

SOCIAL MEDIA

A GUIDE FOR ENTREPRENEURS



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WELL WORTH THE EFFORT

A VITAL BUSINESS TOOL

Long gone are the days when social media was just about posting your vacation photos or letting friends know what you were having for lunch. Today, social media has become a vital business tool that entrepreneurs can no longer ignore.

Social media is everywhere. We use it to make buying decisions, to stay in touch with friends and family, and to develop new relationships—both personal and professional. Yet only 35% of Canadian small and medium-sized businesses have a social media presence, according to a BDC survey in April 2012.

Many entrepreneurs are reluctant to get involved because they lack information. They're unsure about how to get started; concerned about what to post; and suspicious they won't get a return on their investment.

Business owners who didn't grow up immersed in the use of the Internet are often especially cautious. But even many entrepreneurs who use social media regularly in their personal lives don't know how to use it to move their company forward.

When properly harnessed, social media can help propel a business to a new level of success. That was the case for Rachel Mielke, owner of Regina-based jewellery company Hillberg & Berk. Her extensive use of Facebook and Twitter to market her company helped to increase sales by 2,000% between 2008 and 2012.



Rachel Mielke is one of several Canadian entrepreneurs whose stories are featured in this eBook.

Mielke is one of several Canadian entrepreneurs whose stories are featured in this eBook. They have learned to use social media to ratchet up sales, navigate changing market trends, scout for employees and nurture a devoted clientele. You can too—with the help of this step-by-step guide to making the most of social media in your business.

Along the way, you will see how your business may already be on social media—without you knowing it. Then, with the help of checklists, you will learn how to create a social media strategy, build your presence, produce engaging content and respond to negative comments on a consumer review site.

For entrepreneurs already on social media, we share best practices that help you gauge whether you're maximizing your efforts—plus valuable tools and case studies to help you improve your returns.

You will also see why traditional marketing techniques don't work in social media—and why a social media presence is vital if you want your business to be easily found online.

“Social media is a new way of using the power of word of mouth,” says André Goyette, a BDC Consulting Partner in Montreal who specializes in social media marketing. “And we all know what word of mouth can do for a business.”

Our aim is to help your business find its place in the social media revolution.

GETTING STARTED

You've decided your business should make the move into social media. But how do you get started? It can be a daunting question for many entrepreneurs, especially those who aren't web savvy.

Even businesses already on social media often wonder if they're maximizing their returns—or getting any returns at all from their efforts.

The good news is that with the right planning and a bit of effort and patience, you can learn to use social media to attract, engage and retain customers inexpensively. Once you have established your presence and learned the fundamentals, you will find that using social media is both manageable and rewarding.

Here are the steps you need to take before creating your first social media pages.

LISTEN AND LEARN

First, take a little time to educate yourself about social media. Monitoring conversations on social media—especially ones about your business or industry—is a critical first step in finding out where you should be focusing your efforts. This will give you lots of ideas about how to proceed once your social media presence is established.

Here's how to go about listening to social media.

- First, visit key social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to find out how they work.
- Click the “Help” links for more information, and look for material that explains how you can use the sites for business. Here are some examples of helpful web pages produced by the companies that run the sites:
facebook.com/business
business.twitter.com/
learn.linkedin.com/
youtube.com/t/about_essentials
- A good way to familiarize yourself with social media is to get some on-the-job experience. Create personal pages on the main social media sites if you haven't already done so. This will get you into the game and help show you

how social media could be useful for your business.

- Next, start listening. Use the search tools on social media sites to look for mentions of your business, products, brands, competitors and industry. (Read more in the “Monitoring and measuring your social media success” section of this eBook.) You might be surprised to see that people are already talking about your business even if you don’t yet have a social media presence.
- Don’t forget to check out what customers are saying about you on consumer review sites. These can be the most important sites influencing how people see many consumer-oriented businesses.
- Get a feel for how businesses use Facebook, Twitter and other sites, especially successful companies in your industry that have many social followers engaging in a lot of interaction. What kind of content do companies share with their fans and followers? What strategies do they use to engage people? What jargon and abbreviations are used on the sites? It’s not complicated—but it might take some time for you to become comfortable.
- Go deeper. Read blogs relevant to your business, and engage in conversations on social sites. Join discussion groups on LinkedIn. Scan further afield for lesser known sites that might be useful to your business.

CREATE A SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

A social media strategy is essential if your investment is going to pay off. A common mistake that many businesses make is rushing to create a Facebook page or Twitter feed without proper planning. The result can be wasted resources and poor results.

Here is a checklist of the key elements in your social media strategy.

- **Goals**—With the help of key employees, determine the main goals of your social media presence. Are they to attract more customers? Boost recognition of your brand? Improve customer service? Based on your goals, decide how you’ll measure your social media success (e.g. number of visits, number of followers and comments, how much your content is being shared, number of new sales leads, etc.) and set targets.
- **Audience**—Determine your target audience and its receptivity to various social media platforms. Focus your initial social efforts on platforms your audience likely uses most, experimenting as you go.
- **Content strategy and key messages**—Think about what kind of content will appeal to your target audience. Shoot for a balance of entertaining and educational material. Above all, avoid being overly self-promotional—a huge social media no-no.

Frame your content around key messages aligned with your marketing strategy and overall business plan.

“Develop a storyline for your business. What makes your company interesting?” says Michelle Blanc, an Internet marketing expert in Montreal.

How do you develop your key messages? Use your market knowledge and research, organize a focus group, or seek professional advice. But don't rely only on intuition, which could be misleading.

- **Engagement**—Your content should encourage your fans and followers to engage with your company and ultimately become or remain your customers. To do so, it should present the human side of your business and provide followers with benefits such as information, advice or entertainment. Periodically, you can go further and make direct calls to action—asking people to purchase a new product, take advantage of a special offer or sign up for your newsletter.

- **Social media action plan**—Now you're ready to create your action plan. Here are the important elements.

- > Who will do what?—Tasks to assign in your company include monitoring social media traffic, creating content, and posting to your sites and other social media sites. Allocate adequate resources to employee training, and consider hiring a social media manager.

And be sure to communicate your social strategy to employees, working to secure the buy-in of staff, from top managers on down.

- > Publishing schedule—The lifeblood of social media is regular updates. Without them, you won't build the kind of engagement with your followers that you're looking for. Work out a publishing schedule specifying how often each of the platforms will be updated and by whom.
- > There's no firm rule on the best publishing frequency. Your audience may respond differently than another company's. The ideal frequency can range from several times a day for a fast-moving site such as Twitter to several times a week for Facebook. Revisit your publishing schedule if you're not getting enough feedback from followers or your online community isn't growing.
- > Experiment with the timing of your posts during the day to see when you're getting the most interaction with your followers.
- > Take stock of your existing digital assets. Interesting content that readers find useful is critical in building your social media following. But you don't have to create all your content from scratch. You may have a lot in your files to get you started.

Make an inventory of your existing assets, such as guides, articles, presentations, videos and photos. Consider what you could rework for social media. Keep in mind, however, that existing content will only take you so far. Successful companies usually create fresh material geared specifically to each social media platform. For more content ideas, check with suppliers and business partners to see what they could contribute. Finally, be sure to think about innovative ways to get your audience to contribute content.

- **Follow up**—Monitor your efforts to ensure you're hitting your targets. Also, revisit and update your social media strategy regularly.





“Social media has allowed people to get to know us and trust us before we physically meet them.”

Pierre Martell, President,
Martell Home Builders

CASE STUDY

PIERRE MARTELL MARTELL HOME BUILDERS

Pierre Martell knew virtually nothing about social media when he got started. But he did know he needed help with his young home-building company in Moncton, New Brunswick. He was having trouble attracting clients in a tough market. And he had no money for advertising.

Martell decided to harness the low-cost power of social media. He created a YouTube channel and posted short interviews with contractors offering renovation tips. It was a soft sell aimed at boosting his profile as an expert and building trust with potential clients. The only advertising for his business was a company banner in the background.

Martell quickly added a robust presence on Twitter and Facebook. His social media efforts have contributed to rapid growth at Martell Home Builders. Sales are up fivefold since his first YouTube videos went up four years ago.

Martell's social media strategy focuses on directing traffic to his website. There, visitors can see a two-minute video about his business and read the company blog. This content and Martell's social media efforts have been key to reducing his average sales conversion time (the time between first contact with a customer and a sale) from seven or eight hours to two hours.



Martell Home Builders' Facebook page

“Social media has allowed people to get to know us and trust us before we physically meet them,” says Martell, who has more than 12,000 Twitter followers. “Now when people call, they already know us.”

Martell’s social media strategy promotes his fresh and innovative brand with fun, imaginative content that lets employees’ personalities shine.

