



Social Media Marketing

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Understand how to adjust your Internet marketing plan based on metrics and reporting.

Social Media Marketing

What is Social Media?

Social media is a technology that facilitates communication and sharing by using a platform. Those platforms are changing and evolving all the time. Although there are some steady platforms available, there are many more that appear and then disappear rapidly. Around the world there are hundreds of millions of people (also referred to as “users”) who interact with at least one social media site at least once. As a marketing opportunity for you and your company, the options seem endless!

Business owners and marketers often ask if they really need to get involved with social media. It can be a lot of work and take up time and resources, and we’re not even sure how to measure the payoff. However, the savvy business understands that if your customers are on social media, you should be contacting them there. If your clients are not on social media, then don’t spend your marketing time and money marketing there right now, although you’ll need to be ready if they are headed that way.

Understanding the Marketing Mix

The Five P’s and Social Media

Lots of companies say – and even believe – that they have a social media strategy. They encourage employees to create profiles and to promote or share news about what the company is doing, and they set up profiles on every site they can find. But, if you think back to what we understand about marketing, we know that we need to have a strategy for how to leverage social media if we are going to get some kind of return, rather than just taking random shots in the dark.

Around the world, your customers and potential customers have embraced social media to such an extent that it is not just popular, but is a part of everyday life. At the same time, we cannot be fooled into believing that social media is the best way to market your product. Social media is simply another way to get your message out, but it’s not the only way. If you remember nothing else in this course, keep in mind that social media is simply one element within your overall marketing strategy.

When it comes to using social media, your marketing research gets applied in a marketing plan based on the P’s of marketing: product, price, place, promotion, and packaging. All of these P’s influence the **positioning** of your product (how your product compares to similar products from other companies).

Product

Marketing your product and/or services includes differentiating it from other products/services in the market place. You will need to pay particular attention to how those products and services appear in

search engine results. There are lots of ways to do this, so you will want to pick a few that make sense. Some things to pay attention to:

- Capabilities
- Style
- Warranties/guarantees
- Service
- Labeling
- Size

Make sure you really understand what makes your company stand out from the competition. For example, when Lululemon was first established, they were looking for a name that was attention-grabbing and that people would remember. They also wanted something that had appeal around the globe. Their made-up word, with three l's, helped them to stand out.

If you read Seth Godin's book *We Are All Weird*, you'll read about a shift where instead of always trying to appeal to the masses (and an average consumer), it makes good business sense to pay attention to the diversity present in the marketplace and offer choices that reflect the people we are actually marketing to.

Price

Whether you are a for-profit, non-profit, or not-for-profit company, you have to be making money in order for the business to flourish. This means that no matter who you are, you need to understand every aspect of your business when establishing price. If you forget to allow for certain costs and sell the product at a loss, your stakeholders won't stand for it.

On the other hand, some products are deliberately priced at a "deal" price (also known as a **loss leader**) to draw people in to the store where they will be sold other products. A car can be priced below cost, but by the time that the extended warranty, roadside service, fabric protection, and chrome package are added, there is no loss for the company any longer.

Psychological pricing is what has stores using prices that end in 95 or 99 cents. The idea is that people will pay \$39.99 for a product they won't pay \$40.00 for.

In a competitive market, you will see marketing strategies that will meet or beat a competitor's price in order to gain (or regain) market share. If you visit a website or pick up a flyer and see the phrase, "We will match any competitor's advertised price and beat it by 5% on all our products," you are witnessing **meet or beat competition** in action.

Price and **quality** are things that must always be considered in pricing services and non-tangible products. If you have a service and price it very cheaply, people may not value what you offer in terms of the knowledge and expertise that is required to develop that service. Make sure that you are doing sufficient research.

Penetration refers to introductory pricing that is deliberately low in order to gain market share. The idea is to price products at a low per unit amount and then sell a high number of units with the objective of gaining recognition in the market.

Place

This is all about how you will distribute and provide your product. Your analysis of distribution channels will help you flesh out this part of your plan. Will you be a wholesaler, distribute products through a franchise, have brick and mortar retail outlets, or be an online-only store? You can also choose several methods to create a big presence. Leveraging social media can help you to create a large “place” with or without having an actual physical presence.

Promotion

Promotion refers to the way that the market sees your product. It is very difficult to get shelf space in a retail store, so you have to decide how you will draw your potential purchasers’ attention. Pizza shops might send staff members to stand on the corner with a sandwich board describing this week’s deal. Cupcake stores might have someone dressed in a giant cupcake costume waving to passersby. Coupons, flyers, newsletters, banner or pop-up ads on a website, and special deals are also part of a promotion strategy.

Public relations campaigns can also be used to promote a product. **Internet marketing** is another form of promotion that can use programming and keyword techniques to ensure that a search for products like yours will lead to your company’s website.

