Track everything from above related to your competitors including company name, URLs, products, key employees, etc. Everything. You need to be ready to move when any opportunity comes up.

Other places to monitor online 'buzz'

You can also review conversations that are taking place outside of Facebook, Twitter and Linked In. Here are some suggestions:

1. Visit social bookmarking tools. Social Bookmarking networks are a great way to find out what websites are popular for particular topics. A social bookmarking website is a platform where users share, organise, search, and manage bookmarks of web resources. The *resources* themselves aren't shared, merely bookmarks that *reference* them. If you do not have a social bookmarking account you can still use the search function. Go to http://delicious.com/ and type in some keywords that are related to your niche to find out what some of the most popular websites are. You can find a list of other popular social bookmarking websites here - http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-bookmarking-websites.

2. Blog posts and comments - Depending on how 'in-depth' you would like to take your social media monitoring you can also review blog posts and blog comments. Tapping into new industry groups, associations and consumer advocacy groups,

as well as niche bloggers, can be a good way to dig deeper into conversations about brands, issues and trends.
- Go to Google and use the drop down panel on the left hand side to limit your search results to blogs only.
- Try searching for blogs that are related to your area of interest via Technorati™ or BlogCatalog.

Social media account management

It is not time-effective to have multiple social media accounts you have to log into and check on regularly. Thankfully there are tools for monitoring conversations and managing multiple accounts.

The following applications allow you to manage multiple feeds separately, allow several people to post from one account and offer the flexibility to schedule posts.

Check out these applications (in no particular order), to see if there's one that best meets your specific needs:
- **Seesmic** manages multiple Twitter accounts and Facebook® feeds, sorted by the categories you choose.
- **TweetDeck** also consolidates and sorts multiple feeds in a personal browser and manages Facebook and MySpace® conversations.
- **HootSuite** is a browser-based application for managing multiple users and Twitter accounts, while also offering some analytics and monitoring capabilities. It is currently free, but looking at moving to paid accounts.
- **CoTweet** is designed specifically for professional use, allowing multiple accounts and users. While it was still offered free as of April 2011, it may eventually start charging for its service.
- **Ping.fm** can syndicate to 39 networks i.e. you post here and it can go out to 39 networks.

Section 6 - Measuring your results

In terms of measuring the performance of your social media accounts, there are a number of free tools that can report on social media metrics, such as number of likes, number of posts, number of likes on posts etc.

Some tools that you could use are:
- Facebook Insights
  Look at the 'People talking about this' metric, 'reach' and 'virality of posts' to see how well your page is performing. More information on this is provided in the February 27 Facebook Advanced webinar.
- Monitoring (Radian6, Alterian SM2, Lithium, Buzz Numbers)
  You can monitor your activity in terms of posts and sentiment around your brand and benchmark that against competitor activity.
- URL Shorteners
  URL shortener services, such as Bit.ly or Google's URL shortener, will provide you with a shorter link to a URL that contains tracking to provide you with valuable information about how many people clicked on the link as well as which browser and operating system they were using.
- Google Analytics
  If you have Google Analytics installed on your website then you will be able to see how many referrals your website has had from social media.

Although highly effective in measuring metrics, these tools are unable to measure the number of negative comments on social media and whether service fault complaints were resolved. In this case, you may need to manually grade your social media accounts. To do this, look at your Facebook account or Twitter account and tally up the number of negative or positive comments or posts you received in the past week/month. Consider how many of the complaints or issues were resolved and in what timeframe. Write down all of these results and use them for a benchmark to measure the following week's/month's results.

Some further tools you might consider for measuring your social media results:
- Social media measurement and analytics: Radian6, Sysomos, Lithium, RSearch.ly, Beevolve, Alterian SM2, Addict-o-matic, Social Media Tracking
- Twitter Analytics: HootSuite, Twitter Analyzer, TweetStats
- Web Analytics and Tracking: Hubspot, Google Analytics, Compete.com, WebTrends (paid), Omniture (paid)
- Blog Analytics: PostRank, Google Analytics (try the Social Media Metrics plugin, but it's not perfect by any means)
- Facebook Ad analytics

How much time should you spend on social media?

