

A SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE FOR FLORAL RETAILERS AND WHOLESALERS

Social Media Recommendations

Social media networks are a great means of communicating with customers to gain insights on their preferences, interests, and feelings towards one's company. You can also monitor the mentions and conversations regarding your brand on the respective social networks. Creating a social networking profile is fairly easy; however, mastering the art of personal, online communication with customers presents challenges. The following recommendations were compiled to assist business owners in creating and managing social media sites.

General Recommendations

1. Create objectives (Hayzlett, 2009).
Assess what you hope to accomplish through using social media, how social media will impact your business, and how social media will improve your customers' experiences.
2. Conduct research (Hayzlett, 2009).
Follow several sites that interest you. Analyze those sites to determine what they do well, what they need to improve on, and what you could adapt to your own site. Follow several conversations to get a feel for the process and customers attitudes. Start small with your own personal social media site, then develop and fine-tune a professional site for your business.
3. Generate customer awareness and catch the attention of potential fans.
Research has shown that bigger social media fan bases generate more leads and traffic (Mershon, 2011). Use a variety of multimedia channels to reach your customers (e.g. website, e-newsletters, blogs, Twitter, Facebook) and then promote those channels to them (Rodda, 2011).

Several strategies can be used to generate awareness and fans. Start by improving the visibility of your website's location (or URL) by customizing the URL and putting the fan page URL in your email signature, business cards, keynote/PowerPoint slides, Twitter profile, YouTube videos, and blog about your new fan page (Social Media Monitor, 2011; Wise, 2011). Additionally, use existing resources such as tag relevant well-trafficked fan pages, invest in Facebook ads, add a link to your personal Facebook profile, invite employees and friends to "like" your Facebook profile, use targeted keywords in Google Adwords, and redirect webinar guests to your fan page.

4. Timing is important.
Launch a powerful social media campaign to coincide with a new product rollout, seasonal promotion, or celebratory event (Datamonitor, 2011). As a result, more people will be aware of the occurrence and social media site. You might consider launching a week or so ahead of a major floral holiday.
5. Create a customer community through customer engagement.
Customer engagement results in a greater number customer interactions and enjoyment. “Likes” are nice, but interactions are more important (Hayzlett, 2009). An important rule of engagement is to have an engaging welcome tab to generate fan interest (Social Media Examiner, 2011). Some additional successful strategies include: videos, games, mysteries, stories, avatars, “like” box, and customer service options (i.e. use Facebook to order a floral bouquet). Furthermore, fans respond well to calls for action (increasing “likes” by 50%!) including “join the mailing list” or incentives (prizes, etc.) for liking the page (Rondeau, 2011; Social Media Examiner, 2011).
6. Communicate with customers.
One of the greatest strengths of social media is the two-way communication process created between customers and businesses - use this to your advantage! Read, watch, and listen to customers, responding to them when and how it is most appropriate (Hayzlett, 2009). Use conversations to gain a deeper understanding of what your customers want. This information can be used to shape product innovations and marketing efforts (Datamonitor, 2011).

Your business can offer comparison review posts to show how your product compares to competitors (as is, not enhanced or edited) (Hayzlett, 2009). As a business, you can post relevant information for customers including promotions, trivia, blogs, photos, music, links, quotes, and personal stories to humanize your company and create a relationship with your customer base (Hayzlett, 2009; Social Media Examiner, 2011; Wise, 2011). Know what you are talking about and vary the type of content posted (do not just post promotions) to keep customers interested and balance the content between inspirational and informative (Social Media Examiner, 2011).
7. Highlight events through all your social media outlets to gain greater awareness and participation.
Allow and even encourage customers to post reviews, comments, and questions about your products. Do not be afraid of negative PR – it is better to have it on your site where you can assess its merit, respond professionally, and become aware of any issues customers are having than on a site that is unknown to you (Hayzlett, 2009; Rondeau, 2011). Do not delete negative wall posts – it is very important to keep communications transparent to maintain

customer trust in the company. Learn from your mistakes and show customers that you are learning from their feedback.

Also, avoid interrupting conversations between fans, when the conversation is slowing down add your comments to stimulate more conversation and activity. Additionally, it is important to respond to each commenter to show you value them as a fan. Another creative idea is to host a once a month discussion board – this increases fans conversation, involvement and allows for real time Q & A (Social Media Examiner, 2011).

CAUTION: Although posting is very important for social media, avoid over-posting. Posting substantial information 1-2 times per day will engage instead of enrage your fans (Rondeau, 2011). Similarly, be cautious about syncing Facebook with Twitter because on Twitter it is expected to have constant updates whereas on Facebook constant updates can be viewed negatively resulting in fewer fans.