Packaging

The esthetic value of your packaging can draw a customer’s eye or can turn them away. Designers and marketing firms aim to create the best packaging possible to attract consumers or at least create some kind of reaction. In addition, items must also be packaged in a way that protects the contents. Cardboard boxes, protective materials (like Styrofoam), labeling, color, and appeal must all be considered to present your product appropriately and protect it from damage.

Developing a Social Media Plan

Things to Think About

Social media, like all marketing, is about developing relationships with your customers. It is not a short road to profits. You also need to know (and may have already discovered this while exploring your personal social media networks) that it can take an enormous amount of time if you approach it casually.

We have seven guidelines for developing your social media plan and making the most of time and resources.

Stretch

As you develop your social media plan, you need to work with people who have a deep digital reach. Traditional marketers focus on what they know in order to help you establish a niche in the marketplace. They rely on tried and true methods for design and marketing campaigns. (Think about flyers, brochures, contest entries, or contact forms on a website.) If your usual marketing is not getting you the results that you need, make sure you increase your strength by bringing on expertise that gets you what you need. Don't hire someone to be your social media marketer if they have no knowledge about the areas that you want to reach.

Build a Community

What you really need is to get people talking about you in a way that they promote your brand independently of you. Seth Godin has written about this as **tribes**. The Grateful Dead, a wildly successful band for more than 40 years, focused on providing their fans with experiences at their concerts rather than selling albums. Fans (called Deadheads) went to the concerts because they knew that each one was different from the last. Think of the things that you can do for your customers that are different than what everyone else is doing.

Watch Out for Social Media Experts

Social media is constantly evolving, and it is one aspect of marketing, but it is not all there is to marketing. Marketing consultants who are also specialists in social media understand its fluidity. They can help you navigate and establish your brand in the social stream as one aspect of your marketing plan. However, make sure that they can do what they say they can do. Ask for references and look at what they've done in the past.

Be There

Whichever social channels that you use (and there are more coming out all the time), make sure that you participate **with** your community. Don't ask a question on Twitter, for example, and then not be around or available to reply to people's answers, or you will turn them off. Better still, give them something they have not even thought to ask for yet.

Find Your Customers

When you conduct your market analysis, be very clear about where your customers are. Make sure you reach them and their friends so that they are able to talk about you. This doesn't mean that you need to sign up on every social platform there is, because you won't have time. Focus on methods of reach that work for your customers.

Be a Person

There is a lot of artificiality in social media. While systematizing and pre-planning updates makes sense, you look like a robot if you come off like something that has been automated. Make sure that some of your personality and character shines through the things that you say.

Follow Others

It's not appropriate to be a one-way machine in social media. For example, if you are on Twitter and have 2500 followers, and you only follow 20 people, you will not be able to reply to people who are speaking with and about you. We know you cannot read comments from 2500 people a day, but we also know that you can organize people into categories and lists. That way, you can participate in the community you are trying hard to build, instead of being a sandwich board on the street corner that simply makes an announcement. If you are blogging, make sure that you reply to people's comments on your blog posts and that those posts provide people with information they can use, rather than just writing them as a billboard for your products.

Utilization Guidelines

In order to effectively leverage social media, you must have a strategy and establish utilization guidelines. **Utilization guidelines** will help all staff in the company to make efforts that will help the company reach its goals. For example, if staff will be sharing responsibility for updating your company page on Facebook, their messages might also include their name so you know who made the post. You could also have a guideline set up to say that any messages about the company need to be positive, to reflect your brand, and to only release news about the company after an official news release is released. (This way, there are no early releases or information leaks.) Some companies will have a rule that only one person (such as a communications officer or even the CEO) will release public messages.

Test Your Knowledge

Why are utilization guidelines important?

Briefly describe the products or services that you sell.

Is there an existing social media plan? If so, are you conducting an update, or creating an entirely new strategy?

Does the company have an existing website, social media profiles, or social media sites? List the URL(s) here.

Does the company have an existing social media presence? What is currently taking place? (Some ideas: blogs, podcasting, or status updates)

Who is the target of your social media campaign: businesses, individuals, or someone else?

What geographical region will the social media campaign target: local, regional, national, or international? Write the details of the range below.

Rank the goals of your social media campaign in priority order, with 1 being the most important and 7 being the least important. Each item must have its own number; no ties allowed!

- ____ Building relationships with customers
- ____ Increasing visitors to the web/hub site
- ____ Improving search visibility
- ____ Increasing sales
- ____ Saving money on print advertising
- ____ Increasing customer connection to the brand
- ____ Other (Details: _____)

Campaign Budget

Fill out the table below to create a draft budget for your social media plan.

