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First**

## Social Media

Social Media is one of the most important signals from the point of both search engines and consumers - but also one that confuses many small businesses the most. This guide will help you to make sense of how and when to use social media. Just because you've not created a Facebook Fan/Business page for your company, doesn't mean one doesn't exist. Your customers, competitors, staff, family or friends may have created one for you. You MUST control it.

## Reputation Management

Managing your reputation online is crucial to the success of your business. Just because you don't write reviews doesn't mean your customers won't. Just because you've not created profiles/business pages on the various web sites that are important for reviews, doesn't mean someone else hasn't either.

Consumers actively look for and take notice of reviews. Over 70% say they'll believe reviews and comments over advertising and company website text when it comes to making a buying decision.

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## What Social Is Media

Although most people have heard of Twitter, Facebook and YouTube there are many more social media platforms out there for your use. Some of these you may not consider to be 'social'. Blogs are a good example, yet blogs and message boards were the first of the 'social' sites - because they allowed 2 way communication.

So, strictly speaking, I guess you could say that any site that allows easy and public communication between people is social. Strangely enough, wherever people can get together and 'socialise' on-line becomes, by default, a 'social media' site.

We humans love to socialise and will do it wherever we can, whether there are millions sharing the space or only a few.

So the first concept as a small business you have to understand is that it's the consumer that drives social sites not the site creators. Absolutely, the creators can influence how long the site stays popular by making it easy to use and pleasant to look at. But they cannot force people to join (unless it's Google – more of that later).

Going back to blogs. The reason for their popularity is they are easy to edit, Many of them on sites like Blogger.com, Wordpress.com, Weebly.com and Tumblr.com are free of hosting costs.

They have comment features that allow people to interact with the blogger by posting comments on articles and images and other people can see and comment on those comments. A conversation occurs and once that happens you have a 'social' site.

If your blog content is not interesting/amusing/outrageous enough then probably the only comments you'll get are those spam comments placed there specifically to generate links. Luckily you are in control and can delete those 'spammy' comments so they don't mess up your beautiful blog.

For the purposes of this guide we're going to focus on what we might call the most 'common' social media sites, those that can be the most beneficial to a business. Just bear in mind that, when we talk about Facebook, we're also talking about the many smaller, less popular sites where people talk to each other, exchange opinions and ask questions and generally hang out. The techniques you'll use are broadly the same across all sites.

## Why are you using social media – what do you want to accomplish?

This question is very important. If you don't know what you want to achieve with your social media campaign then how can you organise and strategise correctly?

There are three main reasons from a business perspective to use social media.

1. Build links
2. Get Business
3. Reputation Management

We'll be talking about all of these in this guide. The way you use them differs slightly depending on what you're trying to achieve.

## Social Media To Build Links

Social media can be, and some would say should be, used to build links. This is because Google and most other important search engines look for links from social media as a way to judge whether a business is 'engaging' consumers.

It helps the search engines to have 'trust' in the website/business that those links point to. The theory (application of which differs between search engines and is subject to change without prior notice) is that if people are talking about you on social sites, you must be doing something right.

This means that on your social media pages you place links back to your site, surrounded by relevant content - usually in the form of text but can be a link to an image, video or sound file on your site - with a comment attached describing what it is you're linking to.

The more social media sites you have, the more links you can generate. This is the basis of a social media link building strategy and what most 'social media management' companies will offer. Before you rush down this route though, you should bear in mind that if you don't have many followers on your social media pages, then those links will not have great value in the eyes of the search engines - and you will need to post consistently to build up the sheer weight of links to have a beneficial effect on your rank.

The real value of these links is when others share them. So, you have to link to the interesting, funny, thoughtful, informative or just plain scandalous in order to get those all important 'shares' which can only occur if you have followers.

All marketers, whether businesses or the companies they use, dream of a campaign - video, white paper, podcast, article or other content going 'viral'. This is where the content gets 'shared' rapidly across the web, creating thousands and in some cases millions of social media links in a very short space of time.

If there were a way to guarantee this without spending in excess of 'millions' then whoever found it would rule the on-line world. So a word of warning – if a company approaches you and guarantees a 'viral' campaign, be wary and make sure you understand what *they* mean by viral.

