

Guidelines to Using Social Media in Your Business

INTRODUCTION

It's hard to believe that social media has been around in some form since the mid-'90s. That means every member of Gen-Z and most Millennials can't recall life without some form of online, social connection with others!

In addition to allowing people to communicate with one another like never before, social media has created new opportunities for businesses to reach their target audiences.

What's even more notable is that the opportunities to reach an audience of any size are virtually unrestricted. Even a company that doesn't have a marketing or advertising budget can create a social media page, post content, and reach out to its audience.

The bad part is that social media is an absolute danger zone to those who are inexperienced and unaware. As the saying goes, "The internet is forever." Social media has proven this to be 100% true.

With a combination of planning, clear policy, and common sense, your business can use social media to engage with its target audience and achieve its goals.

This guide is intended to provide necessary advice and insight to businesses that choose to use social media platforms to promote their products and services and connect with their customers.

Of course, any advice here should be superseded by laws, regulatory standards, and the advice of an attorney. To that end, we strongly encourage seeking advice from a lawyer so that you understand what your rights and responsibilities are, especially when employment and hiring are involved.



TIP

Social media pages are a fantastic way for companies, large and small, to reach more customers than ever before.

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

You might decide to create an active presence on every social media platform available. You may also decide to stick to just one or two. Both are valid decisions, but they are best made when you have a clear understanding of the purpose of each platform.



TIP

Knowing the benefits and the users of each platform can help you decide which ones to utilize.

Facebook

Facebook remains the largest and most popular platform today. It is generally viewed to be family-friendly, too.

Brands can create business pages, share visual and text posts, create events, and more. Many companies create pages to connect with employees and associates, in addition to customer-facing accounts.

Facebook is also a wildly popular paid advertising platform. You can even use Facebook Messenger for eCommerce and customer support.

Twitter

Twitter is a great platform for sharing small snippets of news, announcements, and other kinds of short-form content. Tweets tend to reach a wide audience.

Instagram

Instagram's growth has been staggering. This platform is focused on visual content. It's a great place to showcase pictures and videos of products and services. Hashtags are often used in posts to help people find content that is relevant to them.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is different from other platforms in that it was designed for professional networking. Many businesses use LinkedIn to connect with potential employees. However, it can also be used as a platform to reach out to customers, especially in the B2B space.

Other Communities

There are plenty of other platforms to explore, too. Snapchat, Reddit, TikTok, and Tumblr are just a few of these. If they seem like a good fit, much of the advice here can still be applied.

Do some research. Each platform tends to attract a different demographic. People also use each platform for different purposes. Understanding these trends should help with targeting.



IMPORTANT

Know your audience and who you want to reach. Focus on the right platforms for maximum benefits.

WHAT TO DO WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

You've chosen your platforms; now it's time to make them work for you.

Remember that social media marketing is less expensive than other options. At the same time, it also means that you have to really commit to creating and curating great content.

Many businesses choose to hire a social media marketing (SMM) professional to help with this. Even if you do so, you'll still be responsible for the quality of the content on your platforms.

In order for your content to be effective, it should be:

- Relevant to your target audience
- A good fit for your brand
- Touching, entertaining, or educational

Remember, your goal isn't to have people simply read your posts. You want them to take action, whether that's going to your website or sharing your content with their friends.



ENGAGEMENT

Social media engagement is the combination of actions people can take when they see a post. Engagement includes likes, shares, comments, and more. The more engagement, the better. In fact, engagement defines which businesses people are really interested in.

Remember that engagement also includes your responses and interactions, as well. Play an active role in your social media pages. Respond to comments, ask questions, and share content from customers and associates. This is how you build relationships and gain more followers.



TIP

Social media marketing is a less expensive alternative to traditional marketing. Posting on your own page is FREE! Paying for ads is cheap and can reach millions.



TIP

Use engagement from your followers to help determine what they want to see in future posts. Maybe you post something with a dog in the photo. If that gets a lot of engagement maybe do it more often.

The more people engage with your posts the more often your posts will show up on their news feeds.

MAKE YOUR BUSINESS EASY TO FIND

It should be a snap for customers to find you on social media. Once they do, it should be easy to get all of the information they need. The best way to do this is to:

! IMPORTANT

People want everything to be quick nowadays so make sure they can find your social media pages quickly!

- Complete all of your profile or account information on every platform
- Post content on a regular basis
- Add your location to help with local search results
- Update changes to hours or contact information

Don't forget to create a "Google my Business" profile and claim your business on Yelp and other platforms. All of this will help drive traffic to your social pages.



