

Integrating Social Networking for Small and Medium Businesses

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Defining our terms

- Social Networking: using online networks to maintain relationships
- Your Site: your presence as represented by all the little bits of the Internet that you create

Your presence makes you visible

- Smart phones make Internet ubiquitous
- People search before opening Yellow Pages
- First hit gets the business
- Using social networks puts you on more than one site

How are people using social networks?

- People add one network per year
- Stay aware of the trends
- You can't be on all of them, but try to get the big ones

How should YOU use them?

- They are great tools for promotion, but avoid spamming
- Let people know about events, specials
- Solicit feedback about what people want

The Commitment

- Integrating social networks into your site requires genuine commitment
- Half-steps will be seen and could actually backfire in terms of reputation
- Internet users have finely-tuned BS detectors.

Be Genuine

- Basic customer server, really
- Say what you mean, be precise and clear
- Have a thick skin and a sense of humor

Specific Techniques

- Add comments to existing material
- Add a blog or blogs to your presence
- Add a wiki or wikis to your presence
- Make use of third-party web apps like Flickr, Twitter, and Facebook

Add Comments

- Pros: Simple, direct, well-established model for building community
- Cons: Material may not really be “commentable”, your CMS may not have it built-in

Commenting: Tech Considerations

- Built-in is great if you have the tools and capacity for it. Your system should have spam-protection built-in. If it doesn't, use a different system.
- Third-party is convenient, but might not scale well and the content ends up on someone else's server.

Commenting: Workflow

- Managing users if you're hosting comments locally. People lose passwords and have technical problems.
- Dealing with trolls and troublemakers. This is where the humor and thick skin come in handy.

Commenting: Vendors

- Intense Debate:
<http://intensedebate.com>
- Pluck:
<http://pluck.com>
- Disqus:
<http://disqus.com>

Add a Blog or Blogs

- **Pros:** A great way to add new material to your site. Dozens of high-quality tools exist in the market.
- **Cons:** Time commitment. A languishing blog is worse than no blog.

Blogging: Tech Considerations

- Installed vs. Hosted
- If you decide to install, you'll need a basic understanding of databases, FTP, and some time. Many hosts offer one-click installs of some blogging platforms
- If you go with a hosted option, you'll want to understand the templating language to customize your site.

Bloggging: Workflow

- Somebody's got to write the thing
- Should post at least once a week
- If you open comments, see the workflow considerations for Comments

Blogging: What to Blog

- Blog about your industry
- Blog about your town
- Most importantly, blog about your own company and what you're doing
- Float content from your site as a blog post and start a conversation

Blogging: Vendors

- Installable

There are dozens out there, but the first three we look at are Movable Type, WordPress, and Expression Engine. Check with your web host and see if they have a recommendation.

- Hosted

WordPress.com, TypePad, Blogger

Add a Wiki or Wikis

- Pros: Excellent for documentation or technical data that must be supported by more than one person. Great to use once you understand them. If you can build an audience, they'll be devoted.
- Cons: Some people have a hard time getting their heads around them. A little tricky to install and maintain.

Wikis: Tech Considerations

- Software is more complicated than blogging software, making in-house hosting tricky
- Lots of hosted versions available

Wikis: Workflow

- Requires frequent attention for both accuracy and civility
- More than one person; perhaps a department

Wikis: Vendors

- Hosted
LittleWiki: <http://littlewiki.com>
PBWiki: <http://pbwiki.com>
- Installed
MediaWiki: <http://mediawiki.org>
(WikiPedia) Really nice, but also pretty complex.

Third-Party Social Networking Apps

- Flickr and Twitter are designed as communities in the first place; all you have to do is tap into them.
- Get Satisfaction in particular gives you and your customers, clients, or users to create conversations about your company.

Using the Apps

- You run a restaurant
- At 3:00, you post a picture of the day's special to Flickr, and send a related message through Twitter.
- At the table, you have cards inviting people to comment at Get Satisfaction.

Be sociable!

- Remember, the point of all this integration is to engage your audience.
- Make a friend, make a customer.
- There's enough Web 2.0 floating around for free that it doesn't have to be hard.