Going Viral?  
Don't you wish!



## Social Media Sites

YouTube  
Twitter  
Facebook  
Linkedin  
Plurk  
MySpace  
Friendfeed  
Jaiku  
Bebo  
Hi5  
Facebook Pages  
Tumblr  
Identica  
Plaxo  
Blip.fm  
Blogger  
Brightkite  
Buboo  
Buzzherd  
Google Buzz  
Custom Url  
Delicious  
Digu  
Fazkut  
Flickr  
Foursquare  
Friendster  
Gozub  
Hictu  
Imeem  
Jisko  
Khaces  
Koornk  
Laconica like

LiveJournal  
Meemi  
Mexicodiario  
Multiply  
Ning  
Numpa  
Orkut  
Plerb  
Posterous  
Presently  
Remember The Milk  
Feed RSS  
Seismic  
Shoutem  
Skyrock  
Tuenti  
12Seconds  
Utterli  
Wordpress  
Yammer  
YouAre  
Zuosa  
Blip.pl

Remember, if you're using social media just to build links, then you should have accounts with as many of these sites as you can and update them all regularly - at least monthly and preferably weekly.

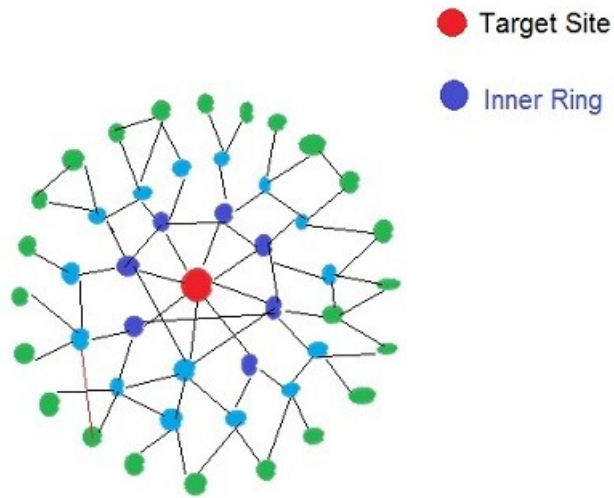
Then you need to 'bookmark' them to get at least one link to each site. See this entry in wikipedia for an explanation [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_bookmarking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_bookmarking).

You can post articles, podcasts, videos and images. Articles should be unique and any text accompanying videos, podcasts or images should strive for a little uniqueness but it's not as important.

If you're wondering why you must build links to these pages then think about this. Search engines find sites by following links, they're like road signs. Imagine you're in the countryside looking for a small shop. Even if you have a map you still look for signposts to tell you where you are in relation to what you see on the map. Without road signs you'd need a huge dose of luck to find the shop quickly and easily.

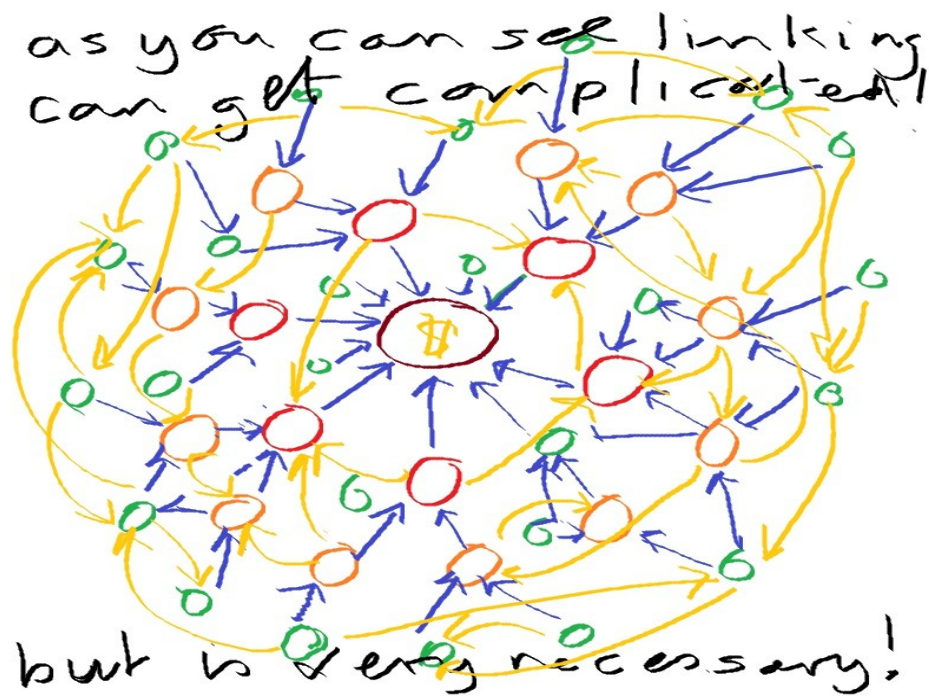
Ideally of course, to fully benefit from your link building efforts, you'd need to build a lot of links to each of your satellite sites. This is sometimes called a 'link wheel'.