He suggests getting started by focusing on one or two social media sites. “Figure out what you like to do and are good at, and do that. If you have a good presence, do YouTube videos. If you have no time or don’t like to write, Twitter is a good option.”

Especially vital, he says, is to engage with visitors. “One of the biggest mistakes is people start self-promoting. If you push too much, people will stop listening to you,” Martell says.

“You always want to be helping, adding value and giving information. Then you become a thought leader, and other people will start to promote you.”

Resources:

themartellexperience.com

youtube.com/user/martellhomes

CREATE A SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR EMPLOYEES

Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and other social media can help employees increase their visibility in the community, reach more customers and stay up to date. At the same time, many employees are avid users of social media in their personal lives.

So it's no surprise that the distinction between professional and personal use can be blurry. Here are some best practices to ensure that employees use these sites appropriately and limit their personal use during working hours.

Write a clear social media policy for employees after gathering their input. Keep a positive tone, and avoid focusing on disciplinary action for misconduct. The policy shouldn't be too restrictive and should allow employees to be good company advocates. It should cover the following elements.

- Employees should be careful to separate their personal and professional social media presence. They should be mindful of their reputation, and assume that clients and future employers can read information on their personal accounts. Social media posts and “likes” can remain online forever.
- If an employee mentions your business in the profile on their personal social media page, they should include a disclaimer in the profile saying their opinions and comments do not necessarily reflect the point of view of your company or its management.
- Most experts say personal use of social media tools on company time shouldn't be prohibited, but employees should be encouraged to limit it in the same way they restrict their personal telephone calls or Internet use. Company time is for company business.
- Posts should be consistent with promoting and protecting the company's reputation and brand image.
- Employees must avoid revealing proprietary or sensitive information.
- If sharing links with work colleagues, employees should be sure the sites are reputable and reflect well on your company. The same advice applies to employees joining online groups.
- Revealing personal information online makes your company more susceptible to spam, pranks and identity thieves.
- Ask employees to get permission from other employees, clients or business partners before publishing names on sites. As well, they should respect copyrights and guard against plagiarism by properly crediting the creators of the material they use.

- When posting on topics relevant to your business, employees should be transparent about their role in your company and stick to their area of expertise.
- Encourage discussion of social media issues between employees and the person or people designated to handle your social media. Ensure that employees consult the appropriate person in your company before answering any media inquiries.

EVALUATE YOUR WEBSITE

As you embark on your social media strategy, it's a good time to think about the quality of your website. After all, that's where you're likely going to be directing social media traffic.

- Be sure your site supports your overall business strategy. Visitors should be able to easily understand what you do and how to navigate your site. They shouldn't have to do a lot of scrolling up and down web pages or clicking through pages.
- Prominently feature a call to action and contact information to help convert visitors into customers. Your call to action should be a clear message to prospective customers. (For example: "Call us today.") Draw more attention to it with an accompanying

image. As well, the call to action button is most effective when a click takes visitors to a "landing page," a special web page where they can make their purchase directly or find detailed contact information.

- Use graphics that have visual impact but are not overly busy and distracting.
- Check with a professional to ensure that search engine optimization strategies have been used to attract potential customers to your site. Google search results now take into account how much websites are shared or discussed in social media, which means it's also important to make sure your site is evaluated for its "social media optimization." For example, your site should feature social media sharing buttons and compelling content to encourage visitors to interact with your site. Your social media sites also help promote links to your website, which also boost your Google search rankings.
- Prominently display links to your social media pages on your website, including, ideally, at the top of your home page.

To help, BDC offers a free website assessment tool at BDC.ca/testyourwebsite.

Resources:

hubspot.com/social-media-marketing-kit/

radian6.com/resources/library/social-media-etiquette-%E2%80%93-minding-your-manners-on-the-social-web/

marketo.com/b2b-marketing-resources/best-practices/the-definitive-guide-to-social-marketing.php

9 DO'S AND DON'TS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

- 1 Know your goals and target audience. Focus your social media activities on them.
- 2 Grow your audience by offering helpful, value-added information.
- 3 Remember that social media is about building relationships. You can't buy loyal social media fans, any more than you can buy friends in real life. Be likeable and don't take yourself too seriously.
- 4 Content should be creative, authentic and truthful. Do something different to stand out.
- 5 Be polite, respectful and generous. Use the same tone as you would if you were talking with a client in person.
- 6 Don't use a hard sell. Avoid being pushy. Instead, allow people to come to you. The idea is that an engaged follower is more likely to become a customer.
- 7 Don't post material that's inappropriate or outside your area of expertise.
- 8 Don't stop learning and listening to what's being said about you, your company, your industry and social media. Social media is changing fast, so it's important to keep an eye on developments.
- 9 Be patient. Like any relationship, social media success takes time to build. "Social media isn't free," says Richard Toker, a marketing communications consultant in Toronto. "It's relatively easy and can be free to create, but creating a presence is the tip of the iceberg. Building a following is not free because it takes a lot of time. The only way social media is going to work is to hammer away at tasks on a daily basis. You have to be disciplined and apply yourself."



ESTABLISHING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Now you're ready to create your social media presence. This section gives an overview of the major social media sites, including their benefits for businesses, and leads you through the steps to follow in setting up your pages.

It is generally a good idea for your business to have an account on every major social media site in order to reserve your place and protect your brand. However, it's also advisable to initially focus the bulk of your efforts on one or two of the sites as you learn.

Choose sites that suit your personality, your company's goals and culture, and your industry. Focus especially on sites preferred by your clients.

Here are some other best practices that apply to all social media sites.

- Customize and personalize your social media pages. Be sure to include visuals, such as your logo and brand colours. Also, consider using images of people at work in your business and customers (while being sure to respect privacy and get consent, if needed). "Social media is about having regular conversations with your customers and community of interest," says Robert Begg, Vice-President of Marketing at Radian6, a firm that provides social media monitoring and engagement solutions. "It has the ability to truly 'humanize' your brand."
- Setting up your page is simple enough to do yourself, but a professionally customized page reflects better on a business in many cases. BDC Consulting can help with expert advice on establishing your presence on Facebook and other social media sites.
- Review your settings after you create a social media account. You can usually find the "Settings" tab at the top of your social media page. Settings control such things as how you share and receive information, and who can post and make comments on your page.

Familiarize yourself with the settings, and be sure they are set appropriately for your needs.

- Familiarize yourself with social media platforms by reading each site's how-to material, usually available by clicking the "Help" link on the home page.
- Be sure to keep up to date on new features and changes in terms of use.

FACEBOOK

When people think about social media, Facebook is the first site that usually comes to mind. If Facebook were a country, its 1 billion active users would make it the third-largest nation in the world.

It's a medium that businesses can't afford to ignore. Even if you're not on Facebook yourself, someone on the site could be talking about your company. At the very least, your industry and products like yours are probably being discussed.

Facebook was created in 2004 for college students to socialize online, but it's since expanded into a powerful tool for businesses to connect with customers. A Facebook page is more dynamic than a website and easier to create and maintain. It has tools that allow you to interact easily with clients and showcase your business and its culture.

Your Facebook business page helps you foster a community of loyal clients and others who can spread your message. Visitors who want to follow your company's activities click the "Like" button on your Facebook page, which means they agree to subscribe to your updates.

Your posts may then appear in their personal Facebook "news feed"—the first thing they see when they log in. What's more, every time they interact with your Facebook page (for example, by writing a comment), this activity may get posted in the news feeds of their friends.

The power of Facebook is word of mouth. The average user is connected to 190 "friends" and shares, on average, 30 pieces of content (web links, videos, articles, etc.) each month. This means the right message can spread explosively to a massive audience.

"When you get new fans, they're saying, 'Yes, I welcome your information.' They can become a captive audience," says Jocelyn Archambault, President of Laval, Quebec-based ID-3 Technologies, which offers social media consulting services to BDC clients.

"It's even better than word of mouth, because your messages can spread through their networks."

Here are some tips for creating a Facebook business page.