Category	Amount Per Month
Design and Writing	\$
Photography and Video	\$
Marketing and Paid Ads	\$
In-House Labor (costs and hours)	\$
Programming	\$
Tools and Equipment	\$
Revisions and Changes	\$

Return on Investment: _____% within _____ month(s) / year

Test Your Knowledge

Campaign Objectives

Fill out the objectives that apply to you.

- Number of Visitors per Month: _____
- Number of Downloads per Month: _____
- Number of Comments per Month: _____
- Conversion Rate: _____
- Monthly Sales: \$ _____
- Average Dollar Amount per Sale: \$ _____

List any other objectives here.

Competitive Analysis

Describe your target market very clearly. Use specific demographics, geographics, industry, segments, job titles, etc.

Why should a customer buy from you instead of a competitor? Use this space to clearly describe your value proposition.

List at least ten competitors and their websites, blogs, and related social media pages.

Competitor	Website	Blog	Social Media Pages

Important Notes

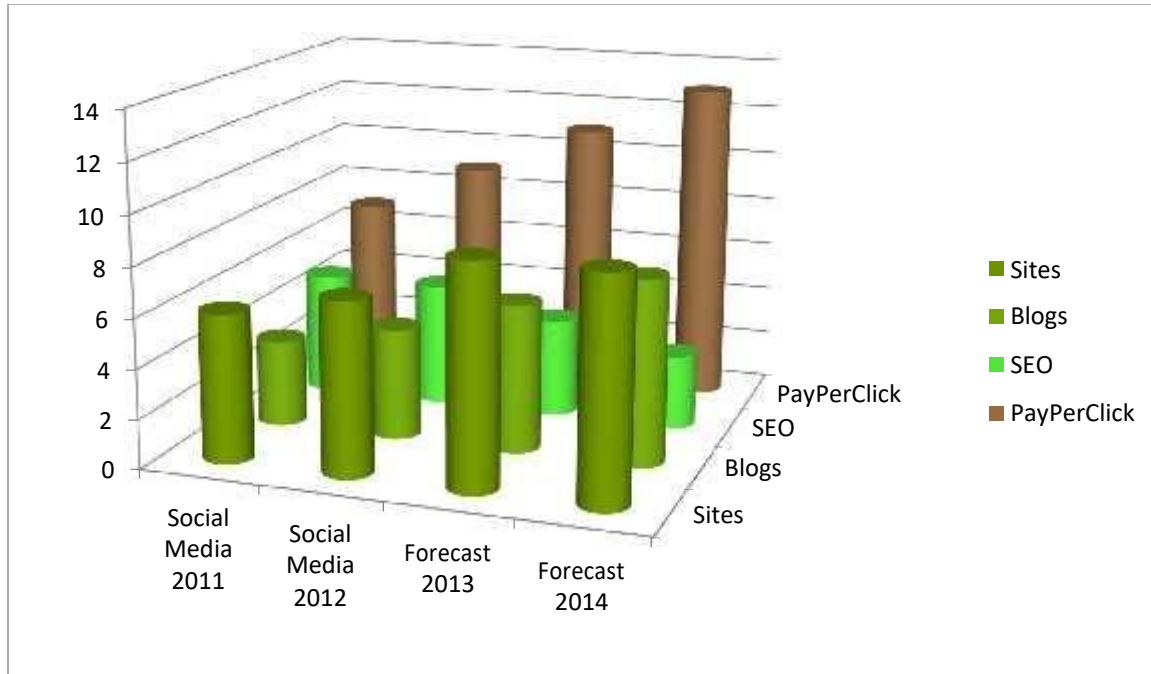
- Costs are generally easier to track in social media marketing than revenues are.
- Be very conscious about your budget. Social media is easy to use and can also be very time consuming. Make sure that you are actually planning, and able to stick to, budgeted resources and time.
- It is unlikely that you will be able to push customers or prospects to a particular social media site or service. You will need to determine where your customers and prospects already are. Then, you can direct your efforts to where they are and encourage them to visit your own sites by offering them a good reason.

What’s the Value?

When you start to calculate what social media costs your company, one of the easier methods is to calculate the **inbound cost per lead**. You probably already calculate what your cost per lead is, so you can incorporate your social media leads into this in many ways. Your goal is to come up with something that is accurate and is a true reflection of what is taking place.

Consider the cost of each lead, whether it is through a social media site, a blog, pay per click and adwords, or a natural search. (**Natural search** is when someone puts a search term into their search bar and your company comes up in the listing because you have a unique name or have optimized your search engine optimization – SEO for short.)

Your **cost per lead, segmented by channel**, could look something like this:



After you have been using, and tracking, your results for a while, you will be able to see whether your planned investment in social media is on target with your budget and resourcing or not. If it isn't, you need to make some immediate adjustments in order to keep your marketing budget on track. Remember: your social media strategy is a portion of your overall Internet strategy, which is a portion of your overall marketing strategy.