### Link Wheel



All of these sites create trust by creating many links that all eventually point to your site. These include bookmarks, blog posts, articles, press releases, forum comments, status updates, videos, images and mentions in directories and niche search engines. This is a very simple link wheel and in reality the more competitive your industry, the more you will need to do.

That all looks very tidy and easy to manage but real linking on the web looks more like this.



That means it's very difficult to control and part of the worry most businesses – large or small have – the lack of control. Once you realise that total control of every link is impossible, you can relax and just get on with the job of building links.

A couple of final thoughts on link building.

1. It needs to be an ongoing effort. One that is done practically every day and not in a mechanical '3 links a day every day' style because that is not natural - and one thing search engines have become pretty good at is spotting when 'unnatural' linking is going on. They will 'slap' you for it somehow so just don't do it.
2. Different types of links must be created. Articles, blog posts, comments, videos, social media, directories, search engines and so on. To only build one type of link does not look – yes – you guessed it – natural!

### **Social Media To Do Business**

Use social media to actually do business. That is, gain customers. You need to do all the above (though you can probably concentrate on just a few), plus you must connect with others. This is where you have the best chance of something either going 'viral' or, you reaching the greatest number of people for the smallest amount of effort.

1. Blog - either your own hosted blog or a free one hosted with Wordpress etc
2. Facebook – business page and profile
3. Twitter
4. YouTube
5. Google + - because Google indexes these pages
6. Pinterest – if you have made, or can make, your business very visually appealing.
7. Yelp – because you're probably on there already & if not – you should be!

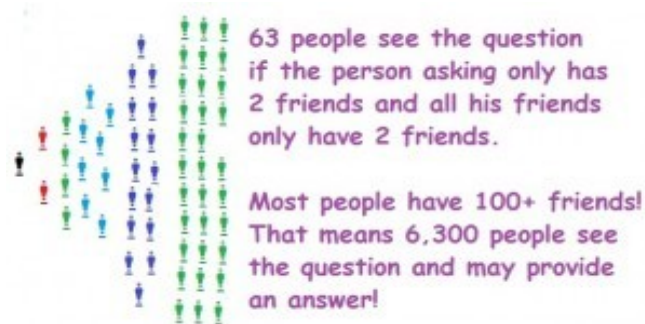
We'll focus on just these few web sites for this section. The tactics we'll discuss actually are practically the same whichever site you use.

- Providing useful content
- Showing the more private side of you and your company
- Commenting on others content
- Joining groups
- Answering questions
- Sending 'invites'
- Making them laugh (or cry)
- Making them think
- Improving their life somehow
- Spending at least 30 minutes per day on each site

Now you need to connect with people. This is the reason that *social media marketing* is so powerful. You connect with people *who are connected to others* who will see what you post, especially when it's 'shared'.



Let's look at a very simple diagram of how social media works. Imagine someone asks a question about your business or product.



Multiply that across all the channels available and you can see how many consumers you can potentially reach.

We'll take each web property in turn and see how we can use them.

**Blog** – This can be your actual website. It's a very good format for small businesses as most blog platforms are easy to edit and don't require you to know how to actually write the code.