- First, go to Facebook.com, and create a Facebook personal account, if you don't already have one. Click "Sign Up," and enter the requested information as instructed.
- A Facebook account is what most people on Facebook use to interact with friends and family. Users often refer to this as a "Facebook page," but in official Facebook terminology, it's actually a "profile." A Facebook page, which is what you need for your business, is something different. It requires another step to create.
- Once you have a Facebook profile, click "Create a Page." (This link is most easily found at the bottom of your profile.) Or go here: facebook.com/pages/create.php. Follow the instructions for creating a company page.
- Some companies make the common mistake of using a Facebook personal profile for their business. This violates Facebook's terms of use and could cause your account to be terminated. A Facebook page also has features better suited for businesses. For example, on a Facebook personal profile, you have to individually approve each person who sends you a "friend" request. A Facebook page lets visitors click the "Like" button, which automatically adds them to your company's network.
- A Facebook page also allows an unlimited number of fans (unlike a profile, which limits you to 5,000 friends). And a Facebook page lets you designate multiple administrators.
- Give your page a human face with lots of visuals, while being careful to comply with privacy restrictions on publishing photos and Facebook's terms of use. (For example, Facebook doesn't allow price information or contact details to be used in your cover image.) Prominently display your logo and other branding elements. Visitors should have no doubt they're at the right place—Facebook is littered with knock-off sites and multiple pages with similar names. Click "Edit Page" to add profile information on your business and change your settings as appropriate.
- When you create your page, the URL (Internet address) will include a long random number. Give your page a custom URL—for example, facebook.com/coffeeshop—in order to make it look more professional, easier to promote and easier to find in web searches. Get a custom URL for free at facebook.com/username.

Resources:

facebook.com/business

hubspot.com/marketing-ebook/how-to-use-facebook-to-grow-your-business/

mashable.com/guidebook/facebook/

TWITTER

It's hard to imagine that a social media site allowing messages just 140 characters long could achieve such wild popularity—let alone become an important tool for businesses.

But in just six years, Twitter has amassed over 140 million active users who generate over 340 million daily messages (called “tweets”). The site gets 1.6 billion search queries each day, making it the web's third most popular search engine after Google and YouTube.

Twitter lets businesses easily share information and deepen relationships with clients. On your Twitter page, other users can sign up as “followers” of your tweets, which means they receive your messages on their Twitter page. The site also allows them to interact with you instantly—sending comments, questions, compliments or complaints.

Montreal Internet marketing expert Michelle Blanc, herself an active tweeter with more than 30,000 followers, says Twitter is the digital era's version of the water-cooler—a thriving meeting place where you can engage with customers, journalists, bloggers and industry personalities. “Do you want to enter a dialogue with people who will influence consumers about your brand?” she asks. “Of course you do.”

To gain even more feedback and market insights, you can also search all tweets for mentions of your company or industry. You can respond to customer questions or concerns, foster a community of loyal clients, and participate in conversations to raise your brand profile.

Here are tips to get started on Twitter.

- Go to [Twitter.com](https://twitter.com), and follow the instructions to sign up for an account. Click “Help” at the bottom of the page to read about Twitter basics.
- Sign up with a user name. But first, carefully consider what user name will best reflect your company and brand. This will be part of your Twitter page's internet address.
- Customize and personalize your page to make it look more professional by clicking “Edit Your Profile” at the top of the page. You can include a profile photo and change the background image to a photo of employees, your company logo or an attention-getting image.

Resources:

business.twitter.com/

[hubspot.com/
twitter-for-business-marketing-kit/](https://hubspot.com/twitter-for-business-marketing-kit/)

johnjantsch.com/TwitterforBusiness.pdf

mashable.com/guidebook/twitter/



“We’re trying to stay top of mind with people, and Twitter gives us a better understanding of what people are interested in.”

Karri and Nico Schuermans, co-owners,
Chambar Restaurant



Chambar Restaurant's Twitter page

CASE STUDY

KARRI AND NICO SCHUERMAN'S CHAMBAR RESTAURANT

Twitter is an important part of the success of Vancouver gastronomic entrepreneurs Nico and Karri Schuermans. The couple owns the award-winning Chambar Restaurant and embarked on an ambitious expansion in 2007.

They've since nearly doubled sales by adding a thriving breakfast and lunch restaurant, a cooking school, a deli and their own Belgian-style beer brand.

Twitter has played a key role in helping the couple foster a community of enthusiastic customers and stay on top of changing tastes. “If we weren’t using Twitter, we would know less about our customers and their interests,” Karri Schuermans says.

Chambar has more than 3,300 followers subscribed to its Twitter messages, while its Dirty Apron Cooking School has 5,600 followers. Its tweets talk about special events and offers. They also personalize the company by describing what its key people do in their spare time, like chef Nico Schuermans’ 8,000-kilometre journey on the TransAmerica Trail in 2011.

Chambar’s renowned sommelier Robert Stelmachuk has a separate Twitter account with 2,300 followers, where he shares wine information and talks about pairings with various dishes.

“There’s a resurgence of people wanting information on food,” Karri Schuermans says. “It’s rewarding to talk about it and see how people react. We’re trying to stay top of mind with people, and Twitter gives us a better understanding of what people are interested in. If you’re not using it, you’re missing out.”

YOUTUBE

With more than 800 million visitors per month, YouTube is the most popular site on the web after Google and Facebook. The average visitor watches half an hour of YouTube videos each day. YouTube is also the world's most popular search engine after Google, with 4 billion monthly search queries.

"It's kind of staggering. That means consumers are saying if there isn't a video on this, they're probably not interested," says Richard Toker, a marketing communications consultant in Toronto.

Little wonder that many entrepreneurs are finding innovative ways to use the site. A YouTube channel is an easy and inexpensive way to reach potential clients with videos that help a business stand out as an industry leader or niche player.

The site is also a good way to engage your customers and get their feedback through comments. And you can search YouTube for videos relevant to your business.

YouTube can showcase the CEO and other employees who make your business successful. "People like to see people. If you're buying a product or going on a trip, it's nice to read about it. But it's better to see a video," says André Goyette, a BDC Consulting Partner in Montreal who focuses on social media.

Here are tips for getting set up on YouTube.

- Go to [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com), and create a YouTube account using the "Create Account" link at the top of the page. Select a user name that reflects your company and brand.
- Access your YouTube channel by clicking your user name at the top of your YouTube account page, then clicking "My Channel." Uploading videos through your channel makes them easier to find on the web. People who subscribe to your channel will be notified on their YouTube homepage about new videos.
- Click "Channel Settings" to customize your site, and enter information about your company and a link to your website. Under "Info and Settings," choose a title for your channel, a description and "tags" (keywords relevant to your business) to make it rank higher in searches.
- Also under this tab, you can keep others from viewing your channel until it's ready for public consumption by leaving the "Make my channel visible on YouTube" box unchecked.
- Upload videos by clicking the "Upload" link at the top of the page.

Resources:

youtube.com/t/about_essentials

LINKEDIN

With more than 175 million members (including 5 million Canadians), LinkedIn is one of the largest social media sites and the biggest professional network.

LinkedIn has unique features that make it a vital social media site for businesses, professionals and employees. Like Facebook, LinkedIn's heart is the ability to connect with others and post professional and personal updates that are seen on the home page of everyone in your network. The difference is that LinkedIn is more geared to professional networking, while Facebook is more oriented to general social interaction.

LinkedIn has tools allowing you to easily and quickly build a large network of business contacts to whom you can send messages and post updates about your company. The site is also a fast-growing method of recruiting, thanks to its powerful job search tools.

LinkedIn also allows your company and employees to join and create discussion groups relevant to your business. This lets you raise your profile and establish your company as an industry leader.

Here are some tips for getting going.

- Go to [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com), and follow the instructions to create a LinkedIn page. Create a page for your company, and ask key employees to create their own personal pages, which they can use to be your advocates.
- Be sure to customize your profile page by adding company information and a company logo or photo.
- Also, create a custom URL (Internet address) for your LinkedIn page that reflects your company and brand, making your page easier to find and market. (Until you do so, the URL will include a series of random numbers.) Do so by clicking your username at the top of the page, then clicking "Settings" and "Edit Your Public Profile." Then click "Customize Your Public Profile URL," and follow the instructions.

Resources:

learn.linkedin.com/

[hubspot.com/
linkedin-for-business-marketing-hub/](https://hubspot.com/linkedin-for-business-marketing-hub/)



“We want to show it’s fun to work at Frima. Our goal is to attract people to work here and promote our brand in our industry.”

Steve Couture, CEO,
Frima Studio

CASE STUDY

STEVE COUTURE

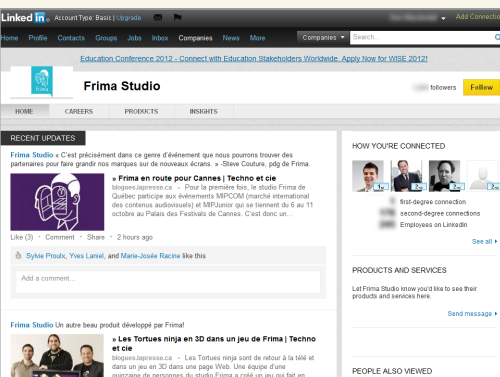
FRIMA STUDIO

As one of Quebec’s fastest-growing companies, videogame maker Frima Studio is always on the lookout for top-quality talent to fill job openings. In just six years, Frima has shot to 350 employees from 20. And social media has played a crucial role in filling that huge appetite for new employees.