Using Facebook

Getting Started

Can Facebook help you grow? Can it help you make more sales? The answer to that is multi-faceted and will depend on where your customers are, as well as what you have to offer.

Facebook is an internationally successful social media platform that, in 2011, had amassed over half a billion users. This is an enormous market for any business; if your prospects or customers are on Facebook, you need to establish a presence there too.

Businesses are not allowed to sell directly on Facebook. Instead, they can offer information, make connections, develop relationships, and share news by creating interesting posts, notes, and so on. We refer to this process as **building a community**. Some contests are allowed, but you need to check their terms of reference (which change regularly) to make sure your approach works with their site. Otherwise, your page could be shut down by Facebook administration.

First Steps

Before you set up any kind of business page on any social media site, review your marketing plan. This will help you to make sure the page fits with your plan, supports your business, and is not going to take you in a different direction.

Next Steps

Visit www.facebook.com. If you don't have a personal account, you cannot set up your business page. You might not want your personal information shared with all of your employees or customers, naturally, and you have the option to adjust your privacy settings so that people can see only what you want them to. This means you can set up your personal page along with your photo (perhaps a way to contact you), and that's all anyone else has to see. It's really up to you.

An important note about Facebook is that from time to time they change their privacy and visibility settings. This means it is essential that you keep an eye on their terms of service and that you check your account and privacy settings. As an example, in June 2012, Facebook changed every person's e-mail contact information to a Facebook e-mail address. This outraged some subscribers and people were rapidly making adjustments so that their information reflected their personal e-mail addresses. You simply have to be ready (or assign someone on your staff to be ready), alert, and flexible.

Due Diligence

Before you get too far, visit Facebook's terms page at www.facebook.com/policies?ref=pf and make sure that you agree with the rules and are able to follow them. You may also want to check out the rules for promotions, which are at this link: https://www.facebook.com/page_guidelines.php#promotionguidelines. (Note that these links were accurate at the time of writing. We take no responsibility for the accuracy of these sites or the content within.)

Now You Can!

From your personal Facebook page, you can set up a business page that visitors can visit. If they want to see your updates in their own news feed, they can click "like" on your business page.

Your updates need to be interesting and capture attention. If they don't, even people who have "liked" your page may hide your posts and not see them. This means that you are not trying to gather numbers. Instead, you must focus on developing relationships and interacting with your community.

Building Your Community

There are lots of ways that you can engage your community. Initially you may find yourself getting a bit frustrated with the amount of work, so we're encouraging you to keep the faith and stick to your social media marketing plan!

At first, you want to get people visiting your business page, adding comments, and engaging with you (and possibly each other). Encourage them to click links to your hub site, if you have one. (There are plenty of small startup companies that include craft operations, family businesses, and more, that are starting out with just a Facebook page). Get people talking on your page, interested in your business, and sharing the link. You can encourage them to post recommendations if they get great service or like a product, post pictures of themselves with your products, and more.

You can also use the page to post pictures of your products, your location, the people who work with you, and more. Businesses will post information about charity events they get involved with, teams they sponsor, and more.

As the administrator of your business page, you will receive an e-mail each week that shows the interactions on your page. When you have enough of a community presence that you can start leveraging your analytic information, you can make marketing decisions based on that too.

Taking it Further

When you initially set up your business page, it looks like all the other business pages: the colors will be similar and the layout format will be the same. Make sure that you learn how to use features that allow you to tailor the page to your business, incorporate some of your brand, and to demonstrate the connection between the page and your company.

In addition to the business page, you can also advertise on Facebook to promote your page. Facebook has some pretty sophisticated advertising so that your ads are directed to the right people. Users will see these ads on their personal page, along the right margin.

You may have noticed that if you are visiting a particular business page, those will be the ads that start appearing in the margin. This is targeted advertising that businesses pay for on a **pay-per-click (PPC)** basis. (Pay-per-click is a way for you to pay for your advertising as you go. You design your ad, supply a credit card number, and then assign a limit to the number of times you want people to click on your ad. If you can only afford to pay for 2,000 clicks, for example, you set that limit and your ad is pulled after 2,000 people click on it. As well, your account will be charged accordingly. See our course on *Basic Internet Marketing* for more information.)

Depending on the nature of your business, you can have several ads on the go at one time. Just watch your statistics because a catchy ad can get clicked on a lot! Keep in mind that if your social media marketing plan has no budget available, you cannot afford pay-per-click advertising.

Test Your Knowledge

Does Facebook have a role in your social media marketing plan?

Have you set up a business page on Facebook? If so, are you developing a community there?