8. Be vigilant.

Do not view social media as a self-sustaining marketing effort (Datamonitor, 2011; Hayzlett, 2009; Rodda, 2011; Rondeau, 2011; Wise, 2011). In truth it is a means of interacting with customers on a more personal level than mass media. As such, it is important to respond to fans' comments to let them know you care. Take fan feedback and create monthly reports to share with the company (Datamonitor, 2011). These reports can be used to increase awareness of company weaknesses and strengths and highlight ways to improve customer satisfaction. At a minimum, check sites weekly.

9. Use the content to reconnect with customers - keep it personal, consistent and relevant. To keep content personal, invite employees to post on the site and reveal who they are or share relevant photos and stories (Social Media Examiner, 2011). Be passionate about what you do. Provide a description of the company philosophy and activities that support the philosophy. Employ engagement activities that incorporate your company's values and make sure the graphics are appealing to your target market. Provide several types of content such as product, educational, event based, and campaigns to inform customers (Hayzlett, 2009).

Consistency and relevancy are very important due to the vast array of information available to customers. Ways to improve consistency include: branding throughout all multimedia outlets, use the same site for all marketing campaigns, have audience appropriate posts (fit with the brand, values, and industry), and enforce site policies (Social Media Examiner, 2011). By keeping a consistent company image, people will be more confident in the company. Relevancy can be improved by looking at the content of each tab and keeping it useful and interesting – photo, information, question, and about us tabs. Additionally, if the business has a retail outlet, a location tab is very useful to

assist customers in finding the outlet. Use blogs to provide more detailed information such as awards, product reviews and stories. Overall, content can be used to reinforce your brand and connect with your customers.

9. Embrace sharing of content.

Allow fans to share relevant, interesting information on your fan site and share information you post on your fan site. Add value by sharing interesting tips, tricks and insights (Hayzlett, 2009). For instance, research on the benefits of cut flowers would be beneficial for floral retailers to share and encourage their fans to share with others. Sharing relevant, interesting information makes listening to you worth it and can provide a competitive advantage. Additionally, create a brand experience (such as a photo of an arrangement) and allow fans to share it with their friends on your site (Datamonitor, 2011).

10. Keep it easy for users.

More and more users are using smart phones to check their social media accounts making it very important that you know what your fan page(s) look like on a smart phone screen (Mershon, 2011). Double check the size of your images – use the whole space available and have clearly labeled tabs and links to increase ease of use.

11. Post community rules (Rondeau, 2011).

By posting community rules you establish clear guidelines about what is acceptable page content. As such, it protects you if you need to remove content due to unprofessional behavior by a dissatisfied fan. Carefully consider your responses to negative posts.

12. Develop a “one-voice policy” to strengthen your brand and connections to customers (Hayzlett, 2009).

It is important to be aware of employee social media usage and discuss acceptable social media usage with employees because even if they do not post your business as their employer they are still a representative of your company. You may work with several employees to improve the quality of posts from your company.

As such, the following guidelines have been modified from Kodak’s Social Media Tips (Hayzlett, 2009).

- Express ideas and opinions respectfully, don’t pick fights
- Use good taste communications
- Be transparent and truthful
- Protect confidential information and relationships – keep in mind online information is not private
- Be careful about personal information
- Disable dangerous privileges and heed security warnings and pop-ups

Time and Cost Considerations and Recommendations

Before beginning the adventure of engaging in social media, consider how current your company's website is and consider investing in that first. For social media to have as deep an impact as possible, consumers (and others) need an online presence to use as an anchor. When the company's website is current and provides useful information, it can be a point of reference for the SM user. It would be challenging for a business to engage in SM without a current and robust website.

Many firms devote at least one part-time (20 hours per week) person to the SM activities. Still others are successful by having 2-3 people integrate SM activities into their daily and weekly routines. All benefit from formally scheduling SM activities as a part of their marketing schedule and strategy. For instance, when plants are identified as in-store specials for the week, these are often features in print (e.g. newspaper) advertising. The special also should be posted on the company's website and multiple SM activities are created to focus attention on the plant special. This way, SM works in conjunction with other marketing activities to direct attention to a specific goal, special, or outcome.

Others find it helpful to select a particular day when multiple team members coordinate a special event such as a contest. For example, perhaps it is a "guess that flower" contest that happens Wednesday afternoons. Of course, this requires a game plan to effectively coordinate the necessary activities and responsibilities.