LinkedIn is one of Frima’s main recruiting tools, says company CEO Steve Couture. “Human resources are super important for us,” he says. “We want to work with the best in the world. To get the best, we have to generate a lot of interest.”

Frima uses LinkedIn to post updates about job openings to its nearly 1,180 followers, who may in turn pass them on to their connections, potentially reaching tens of thousands of people. Frima also scans the updates it receives from its connections to check for people who have left a job and are newly on the job market. This is especially helpful when Frima is looking for specialized personnel. The site also tracks who has viewed Frima’s profile information. If it’s someone who looks like a possible employee, Frima might get in touch to feel the person out.

The company is also very active on its Twitter and Facebook pages, where it features photos and posts about fun company events and parties to showcase its easygoing workplace. “We want to show it’s fun to work at Frima,” Couture says. “Our goal is to attract people to work here and promote our brand in our industry.”



Frima’s LinkedIn page

BLOGS

Blogs (short for web logs) are the oldest form of social media. They first rose to prominence in the early 2000s when bloggers broke several high-profile news stories before the mainstream media. Many businesses have since adopted them as a versatile online tool.

With more than 150 million blogs in existence, they are gaining ground on traditional websites in popularity. Companies with blogs get 55% more web traffic and 126% higher sales lead growth than those without one, according to research by Internet marketing company HubSpot.

A blog is much easier to create and maintain than a traditional website. Blogging platforms offer easy instructions for creating a blog and a variety of templates you can use to design its appearance.

Blogs include tools for visitors to comment on your posts and subscribe to them. The platforms also include tools allowing you to monitor your traffic and track sales conversions.

Businesses can also host a blog on their own website, but this requires some technical knowledge or the help of a website developer. A regularly updated blog hosted on your website can improve your site's search engine rankings.

Many businesses use blogs to show the human side of their company by featuring the president or key employees sharing their views and offering useful content. It's a good way to foster a sense of community around your business by showcasing your expertise and interacting with customers in the comment section.

Create your business blog using these tips.

- Visit the major blogging platforms to see which is best suited to your company's needs. Some offer free blogs, but you can get more features through a paid blogging platform.
- Follow the instructions to create your blog. Customize your blog by adding images and information on your business, and by changing the template (appearance) and settings, as appropriate. You can also use the settings to create an internal blog that can only be seen by those with permission, such as your employees.
- You should aim to post at least once a week. But what's really important is to be consistent and keep the focus on your area of expertise as a business.

GOOGLE PLUS

Google Plus is one of the fastest-growing social networking sites, with 400 million users signed up (100 million of them active) since it was launched in June 2011.

Google Plus has been lauded for its simple, clean look and features that offer great versatility for business purposes.

The site has innovative tools allowing group meetings and video-conferencing. It also allows you to easily organize contacts into various groups (which the site calls “circles”), such as friends, family, acquaintances and work colleagues. You can choose what information to share with each circle, which makes it simple to manage work and social interactions all on one platform. For example, you might share some industry news with work colleagues, while sharing vacation photos with friends.

The site also gives you easy access to all of Google’s other services in a single place, such as Gmail, Google Drive, Google Talk and Google Calendar. Another strength: a search engine that allows you to scan posts for mentions of your company and other relevant topics.

Here are tips for getting started.

- Go to Plus.Google.com. Follow the instructions to create a Google account, if you don’t already have one. Then go here to create a Google Plus page for your business: plus.google.com/pages/create.
- Click “Profile” at the top, then click “Edit Profile” to customize your page and add photos.

OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

The social media universe includes a fast-growing collection of lesser-known sites that offer a vast range of features that are useful for businesses.

Because there are so many sites, it's impossible to give details here on how to get started with all of them. Here are some general tips.

- Visit the site, and click on the “Help” or “Learn More” button, which is usually at the top of the home page. Some sites also have a business support page specifically for companies.
- Create a personal account at the site and start exploring. The best education often comes from hands-on experience.
- Google the site's name and “for business.” The search results should include information on how the site can help businesses, including checklists and articles.

Here is an overview of the main types of sites.

Location—Location-based social networking (sometimes called geosocial networking) allows users to interact based on their location. These sites are especially handy on smart phones. Users can track friends' locations, plan gatherings and share recommendations for venues, such as restaurants and events. Businesses can benefit by offering rewards to users who check in at their outlets.

A prominent example is foursquare, which allows users to share their whereabouts by checking in at various locations. They can earn discounts, rate venues and use the site to meet up with friends.

Social bookmarking—Social bookmarking sites such as StumbleUpon, Delicious and Digg let users recommend web pages or store their web bookmarks (their library of saved web pages) online so they can access them from any computer. Users can also share bookmarks with each other. Getting listed on such a site increases web traffic. Businesses can take advantage of these sites by adding a button to their website making it easier for visitors to recommend or bookmark their site.

Content sharing—Content-sharing sites such as Instagram, Pinterest, Flickr and SlideShare allow businesses to share photos, presentations, videos, guidebooks, documents and other files. While YouTube is by far the most popular such site, many others offer specialized platforms that may be useful for marketing your business.

Group buying—Increasing numbers of small businesses are tapping into the power of group-buying sites, an online phenomenon that is attracting millions of bargain-hungry shoppers. Sites such as Groupon, TeamSave and LeRenard provide deep discounts on products and services with deal-of-the-day coupons offered on the site and via email.

Consumer reviews—See the “Monitoring and measuring your social media success” section (page 45) for more details on these sites.



CREATING CONTENT FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

You're now ready to start posting on your business's new social media pages. This can be the hardest part for many entrepreneurs. What do you say? Where do you say it? And how?

Social media is a different animal than a website or traditional advertising. In those media, your message is mostly based on talking to people. Social media is all about engaging with people to build relationships. The idea is that, once engaged, people can be swayed toward your goals. Social media can be powerful, but not without the right content.

Robert Begg, Vice-President of Marketing at Radian6, likens it to making friends in real life. "You can't buy friends," he says. "If you want friends, you have to give, give, give. Make deposits in their emotional bank account. If you help people, they'll help you."

Building a following in social media works the same way, Begg says. Imagine how you would build friendships if you were to move to a new town. "You're not going to have 100 friends right away. It's a slow build.

"The traditional marketing approach is to buy attention. In a new town, that would be like paying people \$1,000 to come to your party and then spending the party telling everyone how great you are. Not many of them will end up as your friends."

Keep this analogy in mind when you're deciding what to put on your business's social media pages.

CONTENT BEST PRACTICES FOR ALL SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Here are some best practices for creating social media content and building a social media following that apply across all social media platforms. Further on, you will find more detailed suggestions for specific social media sites.

Listen and learn

- Again, listening is the first step. Look at other companies' social media efforts, especially in your industry, to see what they have done. Focus on businesses that have succeeded in attracting many followers.
- Review posts and comments to learn how businesses engage their community and what their fans are interested in.
- Also, search social media sites to see if people are already talking about your company and products.

Engage your audience

- The key to social media success is offering interesting, relevant content that your followers will find compelling and want to share with their networks. This is the power of social media: word-of-mouth marketing and peer referrals. Ninety-two percent of consumers say they trust word-of-mouth recommendations from friends

and family, compared with only 36% who trust sponsored ads on social networking sites, according to an international Nielsen survey in April 2012.

- Try not to simply display the same content on every site. Find a different voice for each platform.
- Post regularly according to the publishing schedule you set out in your social media action plan (see page 8). Social media pages quickly lose fan attention if they're not updated regularly.
- Hard-sell marketing is a big no-no in social media and will turn off visitors. Save that for advertising or your website. Remember: You're trying to build relationships. Find ways to be of service to your online community. Speak with your audience—not at them. For example, an auto dealership could blog and post videos about car care tips. Or remember how Moncton home builder Pierre Martell built a thriving business using social media? (See the case study on page 10.) Instead of just trying to promote his business, he posted YouTube videos of contractors sharing renovation advice with home owners.
- Be fun and imaginative. Do something different. Don't be afraid to try something new.
- Good examples of content include how-to blog posts, links to useful articles, educational videos, Q&A sessions with knowledgeable

employees, announcements of live events and industry news. Also, draw on the existing digital assets you identified during the “getting started” stage, and keep your eyes open for excellent content developed by others.

It’s especially effective to use lots of strong visual content, such as charts, photos, infographics and videos. With today’s information overload, you should be careful not to overwhelm your audience with too much text.

Your aim is to establish your page as the hub of a thriving community and a go-to resource, which will ultimately help fuel more sales. Your posts should focus on your area of expertise, but you can cast a wide net, offering links to content that is interesting, informative and apt to build a deeper relationship with your audience. One caveat: If you have a short sales cycle, be careful not to include links that send traffic to websites other than your own; rather, drive traffic to your website or use applications that allow you to convert visitors into paying customers right on your social media page.

