

Using Social Media Marketing to Drive Traffic to Your Website



What is Social Media Marketing?

In a nutshell, social media marketing is the process of participating in social media networks in order to further build a brand and enhance marketing communication. This type of Internet marketing makes use of a variety of social media communication techniques, including email and instant messaging, blogging, online chats and forums, podcasting and much more. Many of these techniques have been around for a while, but only in recent years have businesses begun to fully exploit the rich opportunities open to them within social media. Before you take the plunge into the sea of social media marketing, learn how to use the tools to your advantage.

Benefits of SMM

While many of the best known social networking websites -- sites such as MySpace, Facebook and Twitter -- were originally conceived as platforms through which individuals could share with each other, these platforms are quickly becoming a valuable tool for businesses in their efforts to strengthen their brand and reach out to potential customers. Social media marketing (SMM) provides a number of other benefits, providing businesses with the opportunity to:

- Help people through information, resources and useful tools
- Build brand awareness
- Earn trust in the online community
- Build a following
- Turn followers into website visitors, and website visitors into customers

The beauty of SMM is that it is an inexpensive way to reach out, and anyone can do it at any time. However, to get the most from this business tool, you'll want to invest some time in forming a plan of action and learning how to get started on the right foot, maintain visibility with your audience and measure your success.

Your Social Media Marketing Plan

There's a reason social networking/social media is rapidly gaining in popularity in recent years: It's fun! Reaching out and making meaningful connections with people who share your interests and passions is stimulating. Not only that but, far from being a mindless diversion, it's an extremely productive, fruitful activity -- if you participate in a structured way. By approaching social media in a disciplined way, you can greatly influence your visibility and your reputation and enjoy the interactions along the way.

Set objectives. What action do you want your network or your blog readers to take? What do you want them to get out of their social networking experience with you?

Determine your audience. Most businesses invest a great deal of time, money and energy during their startup to determine who their prospects are. Put this to good use in focusing your social media energies on the right target audience.

Know what image you wish to project. Are you a pal, and authority or the go-to guy? Determine what real-life profile fits you and convey that image -- that brand -- in every social media/networking activity.

Choose your format(s). Post blogs through blog platforms such as [WordPress](#), [Blogger](#) and others.

Decide how you'll execute your plan. Will you do it yourself or get help? While input and insight from you is essential to projecting the brand and the image you want your audience to see, a company with expertise in [online marketing](#) can assist with the technical aspects of setting up profiles, posting, linking and using search engine optimization and to make your communications more visible to search engines.

Getting Started

It is important to go into SMM with the right attitude, right off the bat. Yes, SMM can be a wonderful way to touch people, make friends and contacts, and influence them to follow you to your website, but it is a subtle art. People can spot insincerity and ulterior motives in milliseconds, even online, so approaching SMM unselfishly is a must.

"Give and you shall receive."

It's a mantra you'll likely hear over and over in the social media world, and it may well be the most important (and challenging) concept to master. It can't be stressed enough: **Every blog, every article post, every interaction with your social networking contacts should be focused on how it benefits your audience -- not your business.**

With the expectations about your motivations properly set, it's time for you to begin introducing yourself to the Web community. You can choose one SMM method only if you wish, but a more effective approach is to use a variety of tools to expand your presence. This resource focuses on three:

1. Social Networking
2. Blogging
3. Content Sharing

1. Social Networking

You may already be using social networking sites to keep up with friends and family. [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [MySpace](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Bebo](#), [Friendster](#) are among the most popular right now; they're user-friendly, ubiquitous and are equipped with a variety of applications and gadgets that make using the sites enjoyable. There are also a number of SMM websites that are especially great for business purposes ([Reddit](#), [Digg](#), [Del.icio.us](#) and [StumbleUpon](#) to name a few). Contacts you make through social networking will also often recommend a few of their favorite SMM websites.

