

SOCIAL NETWORK MARKETING

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In the late 1980's my husband wanted to buy me a mink coat because I had such a long walk to get to my office. I asked for a computer instead. I started a home-based business and no longer had such a long walk!

My first computer had floppy disks that were actually floppy. The Windows operating system hadn't been invented. I used DOS. The computer didn't have a modem, but that was okay because I didn't know anyone else who could get online. It had no graphics card. It didn't even have a mouse!

In the early 1990's I became aware of the Internet and started hearing the words "World Wide Web." I got a modem and could go on-line. I still didn't have anyone to talk to – mostly I talked to other computers. At that time there were a total of 26 websites in existence.

In 1998 tragedy struck! My little workhorse computer died. I got a spiffy new computer. It came in a box that looked like a cow. It had Windows 3.1, an internal modem, a graphics card and even a mouse!

By then there were 750,000 Commercial websites on the Internet and I started to design websites. Back then it was hard to convince most small businesses that they needed a website.

Today there are about 110 Million Websites with over 29 Billion published web pages.

There are over 200 Million active Facebook users and there are 1 billion YouTube video views each month.

And while all of these things have been going on, the way people respond to traditional marketing is changing. Today...

Only 18% of TV ads generate a positive return on investment

People prefer to buy from people they know or from people who know people they know.

People trust recommendations from friends or friends of friends more than they trust advertisements. They even trust referrals from strangers more than they trust ads.

So what is Social Network Marketing?

Social Network Marketing is not an overt selling strategy. In fact, if you try normal sales tactics here, you will probably be considered an "astroturfer," and people will not want to friend, link to or follow you.

As you came in today, you were probably catching up with people you know and getting to know those you didn't. You were telling people what you did, handing out your cards and asking people what they did and how they were doing? Whether you knew it or not, you were practicing face to face social network marketing.

As I speak to you today, I am also networking with you. Blogs and video blogs (aka YouTube videos) are the online equivalent of speaking at a luncheon. In fact, you can read this presentation on my online blog!

Blogs are simple to set up and there are many free ones, including Blogger (a Google product) and WordPress. They really are as easy to use as an email program. Blog posts don't have to be long or involved. In fact, if you come across a good article, you can copy the URL and tell people that it is an article you think they should read

YouTube videos are blogs on film. And they can be done with software built into most computers. Once you have your video, you can post it on YouTube's site, on your website, on your Facebook page, and send a link to your Twitter account.

So what do you blog or videoblog about? These are definitely not commercials! However, you can blog about new products you are adding. You can talk about what is impacting your industry. How the economy is affecting your business. You can explain how your product works and tell stories about satisfied customers. As for videos, How-to videos and videos demonstrating a complex process are especially valuable, but so are simple introduction videos. If you are selling online, people will feel more comfortable when they can see what you look like. If you will be meeting them later, they will feel they already know you.

Blogs and YouTube videos are indexed by Google. And may show up before your website. Using good keywords and tags, along with good titles can get your blog and video blog noticed and viewed. And make you the resident expert in any field you choose.

If blogs are the equivalent of speaking at a luncheon, networking sites are the equivalent of attending the luncheon or any social function. You get to meet a lot of people, chat with them, and can decide whether to include them in your circle. While Facebook and MySpace are the ones most talked about, there are literally hundreds of social networks out there. Many are centered on small niches – like artists, musicians, travelers or even birdwatchers. I believe you should look into some of these niche networks for fun, but you never know... For example, I have gotten business from my birdwatcher friends. They get to know me and what I do in a very social setting, and seem to be happy to refer me – even though I have never asked them to.

With over 200 million active Facebook users, there are probably quite a few people you already know there, so why not join them? Again, Facebook is not the place to overtly market to people. But do tell them what you are doing. A printer I know wrote on her wall that she had just finished a rush printing job for a wedding. Her daughter's friend saw that and said, "I didn't know your mom did that, I need a printer for my wedding."

Once you are on Facebook, you can kick things up a notch by getting a "Fan Page" for your business. You can invite your on-line Facebook friends, your offline friends and customers to become "fans." And while this is still not the place for an "in your face" commercial you can publish fans only specials, list coupons, have "secret sales" or create useful information about your products. While getting as many fans as possible is your goal, if you make these folks feel special and exclusive, they will likely respond in ways that will help your business.