- Your company’s existing digital assets can be useful, but it’s also vital to develop fresh content geared specifically to each platform. That doesn’t mean starting from scratch for every post on each site. Say you have a bakery business, and you’ve made a video offering baking tips for your

YouTube channel. You probably came across other interesting content in your research—advice on buying and storing ingredients, a funny cartoon, an interesting article to link to. These are perfect for your other social sites.

- To get a steady stream of relevant material for sharing, create a Google News Alert with topic keywords at google.com/alerts. Then you will automatically receive articles, blog posts, videos and other online material about those topics by email. You can also get lots of content by subscribing to RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds available on many websites, which will automatically deliver posts directly to various free RSS readers such as Google Reader (see google.com/reader). In your Twitter account, create a Twitter List of people you follow who post good material, which you can then “retweet” (forward to your followers) and post on other social media properties.
- Guard against plagiarism. Be sure to properly acknowledge other people’s material when using it. Don’t post someone’s article or other material without ensuring it’s in the public domain and acknowledging the source.
- Ask employees to come up with content ideas and to contribute to company social media pages themselves.
- Encourage audience contributions and participation. Ask fans to post their comments, stories, photos and videos

on your page. Ask customers for written or video testimonials, and post them. Invite product feedback.

- Be authentic and truthful; build trust, and listen to what your audience says. Ask questions, and be sincere in seeking opinions.
- Respond promptly (generally within 24 hours) to those who interact with you. Be sure to thank those who contribute, and respond to any customer issues. All this interaction will also help boost your following by making your feed livelier. As well, fans' interactions with your pages may automatically pop up on their friends' feeds, encouraging them to follow you.
- Put a human face on your business. Use photos and videos to show the people behind the scenes at your company and events (while respecting privacy and obtaining consent if needed). Express personal views (though not on controversial subjects). "It's important for the business to have faces and personalities, and to be real and approachable," Begg of Radian6 says. "Those personalities are what made the business successful offline. So why not show them online? I'd rather connect with a person sharing real ideas they're passionate about than a faceless company."
- Build engagement by holding contests where you offer discounts or prizes. Contests will help you attract more followers but should be designed to find and retain those who are genuinely interested in your business, not just looking for a freebie. Be sure to tie your contest in some way to your products, brands or business goals (such as collecting customer feedback). Also be sure to check applicable federal and provincial regulations regarding contests, as well as the social media platform's contest guidelines.
- Regularly survey your audience. Surveys are a good way to solicit customer feedback and engage with your audience. Boost the number of respondents with a draw for a prize at the end (while, again, being sure to respect the social media platform's contest rules). Surveys will also help you build a following.
- Liven up your website or blog with plug-ins from social media sites. Plug-ins are tools that allow your audience to make comments, or share or recommend your content. Other plug-ins allow you to create a feed of your social media messages on your website. For example, Facebook offers information on its plug-ins here: developers.facebook.com/docs/plugins/. You may need technical help to install these. Be sure to respect the use conditions of the various social media platforms for reproducing their logos on your web properties.
- For companies that do business with other businesses, rather than with consumers, the same best practices apply. But you'll get especially good responses from your followers with industry-specific content: regulatory

and market news, Q&As with industry leaders, research by your organization and others, photos and videos of events hosted for clients, white papers, industry-related Twitter chats, posts on industry awards, links to professional development material and blog posts on technical issues.

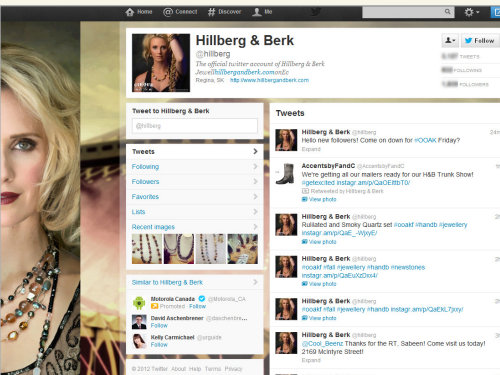
Build a following

- Promote your new social media pages to kick-start a following. Invite people in your personal and business email lists to subscribe, as well as contacts from your personal social media pages. Display links to your business social media pages prominently on the home page of your company website and, when possible, on your products. Those links should also be in your email signature line, marketing campaigns and printed business materials, such as letterhead, business cards and store signs. Submit your social media pages to social bookmarking sites.
- In your posts, regularly ask visitors to share your content with their friends.
- Visit other social media sites where your business or industry are mentioned, and post helpful comments or articles. That will help establish you as a thought leader and draw traffic to your own social media properties and website. Join discussion groups, and post there. Offer to contribute guest posts on blogs of interest to your customers. Avoid blatant self-promotion, but invite people to contact you offline or to read an article you've written for more information. Include your social media pages and website in your author bio whenever possible.
- Consider buying ads on social media platforms, such as Facebook Ads and LinkedIn Ads. Social sites have lots of personal information about users and have mined it to offer businesses highly targeted advertising based on precise demographics and geographic location. You can use the ads to home right in on your target audience without wasting precious ad dollars on anyone else. You can then continuously optimize your advertising based on what works because you can get detailed data on who your visitors are and which campaign or other source brought them to your site.
- In addition to paid ads, you can also buy sponsored content to expand your reach. Examples on Facebook are Sponsored Stories and Promoted Posts, which let you increase the number of people who see your fans' interactions with your site. Also, Facebook's Offers allow you to send special deals to your fans and friends of fans, and the site's Check-in Deals allow you to reward customers who check in on your Facebook page. Meanwhile, on Twitter, you can buy Promoted Tweets, Promoted Trends and Promoted Accounts, all of which allow a business to pay to have a targeted audience see its tweets, campaigns or feeds.

- Paid ads and content are most effective if they combine strong visuals and language with a clear call to action.
- Be sure to follow applicable laws on targeting minors with your ads. Even though some social sites bar users aged under 13, many children are still active on social media.

Resources:

radian6.com/blog/2010/06/social-media-listening-measurement-and-engagement-primer/



Hillberg & Berk's Twitter page

CASE STUDIES

RACHEL MIELKE HILLBERG & BERK

Rachel Mielke started making jewellery as a hobby in high school. In just six years since starting her Regina-based company Hillberg & Berk, she's had pieces showcased on the Academy Awards and built a celebrity following. She also landed a venture capital investment after appearing on CBC's *Dragons' Den*. Despite a slow economy, sales have increased 20-fold between 2008 and 2012.

Social media has been a key part of Mielke's success story. "It's so much easier to reach out to your target customer through social media," she says. "It has really allowed us to build a better relationship with customers."

Mielke actively uses Facebook and Twitter, and has also put a live feed from both platforms on her website to make it more dynamic. She uses monthly contests to build her social media following. For example, she asked fans to post their favourite piece of Hillberg & Berk jewellery on Facebook for a chance to win \$1,000 worth of prizes.

She advises other entrepreneurs to start by creating a social media strategy. "Decide what you want out of it and how much time you are willing to dedicate to it. Then track the results."



“The more we do with it, the more we realize what can be done.”

Christine Lundahl, Chief Operating Officer
Dahlson Industries

CHRISTINE LUNDAHL DAHLSON INDUSTRIES

In Calgary, Christine Lundahl uses social media mostly as a recruiting tool. Her company, Dahlson Industries, is a manufacturer of custom steel equipment for the oil patch. Orders have grown so fast that Lundahl is short of employees and sometimes has to turn away work.

She uses Dahlson's Facebook page to showcase her company as a good employer and industry leader. Employees have a section to post photos of their projects. The page also offers monthly safety tips and invites fans to participate in regular contests for a chance to win prizes such as an iPod. Dahlson also uses targeted Facebook ads to publicize job openings.

It's paid off with more job applications and international brand awareness, Lundahl says.

Dahlson has also worked hard to boost its Facebook fan base, holding a safety logo contest that significantly increased its number of followers and built engagement with them.

“The more we do with it, the more we realize what can be done,” Lundahl says.



Dahlson Industries' Facebook page

BEST PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL NETWORKING CONTENT

This section presents best practices for writing content and building a following on social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Most social networking sites don't offer much space for long posts. But there's another reason to be concise: A lengthy, solid block of text is even more of a turn-off online than it is in a newspaper or magazine. What's more, a short post is easier to read on a mobile device and thus more likely to get shared. (More than 600 million people access Facebook on a mobile device each month.)

Keep posts brief, using short paragraphs and sentences. This is especially true for headlines and the opening sentences of a post, which should be catchy, grab attention and communicate a benefit to the reader. Your posts should be clear, conversational and simply worded. Avoid industry jargon. Try to generate audience reaction. Here are some other best practices.

