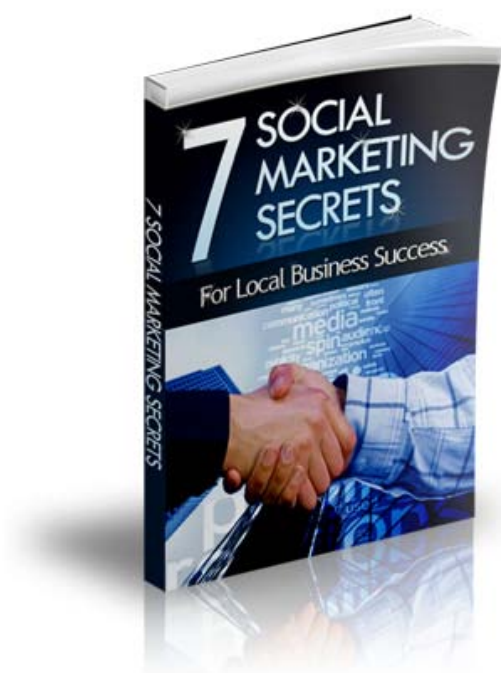




7 Social Marketing Secrets For Local Business Success



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Introduction



If you run your own local business, you probably don't need me to tell you just how important it is to get the message out about what you do to as many people in your area or neighborhood as possible.

After all, simple logic suggests that the more people there are who are aware of the existence of your business and (more importantly) why they should deal with you, the more profit and success you will enjoy.

For this reason, a large degree of local business success is dependent on your ability to spread information about what you do, where you are and the like as far and as wide as you possibly can throughout your business catchment area.

There are many ways of doing this, with newspapers, Yellow Pages advertising and other well known local advertising resources like these immediately springing to mind.

But, what about the power of the internet?

Are you currently using the World Wide Web to promote your local business?



If not, maybe it's because all you ever hear about is the fact that the net is a Global marketplace and you're not so interested in being Global?

If so, forget the Global element for a moment.

Yes, the net does represent a universal business medium but it is also an incredibly powerful local business tool as well.

And the one net-based local business resource that you truly cannot ignore is what is known as social marketing.

In this short guide, you're going to discover exactly what social marketing is and why it's important.

In particular, you are about to discover why you must start including 'being social' in your marketing mix as soon as you can if you don't want to fall a long way behind your local rivals.



What is Social Networking and Why is It An Opportunity?

Over the past few years, the net has changed. Whereas it was a one-way information disseminating tool in the early days, it's now all about two-way communication, online 'conversations' on both a global and local level.

In other words, the net has become an incredibly vibrant social venue, with the growth driven by the explosion in popularity of networking sites like [Facebook](#) (now the 2nd most popular website on the planet after the mighty Google!), [Twitter](#), [MySpace](#) and [LinkedIn](#).



All of these allow ordinary people to 'chat' and network with others online in the same way as they once chatted by telephone (if there were distances involved) or over the garden fence when there weren't.

These sites all have the ability to connect millions of like-minded people together as the fact that Facebook alone attracts nearly 450 million visitors to the site each and every month clearly indicates.

Of course, this is a global audience but you can be absolutely certain that a percentage of these people live within stone-throwing distance of the place where you transact business every day.

In short, social networking is a fantastic communication channel that enables your business to promote what you are doing on a local basis to prospects and customers in your local neighborhood, area or region.

There are many different ways that social networking lends itself to getting the word out about your business activities to an ever-increasing audience.



Some of these involve your business reasonably directly, but not all do.

As an example of keeping in touch with your audience directly, many businesses use social networking to keep prospects and customers abreast of the latest company developments.

Dell is a great case in point (they now have a social marketing division) and look [how much money](#) social networking made for them in 2009.

However, even when you are not directly involved, social networking can expand and develop your business.

As an example, it allows your most loyal customers to form small groups or networks where details of the latest offers and it deals that you have can be passed from one customer to another without any need for you to be involved.