What else can you do to increase the quality of connections to your community? Add these elements to your social media marketing plan.

Using LinkedIn

LinkedIn Essentials

LinkedIn is a business-focused social media site. Its aims include helping people in business connect, helping businesses do business with each other, providing services to business people, and networking within your industry (as well as related or complementary industries).

Within the LinkedIn network (found at www.linkedin.com), you can establish a profile, create a company profile, and engage in communities that already exist, while considering the benefits or establishing your own community there.

LinkedIn has several ways that you can locate other people. You can search for them from the home page of the site before you even join and see if there are like-minded people there that you want to connect with. LinkedIn is a consistent, content rich, place to find people and information. It is a site that has focused on what it is good at, so you won't games or chat. They do, however, offer an enormous network of groups where you can find blog posts and articles, connect in conversations, and expand your own network.

LinkedIn does have the ability for you to enter a status update that will show in your news feed on your profile page and the news feeds of people you are connected to. In order to save you a bit of time, you can update your status on LinkedIn and have it automatically feed it to your Twitter update. Since both statuses are restricted to a concise 140 character limit, things that you say in LinkedIn do not get cut off in Twitter.

However, Twitter announced in June 2012 that users will not be able to automatically post their updates to LinkedIn. You can still send your LinkedIn updates to Twitter, but not vice-versa. Be judicious in your LinkedIn updates and people will be more likely to be curious about what you do so and follow you along.

Setting Up Your Account

Whether you already have an account set up on LinkedIn or not, this section has something for you because plenty of people have set up a LinkedIn account and never updated it.

LinkedIn profiles are set up to look similar to a resume. You can provide details like where you attended school, jobs you've held, recommendations you receive from other people, who you are connected to, and more. You can also add keywords and statements about projects you've done, what you want to accomplish by being on LinkedIn, and more. This is handy if an old colleague or perhaps a complementary business wants to reach out to you and add you to their network because it shows where you are at. You can make some great connections to people by being involved in LinkedIn, so you want to really pay attention to how you set up your profile, the way you word your information, and how it looks on your page. Think of your profile as a resume. Consider getting some help with it from someone who is a writer or even someone who specializes in resume writing.

Once you have set up an account and started building your profile, you can have LinkedIn search your email contacts to see who else has a LinkedIn profile that you can connect to. You can also import your contacts from several different e-mail platforms. This helps you to quickly build your LinkedIn network.

Getting Connected

Connecting to Others

LinkedIn is all about connections, and as with any social media platform, those connections help you to build and/or connect as a community. When you log into your LinkedIn profile, you can then add connections from the Contact tab. You can look for connections by selecting schools you attended (to connect with classmates), companies you've worked with (to connect with colleagues), and so on. There are also plenty of helpful how-to links on LinkedIn to get this working for you.

When you are logged in and you want to search for a connection, you simply enter the person's name in the LinkedIn search bar. You can also search for them quickly if you know their e-mail address. If you

want to connect to someone you do not actually know, LinkedIn encourages you to connect to people that you know and people who are connected to someone you know (a second-degree connection) and that they know (a third-degree connection).

You can connect to second- and third-degree connections by sending them a request directly (and you should mention who you know in common if you do so), or, you can request that your friend (the first-degree connection you have) introduce the new person to you. This sounds more complicated than it is, but helps to stop people who don't know each other at all from connecting and simply building huge lists of connections that they really have nothing in common with, and don't wish to have in their network.

LinkedIn also provides HTML code for you to add a LinkedIn button to your website or blog so that people can find you on LinkedIn easily. This is especially handy if you have a pretty common name!

Using Groups

LinkedIn groups are also a great way to get connected. There are plenty of them to try out. We suggest that you visit, read, connect to, and start communicating with some of the groups that are already there. You can adjust your settings with the groups so that each day or once a week you get a digest of conversations that are underway, resources that have been made available, etc. Some groups will have to give you permission to join.

If you are connected to groups that are right for you, join in the conversations and see what is happening. If you don't enjoy being a part of a particular group, you can always leave and disconnect yourself.

When you have been part of these groups for a while and are getting involved in some conversations, it may be time to consider whether it makes sense for you, your company, or an association you are connected to, to start a group. You'll want to have plenty of conversation starters as part of your plan. You also need to devote time for visiting the group regularly – (once a day at least) to engage in the conversations there, answer questions, provide links to resources, or to connect people together. If this sounds like a lot of work, it can be.

You need to refer back to your social media marketing plan to consider if your involvement in LinkedIn is part of your marketing strategy and make sure things stay on track. Get as involved as you would like and have time for, and see what kind of information and value you get from particular groups in your industry or other areas of interest. If you do set up a group, you need to be dedicated to it to ensure that it thrives.