- On Facebook, engaging content is especially important because it helps determine your visibility on the site. If your posts attract a lot of likes, comments and posts by others, they're more likely to appear in the

news feeds of your fans. If your posts don't prompt a lot of interaction, they'll appear a lot less.

- Nearly three-quarters of interactions on Facebook occur in the first hour after a post is made, says *The Definitive Guide to Social Marketing* by social marketing software firm Marketo. "Keep your interactions up by posting more often and by being online and available right after you post. In other words, don't post and go to bed," the guide says.
- Visual content is especially critical for promoting interaction on Facebook. One tip: If you stage an event, post lots of photos on your Facebook page, then encourage your fans to tag themselves. (A "tag" is a way for someone to add text identifying a person in a photo.) When they do so, their activity is noted in their friends' news feeds, giving your page a promotional boost.
- On LinkedIn and Facebook, use the search tool at the top of your page to look for groups relevant to your business. Both sites have thousands of discussion groups and pages on a wide range of topics. Join groups of interest, monitor discussions, and participate to help potential clients and establish yourself as a thought leader. Also, on LinkedIn, monitor the LinkedIn Answers Q&A forum (linkedin.com/answers/) for relevant posts, and contribute when appropriate.

- On LinkedIn, create your own group by clicking the “Groups” link at the top of your page, then clicking “Create a Group.”
- Build your following on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter by adding people from your email contacts lists and other online address books. On LinkedIn, for example, click “Add Connections” at the top right of the page, and follow the instructions.
- Also on LinkedIn, use the “Recommendations” feature (under the “Profile” tab) to ask clients and partners to recommend your business, products and people.
- Also, be sure not to ignore LinkedIn requests from potential clients, partners and industry contacts (unless you believe they’re mass mailing “spam” messages). Jocelyn Archambault of ID-3 also suggests regularly reviewing the “Who’s Viewed Your Profile” box in the right-hand column of your home page, which can provide potential leads and connections.
- On both Facebook and Twitter, Marketo’s social marketing guide suggests a “4-1-1” rule for content: Publish four fun or educational posts for every one “soft promotion” (e.g., an event announcement) and one “hard promotion” (e.g., take advantage of a special offer).
- On Twitter, engage your audience with tweets about events, links to interesting articles, surveys and contests. You can hold a contest that asks participants to contribute a photo or other content. Your Twitter feed should ideally be a mix of your own tweets, retweets and replies.
- You can also organize a regular Twitter chat (also known as a Twitter party) for followers by including a “hashtag” (the # symbol along with a unique identifying word, such as “#mychat”) in your tweet. This lets followers tune into the discussion by searching for the hashtag in the Twitter search bar.
- Build your Twitter following by following others, especially industry figures and other influence leaders active on the site. Use the search tool to find people who regularly post about keywords relevant to your industry, then click “Follow” beside the person’s user name to start receiving their tweets.
- Twitter’s powerful search tool (twitter.com/search) is a good place to search for tweets about you, your company and topics relevant to your industry. Look for opportunities to answer questions in other users’ tweets or to give helpful information, and invite the person to contact you directly or to visit your social media pages or website. Click “advanced search” to narrow your search—for example, to tweets emanating from near your company’s location.

- Be sure your tweets conform to consumer protection regulations about announcing promotions. If you don't have enough space in your 140-character tweet to include all the required information, add a link to rules and regulations in your tweet or make the announcement on another social site.

Resources:

[hubspot.com/
facebook-for-business-marketing-kit-2/](http://hubspot.com/facebook-for-business-marketing-kit-2/)

BEST PRACTICES FOR BLOG CONTENT

Blog posts are typically longer than social networking posts, but they should still follow the same rules of brevity, clarity and focus. A post should get to the point quickly and have a clear, brief headline that explains what it's about. Blogs lend themselves especially to educational content and advice. Here are other blogging tips (including some inspired by a checklist by social media consulting firm HubSpot).

- Report and analyze industry news in an accessible way. Include links to news stories, data, videos, etc.
- Liven up text with a lot of photos and video.
- Lighten your writing load and broaden your appeal by using guest bloggers who don't necessarily work for your company.
- Write how-to and top-10 lists. People love these.
- Review books about your industry.
- Prominently feature a search bar on your blog so visitors can look for posts on topics of interest to them. (The main blogging platforms all offer an optional search feature that you can install on your blog.)

- Use the label or category feature available on many blogging platforms to specify the topic of each post. This will help visitors find posts of interest to them using your blog search tool. It will also help your posts rank higher in search engine results.
- Add social media sharing buttons. You can use the sharing features available on many blogging platforms or free tools such as AddThis or ShareThis.
- Be sure your blog posts and titles include keywords relevant to your business. Using these words will help your blog get noticed when people look for these terms via search engines. Your keywords should be specific enough to capture how your business stands out and what needs you satisfy. For more information, read up on the principles of search engine optimization.
- Your posts should include links to relevant content on your website and other social media properties to promote more traffic.
- Adjust your settings to allow you to moderate (allow or reject) comments. Blogs receive automated messages, which should be rejected. You may also receive abusive or offensive comments you will want to delete. But don't be too quick to nix constructive criticism or viewpoints you don't agree with. Remember you're interacting with a community now, and that may involve healthy debate.
- Make sure your settings allow visitors to subscribe to your blog by email.
- A blog can be a good place to share longer electronic documents, such as guidebooks, studies and white papers. Use your review of existing digital resources to identify such documents.

Resources:

hubspot.com/blogging-kit/

socialmediaexaminer.com/10-top-business-blogs-and-why-they-are-successful/

BEST PRACTICES FOR VIDEOS AND PODCASTS

Video and podcasts (audio files posted online) don't need to be of Academy Award quality to have a powerful impact. As with other social media content, keep videos and audio files concise. (A long file is less likely to be watched or listened to, while professionally produced content is more likely to be successful.) For video, the person being filmed should make good eye contact with the camera and speak clearly. For audio, speaking clearly is even more important. Here are some other tips.

- Ask customers to contribute video testimonials to post on your social media pages, or arrange to shoot them yourself.
 - Make how-to videos demonstrating your products or services, and answering common questions.
 - Post video and audio of events.
 - Record a tour of your office or plant.
 - Feature employees at work. Showcase their work. Show them doing non-work activities that promote your company's human face.
 - Don't forget to post company information including where to find your website and other social media pages.
- Here are tips for building a following for your videos and podcasts.
- At the end of your videos and podcasts, invite viewers to share your content and subscribe to your social media updates.
 - Embed videos and podcasts on your website, and promote them through your social media properties.
 - Tag your videos with appropriate keywords to make them easier to find on the web.
 - On your YouTube channel, consider organizing videos into playlists with common themes.
 - Also on YouTube, show visitors the channels you subscribe to. This helps build a sense of community and establishes your channel as an industry resource.

APPLICATIONS

Software programmers have created a dizzying array of applications (or apps, for short) that can enhance social media pages. Many apps are useful for businesses. They help you create, share and manage content. Some are free, others are paid. Apps are available to help you to:

- > manage all your social pages via one dashboard, allowing you to save time, manage a complex publishing schedule and keep messaging consistent
- > host campaigns or contests
- > create a store on your social media page
- > collect your fans' email addresses
- > make phone calls and manage your finances through a social networking page
- > store and share documents
- > share video
- > search for and analyze trends in social networking posts.



Search these sites for apps suited to your business:

facebook.com/appcenter

squidoo.com/twitterapps

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
List_of_Twitter_services_and_applications](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Twitter_services_and_applications)

[linkedin.com/
static?key=application_directory](https://linkedin.com/static?key=application_directory)



“The videos let customers engage with us as people, not just as customers.”

Jim Hogan, President and co-founder,
VMAC

CASE STUDY JIM HOGAN VMAC

Innovation is a byword at Jim Hogan’s company VMAC (Vehicle Mounted Air Compressors). The Nanaimo, B.C.-based company pioneered compact, powerful air compressors that revolutionized Hogan’s industry.

The product put VMAC on *Profit* magazine’s list of Canada’s 100 fastest-growing companies four years in a row. VMAC was also named one of Canada’s best companies to work for.

VMAC brings the same creative touch to social media. It has a Facebook page and a Twitter feed, but its biggest breakthrough has come on YouTube. More than 33,000 visitors have seen the 25 videos on its YouTube business channel, with one video garnering more than 15,000 views alone.

Some of the videos explain the company’s unique products, but most introduce visitors to the employees who make it a success. VMAC’s line-up includes videos of an arm-wrestling match and a paper airplane contest for employees.