These people are also an excellent source of testimonials or endorsements for your business as well.

Another example of how social networking can benefit your business indirectly is the fact that your employees can use social networking to stay in touch with one another when away from the office, factory or store. This allows your employees to remain more aware of what is going on within your business and it helps to encourage bonding and teamwork as well.

There is no doubt that irrespective of what kind of business you run, social networking should be an integral part of the structure of the way you work every day.

If you are not taking advantage of this opportunity, you are missing out to a massive degree as you will begin to discover in the next chapter.



Before then however, here is one crucial factor that clearly differentiates social networking as a business promotion tool from other forms of marketing such as local newspaper advertising, company details in Yellow Pages and the like.

You pay hard cash for advertising.

You do not however pay a penny to use social networking to introduce information about your business to an ever-expanding audience.

With any of the social networks, you can keep prospects and customers abreast of everything that is happening within your business and doing so is completely cost free.

For instance, if you have an upcoming special event, you can broadcast information about it to your prospects and customers or you can keep them updated with your latest special offers.

All without spending any money at all!

To give you some idea of how powerful this is, you could in theory send information about your products or services to 450,000,000 people over the next month via Facebook and it would not cost you one single penny.

It is understood that if you run a local business, there would be little point in broadcasting to such a huge global audience but it does give you some idea of the marketing power of social networking.

To make the point even more forcibly, think of it the other way round.

Imagine how much it would cost you to advertise to 450m people using newspaper advertising or how long it would take to send every one of these people a flyer through the mail...☺.



Go Where Your Customers Go...

At the time of writing, every social network that I know of – and there are literally hundreds of them with new ones popping up every day – is completely free to sign up for.

From the perspective of your business, this is obviously a good thing but it is also one of the factors that has encouraged so many people to become such active social networkers.

In effect therefore, by using social networking as part of your promotional activities, you are stepping into a virtual world that is densely populated with people who could one day be your prospects and customers if they are not already.

The power and reach of social networking is truly phenomenal and it is becoming an increasingly important aspect of business and marketing.

For example, recent research in the USA suggests that some 70% of adults use social online resources on a regular basis.

In addition, 33% of respondents admitted that they used social networks to see what other users had to say about particular products and/or services before making their final buying decision.

In other words, around one in three of the people surveyed openly admitted that evidence provided by other social network users helped them to decide whether to buy or not.

The meaning of these statistics is something that you cannot afford to ignore. They should shout one fact at you extremely loud and clear.

Your prospects and customers are using social networking increasingly regularly and you cannot afford to let your business fall behind.



In effect, if you choose to embrace social networking as part of your long-term local business development plans now, you can easily dominate your local marketplace. If however you ignore this growing tide, it is undoubtedly going to cost you and your business a great deal.

Okay, now you fully understand why social networking is so important, let's begin to look at the promised 7 social marketing 'secrets' that you must grasp if you are to make the most of this almost unprecedented opportunity.

7 Social Marketing Secrets For Success

Secret #1: Focus is incredibly important



There are hundreds of social networking sites currently operating on the net, with many new ones cropping up daily. Most of the major sites are incredibly popular whereas there are many others that almost no one has ever heard of that enjoy very few users or visitors.

Even so, the fact that there are so many social sites makes it far too easy to spend way too much time on your social marketing efforts.

One thing that many regular social network users will tell you is that using sites like these quickly becomes addictive and that hours can easily pass by entirely unnoticed when you are socially engaged.

This is something you cannot allow to happen.

Consequently, you must stay focused on the marketing aspect of your social involvement. You must also limit your social networking activity to just a handful of the top networking sites to prevent things getting out of hand.



As far as business networking is concerned, LinkedIn has long been considered the crème de la crème because its primary function is to connect business people with one another.

It is therefore a notable player in the business networking marketplace, one through which many people make valuable new business contacts or even find work or a job.

In terms of building relationships with other local business owners, LinkedIn is therefore definitely a site with which you should be registered and on which you should be participating.