Using Twitter

Tweeting

Twitter is another large and very popular social networking platform. It has amassed millions of users around the world who are sometimes referred to as Twits.

Twitter allows you to build a profile centered around you personally or your business. As with other social media networks, it encourages people to organize in communities as you connect with people you know, do business with, or who find you randomly.

When you use Twitter, you will get used to speaking in very concise terms, because each update that you post on the site is restricted to just 140 characters. (That's not 140 words, but characters, as in the individual letters and spaces that you include in your message. You can link your message to a photo that represents a thought or particular moment, a blog post, an article, or provide a link to your website. As you develop fluency with Twitter, you will find it easier to create short, snappy comments that compel people to read your messages and make them want to know more about you and your company.

When you start to use Twitter, you will find that you can get bogged down in the number of other people's messages. In keeping with the theme of this course, we're reminding you again to check back to your social media marketing strategy and make sure that what you are doing on Twitter fits with your plan.

One of the weaknesses of Twitter is that people post whatever they are thinking about or doing at that moment, so there are pages and pages of banality to filter through as you look for people to connect with. Then there are people who post links to nonsense you won't be interested in, spam, and hours that you can sit and simply read streams of information.

However, Twitter has some excellent features from a marketing perspective, which we'll talk about below.

Hashtags

Do you remember not that long ago when we called the # symbol a number sign? Twitter has re-branded that symbol and it is now commonly called a hashtag.

When you add a hashtag to your message, you can track, organize, and communicate with other people who use the same hashtag. In order to communicate with their communities directly, a business owner can start a "meeting" and everyone there answers or asks questions that end with the same hashtag. People following along with the hashtag can see the conversation going on within its own stream, and outside of everyone else's conversations.

Say that you represent a business that sells smartphones and you'd like to get people talking about it and answer their questions before the next release is due out. You could set up a status update that says: "Join in on new I'm Smart phone apps Tuesday at 7 P.M. Eastern. Use #smarter." That message tells people what you are talking about, when to be on Twitter, and which hashtag to use. If you send the message out and change the wording slightly to catch people's attention, you can host a virtual

conversation that helps you connect to your community. You might try something like this: “New I’m Smart phone is out in two weeks. Come ask questions Tuesday, 7 P.M. Eastern. Use #smarter.”

Re-Tweets

By keeping your status updates short (the example above about #smarter is 98 characters), you leave space for people to forward your messages along to their followers by re-tweeting. The space that you left allows them to add a brief comment like “Great idea,” “A must see,” and so on. A re-tweeted status update also starts with the abbreviation RT. If your status is long, people can use MT in front, which stands for “modified tweet,” where they will edit your message so that it fits alongside their own.

If someone re-tweets the #smarter message, they might say something like this: “RT @helper New I’m Smart phone is out in two weeks. Come ask questions Tuesday, 7 P.M. Eastern. Use #smarter. <--Great idea! I’ll be there!”

Initially, your staff and friends can re-tweet messages if you ask them. You’ll soon see that if you are offering something of value to people, and your message catches their attention, that your messages will spread.

By looking under the “Interactions” tab and selecting “mentions,” you will be able to see who re-tweets your messages. By searching for your hashtag, you can also see who is using that moniker to connect.

As well, Twitter courtesy is to thank people who spread your messages by sending them a message via a status update, like this: “Thanks for the RT @helpful, @helper, @moniker.”

Your Name

Your name on Twitter needs to be a reflection of your brand, so choose wisely. Most people use their name, or their initials if their name is long. You need to use something so that people can find you. If your name is Martin MacDonald Smyth and people don’t really know if you are a Mac or Mc, or a Smyth or Smith, they won’t be able to find you and they may not look too hard. Make sure that you include a link to your Twitter name in all the obvious spots, like on your website, your blog, your Facebook page, and so on.

If you are using your business name as your Twitter name, remember to select something that represents your brand and reflects your marketing plan.

Keep your name short but meaningful. In status updates such as a re-tweet, or when someone wants to mention you in a status update, your name and the @ symbol get counted as characters!

Test Your Knowledge

Create good, strong, Twitter names for your business or personal use.

how I organize them, but you can make your lists public if you think other people might be interested in them or sharing the lists benefits you in some way.

You can create lists very easily and give them any name you want. Currently, I have lists for:

- Folks to watch
- Local businesses
- Media
- National businesses
- Training and education

The big advantage of lists is that you can check into Twitter quickly and see what's most important to you. When you have some extra time, by all means click on the Home tab and see everything in your stream. Lists are handy, however, to keep an eye on people you are most interested in.

Building a Blog

Should I Be Blogging?

This is becoming a more difficult question to answer. Three to five years ago, every business was starting a blog and it was essential to create a good one in order to promote your business. With the wide adoption of Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn (all sites from which you can microblog with short updates), blogs have had to adapt to stay on people's minds and remain relevant. In addition to **microblogging**, we can also create video blogs (or **vlogs**).