Suggested Time Investment and Associated Costs

Your collective digital business channel consists of a social media hub where content is created, social networks for distribution and sharing that information and encouraging interactions with the communities served.

Social Media Hub

It is essential to have a social media hub, one that the business owns. This is invariably a self-hosted WordPress blog, either on its own domain or a subdomain of the company website.

The cost for setting this site up initially ranges from \$150 to \$3,000, depending upon design costs. A fully functioning and professionally designed site can be easily created for approximately \$500.

The real cost in creating this site the time, creativity, and expertise to create content that has genuine value for the community being served. This investment is ideally three hours per week to create one high-quality evergreen article.

The components for creating that article are the ideas, copywriting skills, relevant photos and videos, supportive material to link to both on the company blog and website, as well as outside sources. Additionally, it takes time to choose appropriate tags and create a solid meta-description for the search engines.

Social Networks

Setting up social media profiles requires biographical information in long and short form. Some sites require minimal information, whereas others work best with detailed and descriptive information. To maintain relevancy, it will be necessary to update this information several times per year for each site.

One should budget an hour to set up a social networks profile, and approximately 3 hours per month to ensure everything is accurate and represents the company well across all of the respective channels. As new features and capabilities are introduced, it will be necessary to make adjustment to adapt to or accommodate them.

As a minimum, most businesses should have a presence on one video sharing site such as YouTube, a photo sharing sites such as Pinterest or Flickr, a site with unfiltered distribution, such as LinkedIn or Twitter, and Facebook and Google+.

In addition to the 3 hours of weekly content creation, there is a daily commitment to monitoring the respective channels to respond and engage with current and new community members. The larger the company and stronger its reputation, the greater this commitment will be.

For an actively engaged company, one can expect to invest a minimum of 30 minutes two times per day to maintain and active presence across the company hub and the four major networking channels.

Recommended Activities

- Weekly blog article - 3 hours/week.
- Share article across the respective networks - .25 hours/week
- Promote past evergreen articles - .5 hours/week
- Engage with new media partners to share and cross-promote - 5 hours/week.

- Curate content for ideas, staying current, and to share with your community – 2 - 5 hours/week

Total investment in time is 10 – 15 hours per week.

The cost of managing online marketing activities varies widely across firms. A key factor is their familiarity with social media and the Internet, as well as their skill with the associated technologies. Most companies told us they upgrade their website during the slower months. The content refreshing stimulates a renewal of marketing activities. Many of the case study companies told us that they had great difficulty telling us how much time they spent as so much of SM use is imbedded into their daily activities. This is a key take-home message: it is difficult to separate effective SM from regular marketing activities. It is conducted in coordination with, not separate from, other marketing tasks.

SEO Copywriting Checklist for Digital Articles

Following is a primer on copywriting for SEO (search engine optimization). While this is specific to a self-hosted Wordpress blog, the principles apply to publishing any content online. For example, it is always recommended to have an engaging title that includes relevant keywords. This essential activity gets your content noticed, both by your desired reader and Google.

Title

- Clearly indicates what the article is about. Leads with keywords. The closer keywords are to the beginning of the title the better. Popular titles include “How To” and attention getting words such as “Secrets, Invaluable, Powerful, Essential, etc.”

Title Tags

- Title tags need to be keyword rich and short, preferably 50 characters or less. Avoid meaningless words such as “the, and, for, with, etc.”

Links

- The first link is the most important one. It should lead to the company blog website or another about the company on another site.
- Outbound links to authoritative sources are good. They are much like a bibliography that tells Google you’ve done your research.
- Use descriptive keyword anchor text when linking, e.g. company name and descriptor (Floral Company XYZ Wholesale) or company and location (Floral Company XYZ Chicago).

Headings

- Headings mostly help the reader. They should be descriptive and complete but not wordy. Their appearance gives the article an organized and clean look, as well as an idea of what the article is about. They can often be numbered lists.

Subheadings

- Subheadings should be bolded and contain keywords and phrases that help the reader who is skimming – and Google (who is also skimming). Ideally, subheadings provide an overview of the meaning of the article.

Photos

- Center the photo and be sure to have it open in a new window.

Meta Description

- This summarizes the article in 140 characters or less. It is helpful but not necessary to open the article with the meta-description, which can be conversational and more than 140 characters. The true 140 character meta-description goes in the specific location when using Wordpress and other CMS.

Tags and Categories

- Tags are much more important than categories for SEO. Every article should include the company name, and ideally its location and one or two strongest keywords, such as floral or florist. Only include a handful of categories.

Reminders

- Use italics sparingly – such as for emphasis of a single word. While not verified, some believe italics are not picked up well by Google.

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