Facebook is also a place to do a little market research and customer service polling. Ask your friends and fans for feedback on your products and/or services. And then respond, to both positive and negative feedback.

If you have employees, you might encourage them to mention your company on their personal pages. But if you are an employee, be careful. This is NOT the place to complain about your company or your boss. It could mean your job.

LinkedIn

While there are many social networking sites besides Facebook, one specialty social network that everyone here should look into is LinkedIn. This is a “professional social network.” LinkedIn allows you to add a comprehensive “resume,” to post your personal and business accomplishments, to post testimonials to people you appreciate, and to invite people to post testimonials about how great you are. It helps you find others who went to your college or work where you worked – or would like to work.

It is organized by degrees. First degree contacts are people you know, second degree, people who know people you know and so on. It gives you access people you might not be able to meet by other means. Since 500 of the Fortune 500 have a presence there, it is a good place to be if you are looking for a job, looking for an employee, or looking to network with some of the “big guns” in your industry. You can ask for introductions and give introductions. Like any networking group, you should be willing to give more than you get. There are also sub-groups that you can join. For example, alumni groups, marketing groups, sales groups, network marketing groups ... even twitter groups. You can join online conversations with these groups – a virtual treasure trove of information organized around almost any subject you can mention. Since many of the folks on LinkedIn are leaders in their fields, it is a great way to learn from the pros or become one.

If you have been invited to a networking event by someone with LION next to their name, you have just bumped into a LinkedIn Open Networker. These folks really know the ins and outs of Linked In!

Finally, there is Twitter.

Technically known as a microblog, this is the one most people just don’t get. And I have to tell you when it first came on the scene, I didn’t get it either. I don’t know why it works, I just know it does.

My friend Jim Murray from Signs by Tomorrow regularly uses Twitter – to tweet sports scores, follow NASCAR races and talk about signs! He has gotten at least two accounts through Twitter and has even been invited into the pit at a NASCAR race, where he met the drivers and pit crew and attended a Twitter party.

The concept is that people follow one another. Once you have an account, invite people to follow you. Tweet about your town, your business, your products, your industry, and your interests. Don’t say what you had for lunch, but do tweet when you go to a good (or bad) restaurant.

Depending on what you “tweet” about, people will find you. Many people use applications that tell them when someone is tweeting about something they are interested in. And then they follow those people. When someone decides to follow you, you normally will get an email telling you. I suggest that you look at their page and if they are “real,” send them a private message thanking them for following you ... and then follow them.

Add a link to your website, your Facebook Page, your LinkedIn page and any other pages you can think of. Do a search to find people to follow. If you know a prominent person in your industry, follow her. If you have customers, follow them. You never know when they will tweet about something they need that you can provide. If there are people you would like to have as customers, follow them. First, they may be flattered, and you may be the first to hear that they are dissatisfied with their current supplier. Follow your competitors. You never know what you might learn 😊

Some of the things you can do with Social Networking sites:

Monitor what is being said about your company, brand or product – and respond to both positive and negative comments.

- Follow what is going on in your town, your business, your industry or the world.
- Find customers when they mention things they need or when they are unhappy with their current suppliers.
- Send links to articles of interest.
- Write articles of interest.
- Announce an event
- Publish specials or coupons
- Communicate key messages about your company or brand
- Protect your message – by answering negative comments
- Improve Search Engine Rank (Facebook, YouTube, blogs and LinkedIn pages are indexed on Google.)
- Save on customer service – Often your followers help each other by answering questions about your product
- Involve your customers in product development and market research
- Learn more about your customers and allow customers to get to know you
- Save money on expensive advertising campaigns
- Generate more income.

My advice is to get started. The new paradigm is to

Join – go to the sites and sign up. You don’t have to answer every question, and you can set privacy settings. Give as much information as you are comfortable with.

Once you are in, **monitor**. We used to call it lurking when we went to chat rooms and just listened. You can read blogs, check out Facebook pages and follow a few folks on Twitter.

When you feel comfortable, **participate**. Write blogs, comment on other's blogs. Invite people to join your Facebook fan page, and become a fan of others' fan pages. And best of all, start tweeting!