With people's very short attention spans, one of the key things to remember about blogging is to keep your blog posts short. Seth Godin, who writes about marketing and has a brilliant blog, sometimes creates posts that are only a few hundred words long. Whether you are creating short, informative pieces that are less than 500 words, or longer, more introspective pieces, you want people to read, remember, and think about your blog.

Choose a voice (the tone of what you say) that reflects who you are, what your company stands for, and catches people's attention. You can explore being informative, being controversial, asking questions, and having some fun.

Avoid the mistake that many beginning bloggers make and don't assume that you are a writer unless you really are. Instead, come from the position that you are learning to write and blog, and then behave like a student and learn what you need to do.

When it comes to getting started, our first recommendation is that you read as many blogs as you can, and see what's working (and what's not!). Notice the attention that they pay to page layout, length of posts, columns on the margins, pictures, color, and, of course, the content. You can look at some of the popular blog sites that offer free spaces, such as Blogger and Wordpress. Depending on who is hosting your hub site, they may also offer a blog space, or you can have one created for you.

When you start posting on your blog, you can create traffic by posting a link on your Facebook page, LinkedIn status line, or on Twitter to announce it to people.

Blog Rules

When you create a blog, there are some guidelines that can help you along. Like every other area of Internet-based marketing, things are changing continually, so make sure you keep on top of things.

When you write a blog post, you also add **tags** or **keywords** to it. This will help you to find your old posts, to categorize things, and for people to find what you are writing. Make sure that you set up some kind of analytics, too, so that you can see which posts attract attention, which ones didn't, and who is reading them.

Don't lose sight of your old posts. If your content is good, it has staying power. A blog post you wrote six months or a year ago that remains relevant can be included in another blog post or re-posted to Twitter because it seems like a timely topic. For example, if you write a great series of blog posts for health and safety week this year, you can refer back to them again at the bottom of a health and safety post that you write next year. Keep up the interest and don't be afraid to do a little recycling!

Your blog needs to **look like you are interesting**, and as though you are interested in your readers. There are lots of free and inexpensive templates available, or you can quite easily have someone set something up for you. Don't feel like you have to do all of these things yourself, but remember that you are responsible for your own outcomes and, ultimately, for the success of the blog. If you represent a design company, your blog had better be stunning to look at. If you are from a financial industries company, then your blog is expected to include some pertinent, informative, and meaningful information. Check back with your marketing plan and remind yourself what you are trying to accomplish and how you intend to get there.

You can use paid services that will promote your blog for you, but this can take up lots of money and actually lead you nowhere further than you take yourself. Do your research before you decide to use a paid service and remember to incorporate the costs into your social media marketing plan.

Research the **keywords** for your industry and set up a glossary so that you can use them (without overusing them) in your blog posts. There are lots of programs that can help you do this and someone on your marketing team will make a good resource for this. Using keywords will help search engines locate your posts and push your page to the top of the search listings. If you search for your own posts (or have someone test it for you), and things show up on the second page of search results, people cannot find you. This kind of search engine optimization (SEO) is essential if people are going to find you on any kind of social media.

Help People Find You

Make sure that you optimize your blog for the range of reading platforms that are available. If you don't know what I mean, have a look at a blog you like to read now (if you can't think of one, try www.velsoftcourseware.com/blog) and look at it from a desktop computer, a smartphone, and a tablet. On each device, your blog needs to look good and be readable. Don't expect that your readers are all coming to you via the same media, because they aren't!



Most blogs will allow (and encourage!) you to use RSS feeds to update your followers when you publish a new blog post. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication and is a way for you to distribute (or syndicate) your posts in multiple locations. You can place the RSS icon on your site, and then people can sign up to receive automatic updates every time you publish. This method is very straightforward for your readers, but does take some programming knowledge for you as a distributor. Your programming guru can help you with this.

Your readers can then get all their RSS feeds in one place and never have to search for your blog again. They can also organize their feeds in a convenient way where news, businesses, and friends are all updated in the same location (usually via an RSS reader or an aggregator). Individuals can set these feeds up through their web browser (like Mozilla or Google Reader), their e-mail application (such as Microsoft Outlook), or many other solutions. We don't recommend that you offer RSS as the only option, however, since many readers like being notified via e-mail.

What Will I Write About?

That is a very good question. What will you write about? What is it that you have to share with the world? Or, perhaps you've already been blogging and now you want to set a more certain direction, so your blog is ready for an upgrade!