“The videos let customers engage with us as people, not just as customers. The web is a very visual medium, and YouTube lends itself very well to that,” Hogan says. “A YouTube video is less expensive than a TV commercial, and the return is much higher. It’s also easier to grab someone with a catchy two-minute video than a page of text.”



VMAC's YouTube channel

MONITORING AND MEASURING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS

MONITORING

Say you own a restaurant and learn that a dissatisfied customer has criticized last night's dinner in a social media forum. What do you do? How do you find out what other customers are saying about you?

Monitoring is your first step. You need a way to gather all your customer feedback so you can respond promptly and deal with issues before they harm your reputation. The information you collect can also give you invaluable intelligence for product development, on the state of your competition and on market conditions. It should also help you determine how to engage better with customers, both in social media and offline.

Here are best practices for monitoring social media.

I. Create a monitoring routine

First, create a social media monitoring routine. It will be executed by the person or people you designated in your social media action plan, described in the "Getting started" section. Step one: Every day, check your social media pages for new comments and other contributions from readers. Engage with your followers as appropriate—thanking people for contributions, answering questions and addressing customer concerns. Also take note of feedback; this can be important business intelligence.

Check for new fans or followers, and see how people are interacting with your content and pages. For example, look at who those fans are; who has retweeted your Twitter posts; who has looked at your LinkedIn profile; and how many people have viewed your YouTube videos and subscribed to your channel. This will tell you how your audience is engaging with various types of content.

The next step in your monitoring routine should be a search of other social media sites for content relevant to your business. You can do this daily or several times per week, depending on the volume of relevant material you're finding. Look for mentions of your company, brands and products; consumer questions and complaints; candidates for job openings; content to share in your social posts; and industry news. Here's how.

- **Facebook**—Log into your account, and type your search terms into the search box at the top of the page. Click “Public Posts” to focus your search on public Facebook posts.
- **Twitter**—Log into your account, and do searches using the search box at the top of the page. Or just go to twitter.com/search. After you do your searches, click the gear symbol at the top right, then “Advanced Search,” to narrow your results to messages emanating from your local area or written by certain people.
- **LinkedIn**—Log into your account, and type search terms into the search box at the top right. You can filter searches in many ways. For example, select “Updates,” then type in a company name, industry or profession (such as “engineer”) to search status updates for people who have recently left their job and may be prospective hires. You can also narrow searches to your city. Select “Answers” or “Groups” to search for relevant keywords in Q&A forums and discussion groups.
- **YouTube**—Go to youtube.com, and enter your search terms in the search box at the top of the page. Once you get your initial results, click “Filter” to narrow your results, as appropriate.
- **Blogs**—Go to google.ca, and enter your search term in the search box. Click “More” on the left of the page, then click “Blogs” to narrow your search to blog posts. You can also search for media mentions on Google News.
- **Google Plus**—Log into your account, and use the search tool at the top of your page.
- **Consumer reviews**—Check consumer rating sites relevant to your business for possible mentions. (See page 45 for more details.)

2. Automate your monitoring

Automate your searches to save time. Paid and free services are available to help you do this. Free monitoring services include TweetDeck, Topsy and Social Mention. Here are two other useful free tools.

- **Google Alerts**—This service from Google (google.com/alerts) lets you create multiple alerts for various keywords. The alerts deliver the search results for your keywords in a message to your email address on a daily, weekly or as-they-occur basis (depending on your settings).

You can direct the alert to search news, blogs, discussion forums, video or the entire web.

- **Google Reader**—Use Google Reader to automate some of your social media searches and pages and get results on a single page. First, create a Google account, then set up a Google Reader page (google.com/reader/). This free service has tools allowing you to automate blog and Twitter searches in one place and to subscribe to feeds from some social sites. Do so by clicking “Browse for Stuff” on the left-hand side of your Google Reader page, then clicking “Search.” Enter search terms in the boxes provided, and click “+Subscribe” to get the results delivered to your Google Reader page.

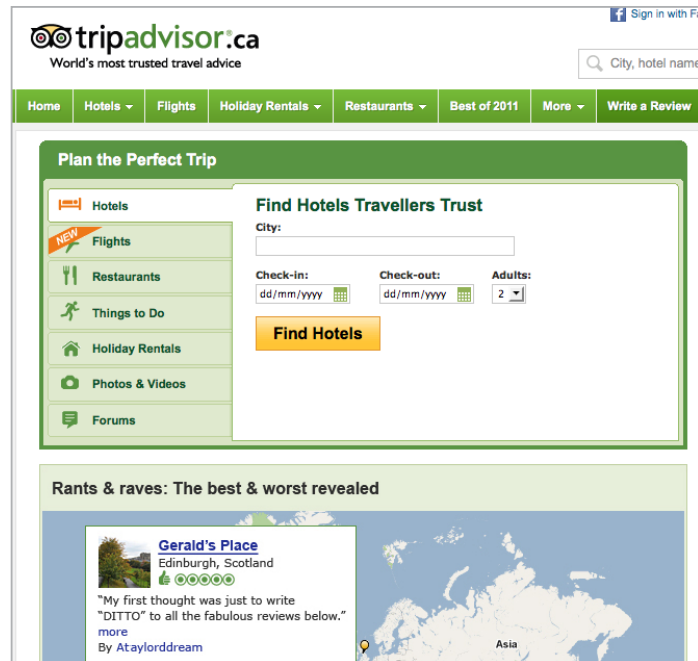
Of course, paid tools offer more features and better analysis of results. Examples include Radian6, HootSuite and Trackur, all of which monitor vast volumes of social traffic relevant to your business, distill it into dashboards to track your social footprint across all platforms, and measure how well you’re engaging with and influencing people.

Resources:

radian6.com/resources/library/the-guide-to-social-media-monitoring/

hubspot.com/social-media-monitoring-in-10-minutes-ebook/

slideshare.net/HubSpot/the-science-of-analytics

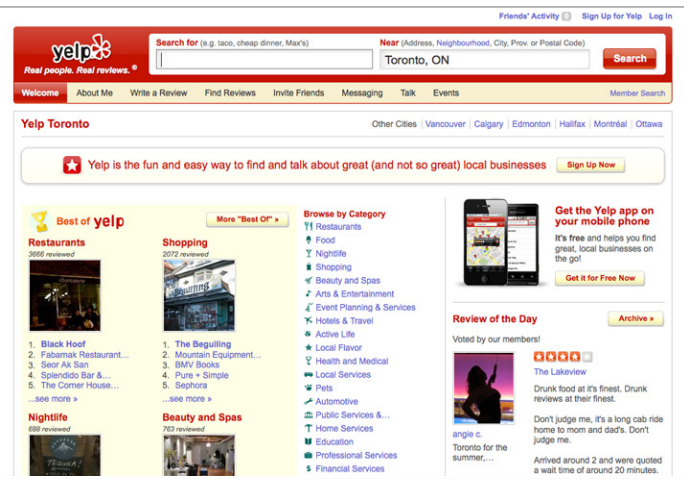


TripAdvisor's website

3. Check consumer review sites

If they're going on a trip or buying a car, the first thing most consumers do these days is consult a consumer review site. Sites, such as TripAdvisor and Yelp, are one of the key ways social media has changed consumer behaviour.

The sites contain reviews of a wide range of businesses, services, products and professionals—everything from restaurants to hotels, electronics, mechanics and doctors. These sites are especially important to monitor because a consumer review site is the first web search result that comes up for many companies.



Yelp's website

Four in five consumers have changed their mind about buying a product after reading negative information online, according to a 2011 survey by market analysis firm Cone Inc. On the other hand, 87% of consumers said positive information online has reinforced their decision to buy a product.

While businesses can't control what's said on review sites, they can manage their reputation in other ways. Here's how.

- Monitor sites relevant to your business. Look not just for mentions of your company and products but also at what customers are saying about your competitors. This is invaluable intelligence.
- Be sure you are listed on relevant review sites, if possible with a link to your website. Display a link to this listing on your other web properties.

- Never post a customer's positive feedback without first getting their permission. Never post fake reviews, but do invite customers to contribute testimonials.
- If you see a positive review on a site, mention it on your other web properties.
- Respond to negative reviews using the best practices outlined below. (See Create a reputation management checklist on page 47.)
- Be aware that a bad review isn't always bad news for your business. Studies have found one or two negative comments can actually be better than an unbroken stream of glowing reviews. That's because consumers are suspicious if the picture is too rosy and find it more credible when there's a variety of comments upon which to base their judgment. As well, responding constructively to criticism shows people that you care about clients and want to help them.