Once you have your free membership sorted out (you can upgrade your membership, but it is not strictly necessary), you may be surprised how many other local business people you will meet through the site.

If your operation is primarily focused on providing business-to-business (B2B) products or services, LinkedIn is probably the networking resource that is going to expand your business most effectively and profitably.

If however you are primarily interested in the business-to-consumer (B2C) market place, Facebook, Twitter and MySpace will be the social resources that offer the greatest scope for business expansion and development.

With social sites, the basic concept of networking is that you add friends or followers to your account. Each site calls them something different but the central idea is always the same.

When you add friends, the majority will reciprocate by adding your name to their friends list which means that every time you post new information to the site, it will be delivered directly to them.

Nevertheless, you cannot get involved in too many sites at the same time.

What you should do instead is start off with the top level social sites highlighted previously to see which are the most effective networking resources in your market.



Once you have identified what works best for you, narrow your efforts to focus on those sites.

At the same time, pay considerably less attention to resources that will ultimately have less benefit for you and your business.

Secret #2: It's all about quality

Leading on from the first idea in this chapter, even if you limit your social networking activity to just a handful of sites, it is still easy to become overwhelmed if you try to get involved too much or too often.

The thing to remember with social networking as a business development tool is that it is all about providing quality to your prospects and customers rather than quantity.

It is far more beneficial (and ultimately profitable) to post valuable information to a social site once or twice a day instead of adding facile, useless comments every 15 minutes.

Even before this however, it is essential that you identify the answers to a handful of critical questions that will ultimately dictate how you develop your social marketing strategy.

The first and most obvious question that you have to answer is, why are you using social networking in the first place? What is the ultimate objective of getting involved in social sites?

For example, is your primary aim to raise the profile of your business in your local neighborhood or is there something new happening with your business that you want to create a buzz about?

It might on the other hand be that are you trying to build a list of local contacts or it could be about branding your business.



You must know what you want to achieve because it is only after you have established an objective that you can build your social network in a way that helps you achieve these aims.

At the same time, you should never forget that most social sites (with the possible exception of LinkedIn) are not primarily designed to be business resources.

As *'social'* networking suggests, Facebook, Twitter and MySpace are mainly intended to be sites through which members can build social relationships with others. In effect therefore, it's all about socializing and business comes a very distant second (if it comes anywhere at all).

This means that whilst you can use social sites to develop your business, you must do so by developing relationships before you consider doing anything else.

There cannot for example be any *'sniff'* of selling or marketing as there might be if you were advertising in a local newspaper.

When you use a social site, relationship building must always come first.

It is only after you have established a relationship with your followers or friends that you can start to introduce business into the picture with any hope of success.

Secret #3: Find your audience



Once you know what you are trying to achieve through your social efforts, the next stage of the development process is to find the people with whom you should be networking.

This is critical because in a global social milieu populated by billions of people, segmentation is crucial.

In other words, when you have identified your ideal target prospects or market, you need to put systems in place to find and make contact with these people.

To an extent, because of the size and popularity of the major social sites, you can almost always find other site members who fit your perfect customer or contact profile pretty much to the letter.

Indeed, many of the social sites make it extremely easy to find these people making it extremely easy to find the kind of people that you want to include in your network.

For instance, both Twitter and MySpace provide tools that enable you to find people in your local area by searching using the name of your local town or city.

To do this with Twitter, use the '[Search Twitter](#)' utility by typing in the name of your local town or city:



See what's happening — *right now.*

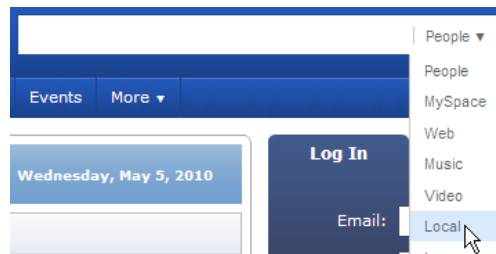
chicago [Advanced Search](#)

Search

This will produce a list of Twitter users in your chosen town or city.

