

## How to Guide Essentials to Social Media Marketing

Social media and social networking sites are quite a popular topic among businesses wanting to improve their marketing efforts. If utilized properly, Web 2.0 tools can greatly improve your understanding and communication with your customers.

Unfortunately, many businesses approach Web 2.0 tools as a new way to market to their customers, instead of as a way to improve their marketing. This is an important distinction, because Web 2.0 tools work best not as promotional tools, but as ways to promote communication and understanding between a company and its customers.

When your customers have more ways to give you feedback and more ways to communicate with you, you can better understand their wants and needs. Armed with this knowledge, you can greatly improve your ability to effectively market to this audience and communicate your products, services and promotions.

When considering whether to join or create a social network, there are two separate learning curves.

**1** – you have to become very familiar with using social networks. This usually involves figuring out how to create a solid profile and other member profiles on the network.

**2** – you need to learn how to interact properly with other members of the network. This goes beyond simply contacting other members. You must keep in mind that most people who use social networking sites are extremely leery of being marketed to.

If you attempt to join or create a social network solely to promote your company or products to other members, it will most likely cause other members to denounce your activities harshly and accuse you of “invading their space” which will result in immediate failure.

While learning the curves of using social networks isn't too steep, the most difficult lesson for companies that join social networks are to understand that they are not there to market their gears. Failure to do so could easily cause more harm to your company than good.

### Keys to successful social media marketing

- Long-term strategy and commitment
- Clear objectives
- Time commitment
- Resource allocation

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**Build awareness**

**Facilitate dialogue  
with potential  
customers**

**Expose your  
business to new  
customers**

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Requirements for successful development, launch and management of social media marketing are time, resources and investment.

### **TIME**

Web 2.0 tools require a long-term time commitment to be truly effective. Most require weekly, if not daily or hourly attention. This is the trade-off with social media. Many are free or inexpensive to use, but most or all require constant attention. Count on having to devote the most time to blogs, forums, wikis and ratings sites. These can gather feedback and comments, which must be monitored and approved frequently. You should factor in daily attention to monitor and review these tools.

### **RESOURCES**

If you want to launch a blog and no one at your business has experience blogging, you can still launch a "private" blog and get your feet wet before you launch a blog to the masses.

Some tools such as podcasting, video blogging, forums and e-commerce or rating sites are more specialized and require expertise. If no one at your company has experience with these tools, it may be a good idea to outsource the development to an expert. Fortunately, as social media has become more popular, it's given rise to many well-qualified social media consultants who can train your business to use any of these tools.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** In the Business-to-Business marketing field, you should **ONLY** rely on resources who are experts in the field of Business-to-Business marketing **AND** social media.

### **COSTS**

From a "Return On Investment" perspective, blogs, wikis, micro-blogging and profiles on social networking sites are perfect place to start. These tools can be used for very little or no cost, and give you a great way to communicate with and engage current and potential customers and partners.

At the other end of the spectrum, unless you have programming and coding experts working for you, you will most likely want to outsource the creation of an e-commerce/rating site to someone else, which can easily run into hundreds or even thousands of dollars. Also consider that you'll need to invest in equipment for the creation of podcasts and videos. This can cost anywhere from \$100 to \$500 for basic setup and considerably more for higher quality equipment.

Ready to take the next step?

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