Like anything, the more you put in, the more you get back. It is likely you will have to invest more time at the outset and as you start to find a rhythm, the amount of time you will need to spend each day will reduce.

Of course the amount of time you should spend will vary depending on what your objectives are, but a rough guide may be to spend 4 hours a week at the outset which reduces to 15 minutes to a ½ hour a day once you have found your rhythm. It will likely take at least a month before you see any tangible results for your efforts.

The good news is that if you keep at it (and you must) your online exposure increases exponentially. Before you know it people who are interested in your product or service who may never otherwise have heard of you before, are following your Twitter posts, have become friends on your Facebook page and are viewing your YouTube videos. The key to being effective with your time on social media is:

#1: Tackle one platform bite at a time

Don't try and become a pro on Twitter, Linkedin and Facebook all at once. Choose one which suits your objectives and personality the best and get that platform up and running before you jump to the next.

#2: Respond to your fans

Many companies feel the need to talk first and respond later. This won't work when it comes to social media. Firstly, most people aren't listening to you. They're waiting for you to respond. Even though this might seem like a drag, the reality is that it's an opportunity for you to create an excellent experience and add to your company's profile and credibility. If you can make a difference with just one reply, then it's worth making the effort.

Spend the most significant portion of your time responding to @'s, messages, wall posts, and most importantly… putting out any fires which may arise in relation to negative comments or feedback. This boils down to being an effective listener and having an effective online alert system, while simultaneously being ready and willing to respond appropriately and promptly. Don't differentiate between customers and prospects, because anyone can become an advocate for your business if you treat them well.

#3: Reach out and help people

Reach out and lend a hand to people who don't expect it.

Many times, this can be a random person in a Facebook group, or even someone tweeting a question about your particular industry or niche. Don't ask them to follow you and don't link a product. Simply seek out those who need help using searches and your networking skills, and give them what they need.

The goal is to get on people's radar, and get them talking about you. It's highly possible that the people needing your help the most don't actually know who you are, and just as you wouldn't shove a business card in someone's face at a conference (you wouldn't, right?), you shouldn't shove a link down a Twitter or Facebook user's throat. Just extend a helping hand so that they know who you are and how to find you.

Conclusion

The key really is to focus on one or two actions per day, and leave the rest for another day. You don't have to reply to everything. Sometimes a blanket statement will do, while other times a tweet to a blog post will do. Lastly, don't underestimate the importance of just hanging out.

Marketing messages often go unnoticed on Twitter and Facebook. Let your actions tell the story and your interaction be the message.

Appendix 1 – Resources

Facebook:

- http://www.facebook.com/help/ - The main Facebook page

- http://blog.facebook.com – Facebook's official blog

Linkedin:

- http://blog.linkedin.com/

- http://press.linkedin.com/

- http://www.linkedin.com/today/

- http://linkedintelligence.com/ - the unofficial site for all things LinkedIn

Twitter:

- http://support.twitter.com/

- http://blog.twitter.com/

- http://support.twitter.com/articles/166337-the-twitter-glossary - the Twitter Glossary contains lingo and vocabulary used frequently to talk about features and aspects of the Twitter service. Following each definition are links to related articles in our help centre for further exploration of each term.

Australian social media sites:

- http://socialmediadaily.com.au/

- http://www.socialmedianews.com.au/

General industry sites

- http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com

- Mashable.com

- Techcrunch.com

- Readwriteweb.com

Want more?

The Interactive Advertising Bureau is made up of industry leaders seeking to outline best practices, develop standards and generate research. While you're browsing their site, be sure to read the best practices and metrics documents available from their Social Media Guidance page.