Here is where you'll post the majority of your best and most useful content, then each time you post new content, you post to all your social media a link to that content, with a short description. Once someone comes to your site/blog you should **make it easy to do whatever it is you want them to do** - whether that's to buy, call, email, subscribe, donate, comment, join or anything else you may want them to do.

If anyone comments on your content you must acknowledge the comment or very soon you'll find they lose interest.

**Facebook** – For some things on Facebook you need a personal profile. As an example, you cannot send friend requests from a Fan/Business page.

Facebook is where you let the personality of yourself and your company become a little more relaxed and, well, personal. Share stories about the business, staff and yourself. We're not talking about about what an a \*\* your ex is, or how unscrupulous a competitor is. We're talking about what music you enjoyed last night, what film you last went to see and what one you can't wait to see.

Talk about things that are happening in the business, what you're planning, ask what customers would most like you to provide. Talk about achievements - both of the business and staff; what awards have you given or received.

See who's become a 'fan' and check out their Timeline. If they allow public following, make sure you follow them and comment on stuff they post.

*Provide offers, content and contests only available to fans.*

Remember always that the thing people will have in the back of their mind is “What's in it for me?” You need to provide a reason for them to keep interacting with your page. Post videos, yours and others you like - try and keep it clean!

Create infographics and post them, post images and always remember that to connect YOU have to join in.

**Twitter** – What can you say in 140 characters? One of the most productive uses of Twitter is as a customer service tool, but then you (or someone) has to monitor it at all times. You can post links back to your site of course but if you want to actually get customers from Twitter you have to pay attention and start connecting.

Find people to follow, just a few and make sure they have something interesting to say. When you find someone who posts informative content that you actually like to read, think about what it is they're doing and *copy it*. Not the content of course but they type of content. The value of the content is what keeps you coming back, so you should try and provide similar value.

That value may be content on your own site/blog, articles or press releases on other sites. Maybe a white paper you found interesting or a 'how to' video, an infographic or inspiring quote, a humorous anecdote or cartoon. The possibilities are endless.

Search Twitter for people asking questions in your field of expertise and answer them. Offer genuine help without thought of reward and you'll be surprised at the business rewards you will reap.

**YouTube** – The biggest video sharing site and owned by Google. This is where you have your own 'channel' where you post videos you create or have created. Great value links naturally but if your videos are found worthy by consumers then they will 'share' them and you will reach a far wider audience with your marketing message.

The problem is coming up with good content, something that people will want to watch and share. Keep it short 30 – 60 or 90 seconds max, post them to Facebook, on your site/blog, link to them from Twitter.

Find other channels to follow and comment on their videos, send invites to connect with others and respond to comments on your videos. Always be aware that some comments will be deliberately inflammatory and **DO NOT** respond in kind.

**Google +** This relative newcomer from Google is the only site that can in anyway 'force' participation. It's able to do this because of its dominance of the search market. When Google started indexing and ranking these pages, businesses really had no choice but to hop on board.

You can do business on Google. You need to employ the same tactics as Facebook and the others, posting unique and useful content, your own or links to others. Re-post, comment, add to circles, follow and connect. Depending on your market you may want to just do the minimum of posting content; get a link and hope Google ranks the content to attract people to you and your business.

**Pinterest** – A totally visual site - so a very good fit for visual businesses like designers, cooks (showing off the finished item), craftspeople, artists and anyone who loves to look at pictures rather than read text.

If you can create great visuals for your business then Pinterest may be useful to you (for the right businesses it now sends more traffic than Facebook). Once again though consistent posting, commenting and connecting are key.

For those who can't find a way or don't have the time to create stunning visual content there is a visual alternative and that is **Daily Booth**. This is a site where you take a photo a day and post it to your profile, with a comment if you wish. This is about more personal 'fly on the wall' images - you having lunch, a happy customer at the checkout, staff at their daily routine, odd and quirky is good.

The beauty of Daily Booth is that as long as they agree you can take photos of happy customers, post them from your place of business and 'share' them on all of your web pages, site/blog and social media. Great little tool to promote happy customers!