Invest some time up front in the construction of your profile, including biographical information, a photo, objectives, interests, expertise and other professional and personal associations. Use these topics in the social networking site's search tool to locate people and organizations who've share interests and associations. Rather than lie back and wait for the conversations to start, introduce yourself. Just as you would extend a warm handshake at a party or business convention, offer your hand to the online community.

Whether you're using a personal account or a business account or both, be open and transparent, and encourage your new-found friends in the online community to consider you a good neighbor and a resource.

2.) Blogging

Blogs are a staple for businesses looking to build a presence. Use blog posts on [WordPress](#) and other sites as a resource for others by regularly offering up fresh, original information that is of interest and is useful to others. Your contributions to your blog will be far more meaningful and credible if they focus on giving information and resources to others, rather than hawk your own products or taut your business' attributes.

Indirectly, though, these posts allow you to establish your authority in your industry and also provide readers with a reason and means visit your site. In addition to providing links to valuable resources, give readers a convenient way to reach you for additional support and guidance.

3.) Content Sharing

This differs slightly from blogging, in that it encompasses not just sharing ideas and information through posts, but also sharing content via other methods and content sharing sites:

- articles
- news releases (PRWeb, eReleases, PRNewswire)
- photos (Flickr)
- videos (YouTube, Yahoo! Video, Google Video)
- whitepapers (Del.icio.us)
- presentations

With each of these methods, be smart about linking. Use your blog, social networking page or content sharing platform to link back to your website, but also link out to these SMM resources from your business website.

Maintain Your Social Media Presence

Depending on the amount of time you can set aside for SMM, it can take a while to build up a following and see real-world results (read "conversions"), but with regular effort and patience, all that "paying forward" can pay back in a big way.

If possible, set aside time daily, even if it's a few minutes, to maintain your social media presence. You may wish to enlist the aid of a friend, coworker or an online marketing partner to manage your SMM campaign for you on a regular basis, or at least keep up with it when you're out of town or bogged down. Some services can provide everything from simple blog posting services to copywriting services so you can get professionally written content as well.

If it helps, have a checklist of tasks you want to tackle:

- monitor blogs and social media for activity
- respond to comments, questions and wall posts
- post new blog about a chosen topic
- search for and add new contacts

Results won't happen overnight, but SMM is to some degree a "you get out of it what you put into it" proposition. The more you can invest in the proposition, the greater the likelihood that you'll realize positive business benefits.

Measure Your Success

Gauging the effectiveness of your SMM campaign isn't necessarily an exact science, but there are ways to know whether or not you're reaching people, or reaching out to the right people. You can use analytics tools such as [Google Analytics](#), which is free, and [Omniture](#) to measure how many visitors you're getting to your social media sites, how much time and how many pages they're viewing while they're on your page(s), and whether those guests are following through with a visit to your business website. Many of the social networking and SMM websites you join offer their own tools for measuring

the volume and type of activities you're attracting with your profile and your activities through that profile.

With or without tools, though, you can note some trends on your own. Who are the people viewing and commenting on your posts or wall comments? Do these people embody your target audience, or are they influencers in your industry? Are you experiencing an uptick in traffic to your own website, or receiving more inquiries or sales? How many people are subscribing to your RSS feeds?

Simple SMM Do's and Don'ts

Do ...

- Be open, honest and unselfish in your use of social media and networking applications.
- Address issues that are meaningful to your target audience. Put them first.
- Provide fresh insight and original content.
- Listen to your contacts and respond in a way that is meaningful and useful to them.
- Provide ways for people to contact you for additional support.
- Provide links to other useful resources. Remember, social media is about what you can do for others.

Don't ...

- Wait for an invitation: Reach out to your audience.
- Sneak in a sales pitch. This is a turnoff to people looking for information and support.
- Talk too much about yourself or your company. Keep the focus on what's interesting to your audience.
- Forget to monitor your feedback and respond swiftly.
- Overlook the importance of having a good hosting provider. You need a reliable server infrastructure that's equipped to handle traffic spikes.

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