You could however narrow the search down still further by using something like 'Chicago lawyer' if you were looking for contacts in a particular profession as an example.

Similarly, you use the standard MySpace search utility at the top right of the homepage to search for people by 'local' address:



It is therefore possible to find people by categories or groups using the major social sites.

This does of course assume that you are going to limit your social networking to the major sites only. Depending upon your target market, this may not be the most appropriate method of networking.

For instance, there are some social sites that cater to specific demographics which might be more in tune with your business requirements.



As an example, if your ideal target market is slightly older and well educated, then [Gather.com](#) might be a better site to be involved with than Facebook or Twitter.

Similarly, if you are selling to Moms, then it might be that [The Wise Mommy](#) works better for you than any more mainstream social site.

Secret #4: Be part of the community



Used properly, social networking is a terrific way of developing your local business contacts and influence. However, as suggested previously, there is a right way and a wrong way of doing this...

The main thing to appreciate is that whilst other social site members do not necessarily object to you developing your business socially, you must play by the rules if you are to do so effectively.

What this essentially means is that before you start any kind of business development, you must become an active, useful member of the community.

Consider it this way.

When you first join a social site, you are a stranger in a community of millions of people, many of whom have been actively involved for many years.

As social sites are free to join, every site has been 'spammed' at some point in the past and therefore existing members have a healthy skepticism about the value that new community members will add.



As a result, it is incumbent upon you to go out of your way to become a valued community member who provides something of real worth to other members before you begin thinking about developing your business socially.

In other words, you have to earn the trust and respect of other social site members first. It is only after you have done so that they will begin to take what you add to the site seriously without questioning it.

However, once you have ‘earned your stripes’ by playing the social ‘game’ in the right manner for a reasonable period of time, you will have earned the trust and respect of others.

At this point, you can begin to mention your business activities safe in the knowledge that many members will be interested in what you have to say.

If on the other hand you plunge straight in by talking business, business, business from the beginning, you don’t merit anything.

You are therefore wasting your time.

This is not a small, unimportant point.

On the contrary, becoming a valued member of the community before you start your business development is probably the #1 key to doing so successfully in the long term.

Secret #5: It’s an open community...

One of the biggest attractions of social networking as a long-term business development resource is the ability to ‘meet’ hundreds of new people that you would in all probability never meet otherwise.



To begin with, the overwhelming majority of members of any new social site you join will be strangers. Nevertheless, it is remarkably easy to turn many of these strangers into friends or followers very quickly as long as you adopt the right approach from the outset.

Perhaps most critically, if you want to get the best out of social networking, you must be willing to be open, friendly and receptive with other members.

This primarily means being happy to accept friend requests from other members even if the people who are making these requests are not the kind of people to whom you believe you will be able to market further down the road.

The fact is that although it might be tempting to reject incoming requests from people who appear to be unlikely to be of value to your business, doing so is an extremely shortsighted strategy for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, although your first impression of an individual who has made a friend or follow request might be that they have nothing to offer your business, you really don't know this for a fact.

All you have is the information that they have added to the site, plus, you also have no way of knowing where their life will take them in the future either.

Consequently, every incoming friend request is worth accepting because you never know which of these friends will ultimately become your best customers.

Secondly, accepting all incoming requests comes back to being a valuable member of the community.

Most social sites work on the basis that when another member is a friend or follower, they see all of your outgoing messages. Who knows who will find the contents of your messages most valuable?



Hence, the wider your social net is spread, the greater the value you are providing to the community tends to be.

Finally, wiser and older members of the community are likely to see your willingness to accept incoming friend requests as a mark of the kind of community member you really are.

Consequently, the more friendly and receptive you can be to other members, the more highly regarded you are likely to become.

It is also important that you do whatever you can to be as 'real' a person as you can possibly be. This helps other members relate to you which in turn helps to develop and expand your social network.