### **Social Media and Reputation Management**

This is perhaps one of the most important uses of social media, to manage, protect or repair your reputation on-line. Just a couple of disgruntled customers or ex employees can, and do, ruin the reputation and subsequently the business of many companies every day worldwide.

Research done by Nielsen shows that 70% of consumers trust reviews when making a buying decision. If you're wanting to know what the figures say about all consumers not just those online, well Nielsen has the answer for that too. 92% of people trust recommendations from people they know above all other forms of advertising and promotion. 92% that's 92 out of every 100 people, so if you don't have your social media in place to nurture and grow your reputation you could be in serious trouble.

Let's start with the customer experience, this is where your reputation begins and ends, if the customer is not happy you have a problem needing to be addressed.



**Your customers are listening to their friends and family.**

**Are you listening to your customers?**

Now let's be honest and admit that none of us operates at 100% all the time. We all have off days, that includes employers, employees and customers. Sometimes sh\*t happens and all we can do is try some damage control.

Yet damage control, if done right, can secure us a customer for life. On the other hand, done wrong and it will only compound the problem.

What is the right way? First never, and I do mean never, get into a verbal fight. You'll never win and you'll polarize the people who see the 'fight'. Some, those who decide against you for whatever reason, will spread the word and they'll probably be believed.

As a species we love spreading 'gossip' and usually the sort that is scandalous, damaging or in some other way negative. We psychologically enjoy the fact that we avoided the situation that's causing our friend such grief. It's just one of our human quirks, you can't do anything about it so the best thing is not to go there in the first place.

When someone posts a positive review, you should at least say 'thank you'. After all, they've taken the time to do something that will help bring in customers and they've done it for free. Whilst we're on the subject of 'free' never, never offer to pay for reviews in any way, especially for 'positive' reviews.

Not only will it get you penalized but unless the reviewer states their interest it is ILLEGAL - and you the business owner would be the one prosecuted/fined. You're also in danger of having your page shut down.

*The top local review sites, the ones you want to concentrate your efforts on are:*

Google Local + formerly Google Places

Yelp

Yahoo Local Listings

Citysearch

Merchant Circle

Insider Pages

Angie's List

There are many more places people can leave reviews but these are the major players and the ones that will influence your customers and therefore your business the most.

After Google Local + the most important is Yelp. Many small businesses have had bad experiences with Yelp because Yelp has a 'spam' filter that will prevent some reviews from showing on the actual business page. The reviews are there and, if you scroll down the page, you'll find a link to 'filtered reviews'.

What you have to remember is that Yelp is built on providing real, impartial reviews, so it has to try and keep out of the results what it sees as biased or 'spam' reviews.

I did a search and found a business with 19 filtered reviews, I've detailed them below. As you can see the majority of filtered reviews are 5 star ones. Now take a look at how many other reviews these consumers have posted. In most cases, the only review they have is for this business, they generally have no or very few friends and often no profile picture.

### **Five Star**

LB - 1 review, no friends, no profile picture

AP - 2 reviews, 5 friends, no profile picture

G.L. - 4 reviews - no friends - no profile picture

RB - 1 review - no friends - no profile picture

AK - 2 reviews - no friends - works at shop

JO - 1 review, no friends, no profile picture

MK - 1 review, no friends, no profile picture

CE - 4 reviews, no friends, no profile picture

BW - 3 reviews, no friends

GN - 1 review, no friends, no profile picture

AH - 1 review, no friends,

EB - 7 reviews, 1 friends,

CH - 1 review, no friends, no profile picture

KB - 1 review, no friends, no profile picture

LM - 2 reviews, 1 friend, no profile picture

#### **4 Star**

FB - 0 review, 15 friends,

AS - 1 review, no friends, no profile picture

#### **2 Star**

BB - 1 review, no friends, no profile picture

#### **1 Star - removed**

MW. 1 review, no friends, no profile picture

So, ask yourself is that 'natural'? Is it likely that these people are true reviewers, ones that make a point of regularly posting reviews that other consumer feel are useful?

Because that's the whole point of reviews - that they should provide us, the consumer, with real feedback on the business they're reviewing. Just take a moment to think about how you would feel if you bought something that was very poor quality based on false reviews extolling its virtues.