First of all, you need to **set up a plan**. Don't feel like you have to blog every day, because you can flood people's e-mail and RSS feeds with nothing to say, and we don't want that! Instead, we suggest that you sit down and write about some topics that you think might be interesting or helpful for people who are interested in what you do or what you have to share. Then, go through the topic list and cross out anything that doesn't really interest you or that you don't want to share. Now that you have a list of topics, you can look at the list and decide how many of them you can write about each week. One? Two? Be honest, because after this course, you may also be updating Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

The **topic list** is important. You can keep it in a file on your computer and then add to it as interesting things catch your attention. This way, you should always have something to write about. You can also ask people to write guest posts for your blog, so that you get a great post and they get some exposure too. This is an excellent way to tap into your community of experts and advisors who have something to offer your readers, and also relieves you of some pressure to be constantly writing. (Unless you love the pressure of deadlines, in which case, go for it!)

Vlogs and YouTube

Video is a very popular form of communication and vloggers have adapted quickly to this technology. You can take your print blog and simply record yourself discussing what is there and add a video link to your blog, or you can use a site like ever-expanding YouTube (www.youtube.com) to set up your own channel, get people to comment on your vlogs, share instructional videos, allow people watch you in interviews, and much more.

Vlogs are created in a similar process to blogs, but they are normally more expensive to produce. You need to have a good room (with no noise, echoes, or interruptions) in order to record video and audio files. You also need to have some kind of editing software. No one really wants to watch the fumbles and mishaps that go on while you are recording, except for maybe your mom.

If you are creating a series of instructional videos, for example, you need to have the course well scripted and recorded by someone who has had instruction in drama, recording arts, television, and even music. Also, you must be very aware of copyright law at all times, especially if you want music clips in the introduction or credits, or during transitions.

There are people who create reasonable quality vlogs simply using their webcam and speakers with a decent microphone. Others create poor quality vlogs, and that can be a dint in your reputation. If you decide that you would like to be a vlogger, we recommend that you look at lots of samples and then speak with a few people in the recording arts industry or take some classes that are specifically about this topic. Once you do so, you are in a better position to decide if vlogging is something that you want to invest in either on an ongoing basis or as part of a special project.

Using Specialty Sites

The beauty of social media is that there are so many options. However, this can be a downside as well. Specialty sites allow you to focus your interactions, contribute to a community, and/or expand your network in a highly specialized place. We are providing some examples here, but we want to remind everyone that these sites are continually launching, evolving, and refining. We encourage you to keep your eyes and ears open for what is new and could be a good fit to your business.

Yammer

Yammer calls itself “The Enterprise Social Network” and is a social network for people within companies. Yammer allows you to chat, share, and collaborate within your company structure, without the distraction that is often attributed to public sites like Facebook or Twitter. When the company sets up an account on Yammer, all employees with a dedicated e-mail can also join. Members set up profiles, enter interesting information about themselves, and can communicate within their own company-specific site.

You'll find this site at www.yammer.com. At the time of writing, accounts were free, but Yammer has also recently been purchased by Microsoft.

Pinterest

Pinterest is a visually-based site that allows a member to set up a profile, start pinning pictures that they like, and organize their own pictures onto pinboards (like adding pictures to a bulletin board). People can link with you and create a network of shared interests based on your pinboards. While there are commercial benefits to this, there are also some challenges, particularly if you do not have a strong visual element to your business. However, if you start to pin things that might be of interest to your customers (including complementary and even competing products), this can help you to serve your network.

For example, someone who works as a dietician and counsels people on nutrition may not have a whole lot to offer. However, that dietician can pin all kinds of healthy recipes (including directions and stunning pictures) to share with their clients. A wedding planner has access to thousands of ceremony and reception ideas and a landscaper has a wealth of garden ideas for budgets of all sizes. Think outside the box and you'll probably think of an application for your business!

Pinterest can be found at www.pinterest.com. (As of this writing, this is a free service.)

SnapGuide

SnapGuide is an application that is specific for iOS products (such as iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch) that allows you to create an instruction guide that can be read on these devices. With a little effort and some really good digital photos, you can create a visually appealing instruction guide about any of your products or services and share them with your network. There are samples on the site that include instructions for entertaining, cooking new recipes, repairs, do-it-yourself projects, and a lot more.

You can link SnapGuide to your Facebook and Twitter accounts so that each time you publish a SnapGuide, everyone that follows you will get the message. This is a great option if you would like to spread the news about what you are doing and appeal to visual customers and prospects.

Visit www.SnapGuide.com for more details and to get in on the fun. (As of this writing, this is a free service.)

Staying in the Loop

There are other sites that list interesting networks, offer associations, and have the potential to help you market your business. However, there are many sites that come and go, so we encourage you to look for them online, particularly those that are related to your industry. No matter what you do, there is probably something out there for you. We have encountered sites that focus on dogs, athletics, organization, music, writing books, and more. Have some fun searching!