CREATING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA TEAM

When businesses suffer from social media embarrassment, it's often because the wrong person was given the authority to speak for the brand on social media. Occasionally, things go wrong when someone decides to take on the role of social media spokesperson without permission.

The best way to ensure that social media works for your business — not against it — is to leave social media communication to the experts. This might look like a dedicated person or team who will create posts on behalf of the company, handle any crisis communications, and approve posts by others before they go live.

Of course, if you are the owner of the business, you'll have the keys to the kingdom as well. That doesn't mean you should end-run your social media team. Their expertise can help you stay out of hot water, as well!

What you can do is work with your social media experts to create content guidelines. Think about your branding and the tone and content of your posts that will be the best fit.

Remember that customers may engage with you about your products and services, and not all of them are going to be happy. Make a plan for dealing with that constructively.

✓ TIP

Make sure the "right" people are the ones posting. Even if several people are on your team, it should sound like one person is posting everything.

! IMPORTANT

Dealing with negative comments is just as important as responding to positive ones. Have a plan so your team knows how to respond.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN EMPLOYMENT TOOL

Job seekers are constantly warned about posting things that could jeopardize their ability to get a job. Given that advice, one might think that potential employers are actively scouring applicant's social media pages in search of potentially scandalous information.

Well, they aren't. At least they shouldn't be — and neither should you. That doesn't mean you can't consider social media behavior. There are just some do's and some very serious don'ts.

DON'T

By all means don't do any of the following:

- Request social media usernames or passwords from employees or applicants
- Mandate that employees or applicants friend you or your business on social media
- Create a fake account for the purpose of catfishing job prospects



IMPORTANT

There's a lot that can go wrong when using social media in the research process for new hires. Be VERY careful to not cross the line into illegal or unethical practices.

In fact, you should be very careful about directly using social media to research applications. There are many legal landmines here.

While it is legal to use social media during background checks, there are many steps you have to take if you find something that could disqualify an applicant. This includes:

- Informing the applicant that they are being disqualified due to information found on social media
- Informing the applicant of the source of the disqualifying information
- Following the Fair Credit Reporting Act to the letter

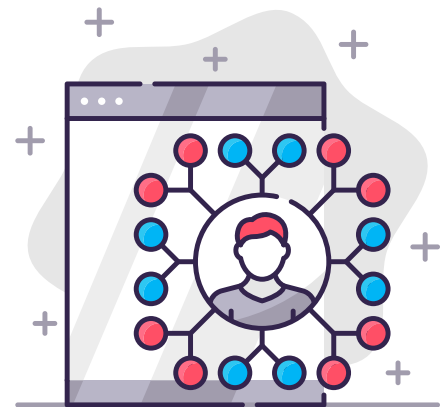
Finally, remember that there could be potential issues if a prospective employee thinks you have discriminated against them. This could be given credence depending on the information they share about themselves online.

DO!

Here are some actions you can take to learn more about potential employees without raising ethical red flags:

- Designate another staff member to do social media research
- Only collect social media information after other qualification decisions are made
- Use other methods for conducting background and reference checks

If you truly want to use social media to help with your staffing needs, consider using it as a recruiting platform.



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES FOR EMPLOYEES

The way your employees use social media can affect your business and reputation. On one hand, you need clear policies. On the other, you don't want to overstep any legal boundaries or be unreasonable or strict.

Remember that employees generally have the right to engage in protected speech. This includes engaging in discussions or complaints about pay and working conditions. Remarks about discrimination or harassment may also be protected.

However, employees are not allowed to engage in illegal activity, threaten or use hate speech, reveal confidential information, or make false or slanderous statements.

Additionally, posts disparaging your company or products are not protected speech, nor are complaints about coworkers (except when they involve topics such as discrimination).

Consult an attorney to learn your rights and responsibilities. Then, write clear social media guidelines for your team.

Here are some other steps to take:

- Monitor internet use on your networks
- Inform employees that internet use is monitored
- Offer guidelines for acceptable online behavior while on and off the clock
- Block websites, including social media pages, if they affect productivity

Most importantly, encourage the beneficial use of social media. Your employees can become your biggest brand advocates online. Invite them to engage with your brand online, share their own positive experiences, and offer insights into your products and services.

CONCLUSION

Social media should bring opportunities to develop positive relationships with customers and employees, promote your products, boost traffic and conversions, and improve your reputation.

By following a few simple guidelines, you can ensure that your use of social media platforms truly benefits your company.



TIP

To avoid any confusion it's a good idea to add clear social media guidelines into your handbook so all employees know what is expected of them.