False or fake reviews have come under the scrutiny of university research, Cornell to be precise, where they have used semantics and word usage to determine with a good degree of accuracy those fake reviews.

<http://aclweb.org/anthology/P/P11/P11-1032.pdf>

With that, and the fact that fake reviews you solicit (even by employing a 'reputation management' company who use the tactic instead of you) are illegal, the best way to ensure great reviews is to provide great customer experience.

<http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2009/10/endortest.shtm>

### **How to get real reviews**

One of the best, simplest and easiest ways to get reviews is to ask your customers to help you improve your service to them by posting an **honest** review. Give them a card

with your review links printed on them and include a QR code so they can easily scan it with their phone or camera (if they have the barcode scanner app downloaded).



Please help us improve our service  
by posting an honest review

<http://goo.gl/dwfPr>

For our Google page

To post a Yelp review, use the link  
below or scan the yellow QR code

<http://goo.gl/yiGx8>

To scan either QR code you'll need the  
'Barcode Scanner' App on your phone  
or tablet.



You can hand out these cards to all customers and some will post reviews. You must thank them on-line if they do. If they post a poor review, remember that the first thing is to acknowledge that as far as they're concerned they did have a less than great experience.

How can you respond in a positive manner? Have you investigated to find out if their review is justified? If it is, how will you handle it? Have these things worked out ahead of time. It's always better to have a procedure in place to handle this sort of thing.

### **Step One**

Acknowledge the complaint, apologise and promise to investigate.

### **Step Two**

Investigate.

### **Step Three**

If the complaint is justified, decide how you will:

1. Deal with the reason for the complaint so it doesn't happen again
2. Respond to the customer to put the problem right
3. Train staff (or yourself) how NOT to have this happen again.

### **Step Four**

If the complaint is not justified, respond civilly detailing what happened without calling



the client a liar :)

### **Final Step**

Remember that you cannot please all of the people all of the time and it is natural to have a few reviews that are less than great. What you're looking to maintain is your overall rating. It should be a 4 or 5 - anything less and you'll lose business.

### **Using Social Media To Push Bad Reviews Comments Down The Results Page**

If you have set up all your social media profiles you can publish content that, because it is fresher, will push down older content in the results. If you have customer testimonials in written form, transcribe them and post them online. Scan the original and publish that as an image. Create a video from your testimonials and post that on-line.

### **Using Yelp.**

You should set up your Yelp business account so that you can respond to any reviews posted. Search for your business first as it's entirely possible that someone has already entered you into Yelp. If you find it you can 'unlock' the page and start editing. If not, then you can set up a business page.

To truly benefit from Yelp you also need a personal profile. Set one up after you've set up your business page; you'll be prompted to fill out your 'profile' so you can do it at the same time.

Now you need to fill out your personal profile, it needs to be filled out completely and some sort of bio pic added.

Now look for businesses that are near you and start reviewing them.

Check out other reviews, especially those by people who've posted ten or more.

Comment or compliment them. If they reply make sure you check out their reviews often. Try out a business they recommend and review it yourself - let them know you tried it because of their review.

After you've exchanged messages a couple of times send a friend request.

Your aim is to connect with as many influential Yelpers as you can; some of them will naturally try your business and then review it.

These influential Yelpers rarely if ever have their reviews filtered and a good review from them will bring in business.

On any social media site, including Yelp, your aim is to connect with people. Engage with their content, offer help and reciprocate.

You should also publicise your business/social media page on your website and in your physical place of business.

Encourage people to 'check in' to your place, they can do this via the following sites.

Google Local

Facebook.

Yelp.

Foursquare.

These are the most popular places on which to check in. Each check in is a silent recommendation of your business.

Reward people for checking in with special offers-freebies-whatever works for your business.

These 'check ins' create a powerful message that will bring you business. But you have to be consistent in your efforts.

Another technique is to take snapshots of happy customers (with their knowledge and permission of course) to post to your social media or blog.

Award 'customer of the month' badges, take photo's and post to your web site and Pinterest.

The power of happy smiling faces will go a long way to repairing/protecting your reputation.





***If you need some help call us now***

07799-576223