For this reason, make sure that you add a picture (of a real person, not an avatar, cartoon or business logo) to your site profile whilst creating a profile that is friendly, humble and generally normal.

Even though you should mention your business interests in this profile, you should also highlight other facts about your life – your family, interests, hobbies, pets etc – that make you seem more like a real human being.

Remember that the net is an incredibly impersonal medium so it pays to do whatever you can to become less of a 'cyber-person' and more real.

Secret #6: Think of your readers...



You cannot afford to forget that everything you post on a social site will be read by every member of your network.

You must therefore be very careful about what you post.

For example, you should never post information that could be seen as sensitive nor should you post hearsay as facts unless you know that they are 100% true. If you have hundreds or thousands of friends and you claim that XYZ is a fact, someone, somewhere will find you out.

Similarly, remember that humor does not travel very well and that things that maybe completely innocuous and inoffensive in your society or neighborhood could be viewed completely differently by people in other societies.

If you have any doubts whatsoever about the content that you are thinking of posting, don't do it.

It only takes one offended or upset network member to start causing ripples on the pond. In this case, it would be far too easy for your hard earned respect and credibility to fly out of the window which is something that is definitely not going to help you.

Secret #7: Be conversational...



Although it is taken a lot more seriously as a business communication tool nowadays, there was a time when Twitter was generally considered to be a silly waste of time by those who thought they understood online business Communications and marketing.

Whilst these early criticisms have to a large extent dissipated, the fact was that only a year or two ago, Twitter was full of members who seemed to spend all of their time telling each other what they had for breakfast, what they were going to have lunch, what they watched on TV last night and so on and so forth.

Do not fall into this seductive trap of using social sites to tell people everything you do every day. The majority of your friends or followers are not really interested in the contents of your breakfast bowl nor do they need to know that you have just got on or off the subway.

Instead, never lose sight of the fact that every time you post information to a social site, it must provide value to anyone who reads it.

So, whilst telling people that you have a special offer on ABC widgets is great if you have built a network of people who are interested in widgets, it will be of no interest whatsoever if none of your friends are 'widget people'.



To use social networks most effectively, it is better to spend a large percentage of your time listening to or keeping an eye on what other members of your network are saying and doing rather than continually posting information yourself. This is particularly true in the early days of your community membership.

In this way, it becomes easy to be involved in the conversations and discussions of others. This helps point you in the direction of the kind of content that you should be adding to the community to provide the necessary value.

This is very important because one of the biggest questions that new business-oriented social networkers have is, what kind of content adds value?

If you spend most of your time getting involved in other people's conversations in the early days, existing members will answer this question for you.

What tends to happen is that when you start getting involved, others will reciprocate. They will actively involve you by (for example) asking questions, querying what you do and so on.

It is therefore other members who open the door to the 'inner sanctum' of the local business community rather than you trying to force it open in any way.

Always remember that in marketing terms, promoting your business using social networking is unlike anything else you have ever participated in.

It's about becoming a member of a community and having meaningful conversations with other members of the network which allows you to gradually introduce your business and activities to them.

It is definitely not about blatant promotion or selling.



However, by engaging and building relationships with other network members, you naturally develop conversations that eventually lead to social relationships slowly morphing into the business variety.

In other words, developing your business with social networking is all about natural, conversational marketing. Remember this simple guideline, and you won't go far wrong.



Conclusion

In this short report, you have been introduced to many reasons why social networking can be such a powerful marketing tool and a lot of things that you need to remember if you plan to use social networking to develop your business.

However, the most important thing to comprehend about social networking is that the primary requirement for social site success is to be social and sociable.

If you view sites of this nature as a networking tool first and a business development resource as a very distant second, your attitude is one that is very much set for success.

Of course, you cannot begin to develop business relationships through social networking until you have cemented your place in the social communities on which you will subsequently focus.

Doing so sooner rather than later should therefore be your first priority.

If you're looking for a professional company to help you with that, schedule your FREE 15 minute consultation today -- with no obligation whatsoever.

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