4. Create a reputation management checklist

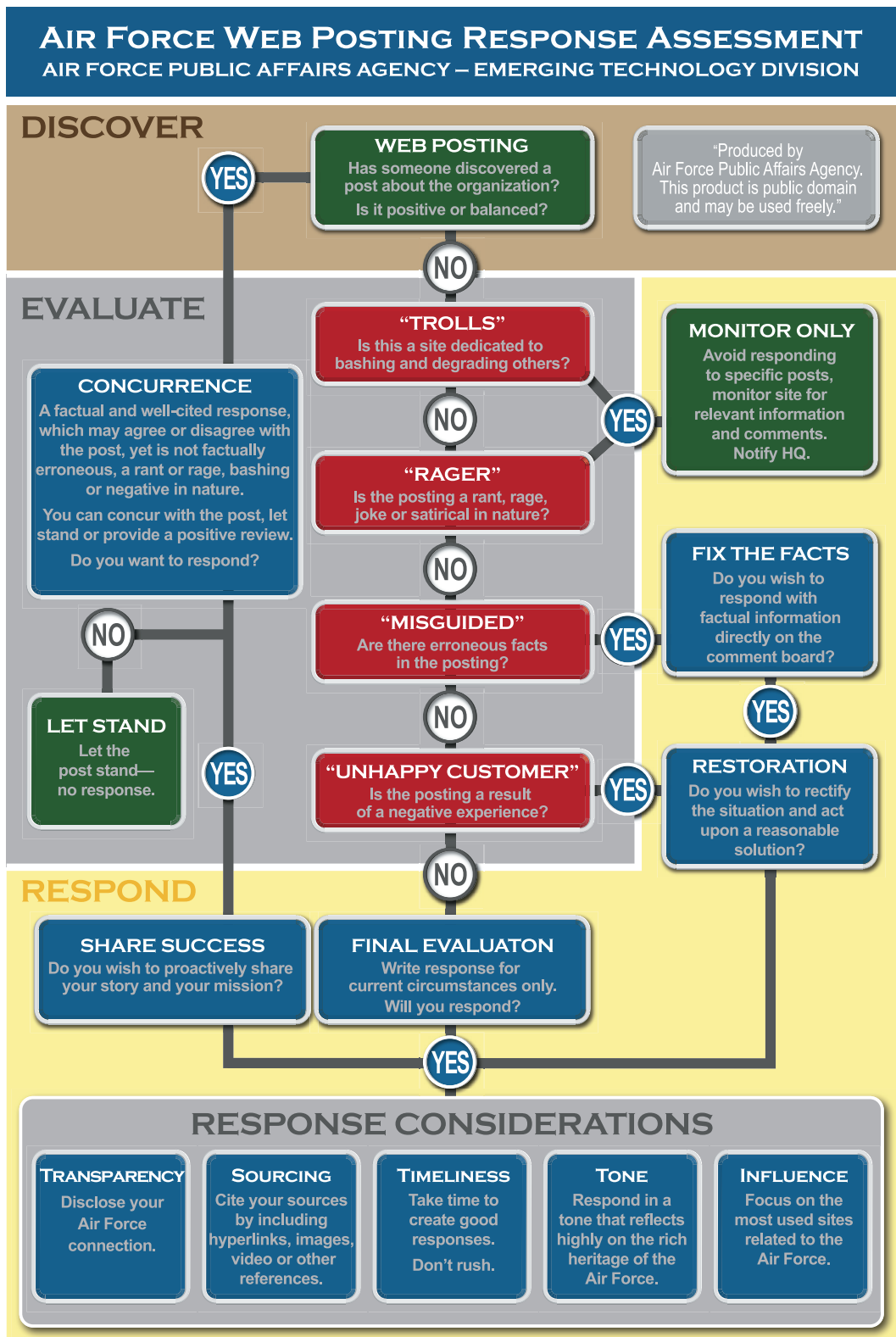
Most mentions of your business in social media are likely to be positive or basic product questions. When you see such mentions, respond promptly, beginning with a thank you. Deepen your relationship by taking the time to give a full answer, and perhaps offer a link to a useful article or web resource. This will build trust and encourage others to make contributions. Also, invite the person to subscribe to your social media pages and visit your website for more information.

For negative comments, the key is to be polite, truthful and transparent. “This shows you’re present, open to discussion and trying to get better,” says Jocelyn Archambault of ID-3.

Here are some best practices for dealing with negative social media posts.

- Create a customer service script for staff, including a standard approach for resolving issues or moving them up the ladder to a superior.
- Respond to issues promptly.
- Be polite, calm and neutral in tone, regardless of the language used by the other person.
- Use simple, conversational language, as if the person were in front of you.
- Be truthful and transparent. Correct any misstated facts—yours or theirs.
- Don’t block or delete critical comments, unless they use offensive language or are mean spirited.
- Invite the person to work out issues offline, if necessary. A phone or face-to-face conversation is often best for resolving issues.
- Look into problems and fix them. Go back to the original post and provide an update on the resolution, if the customer hasn’t already done so. The community reading the post will want to know that everything worked out in the end (assuming it did).

The diagram on the following page shows how one organization—the U.S. Air Force—deals with social media posts about it.



MEASURING YOUR RESULTS

You might be actively tweeting, posting how-to videos and updating Facebook. Now, you want to keep track of how well you're doing. Without this information, it's hard to know which efforts are paying off and how to optimize your resources.

The simplest way to measure your efforts is by watching the number of fans you get on your social media pages. But that's not always a good indicator. What's more important is the volume and quality of interactions on your sites—comments, likes, retweets, etc. This is a good sign that your site has attracted the right kind of fans—people whom you can sway to meet the goals and targets you set in your social media strategy.

“If your goal is sales lead generation, your metric is how many leads you got and their cost,” says André Goyette of BDC. “If it's customer service, how many customers did you touch, and has it saved you money? If you're on YouTube, what would the cost be of getting those viewers in another way?”

You can use a paid service to get detailed data to gauge and improve your social media efforts. Free tools also exist that can analyze your sites and rate your social marketing influence based on how well you engage with fans. These include Klout, Kred and Peerindex.

Here are some best practices for the main methods of measuring the effectiveness of your social media efforts. (The list below includes tips inspired by *Practical Social Media Measurement & Analysis*, an eBook by the social media firm Radian6.)

1. Online traffic

This is the simplest metric for measuring your results. Get traffic data on your social media efforts using free tools available on most social sites and blogging platforms. You can also use the free Google Analytics tool (google.com/analytics) to get detailed data on traffic to your website from your various social media sites. Monitor such information as the following:

- > traffic volume metrics, such as the number of visits, page views and fans
- > engagement metrics, such as the number of comments, liked posts or favourited/shared tweets versus your page's total number of fans
- > competitive position (compare your engagement metrics to your competition's)
- > cost of engagement (compare your social media budget and time spent on social media efforts to the number of interactions on all your social sites, such as comments, liked posts, retweets, etc.)
- > length of time visitors stay on your page

- > sales conversion rates for social media followers versus those from other sources
- > number of content downloads; sign-ups to an email list, blog or newsletter; contact form submissions; contest entries; and survey responses.

2. Return on investment

Determining your return on social media efforts can be difficult because it may be hard to establish what role they played in each customer's decision to purchase. However, you can still try to get an indication of your return in a couple of ways.

- You can create a dedicated Internet landing page or promotional code available only to the followers of your social media pages, then track just those sales and see if the income from those sales exceeds your social media spending. The drawback to this approach is it doesn't include other purchases that your social media fans may have made.
- An alternative metric is correlation. Create a timeline where you plot your social media activity (new or relaunched social pages, special promotions, ad campaigns, etc.) and sales results. Look for possible correlations, keeping in mind that correlation doesn't necessarily mean causality (i.e., other factors may have influenced sales fluctuations).

3. Sales lead generation

The key for this metric is to track the source of your leads. If the source isn't clear, ask how the person found you. You can also:

- > include a field in your contact form asking how customers found you
- > track your website traffic from social media sites
- > determine what percentage of total leads come from social media, and break this data down for each social media page
- > track and compare how many leads you get per follower on your various pages to determine where you're being the most effective.

4. Customer service

Calculate how much you're spending on customer service, then determine your daily cost per issue resolved. Track this figure for your social media sites versus your other channels, such as phone, email and web support. Also factor in peer-resolved issues in social media discussion forums that didn't need in-house attention.

Resources:

radian6.com/blog/2010/03/social-media-measurement-analysis/?utm_source=ebook&utm_medium=pdf&utm_content=Primer

WELL WORTH THE EFFORT

Successfully using social media takes time and patience. You shouldn't expect overnight results. But it's well worth the effort. Consistently listen, measure and learn. Then adjust your strategy on the basis of what's working best. It's a continuous cycle.

As an entrepreneur, you are already close to your customers and business partners. Social media is about making those relationships deeper and building new ones.

If you don't have the knowledge and expertise you need, BDC is here to help. Our team of independent and objective professionals can offer the advice you need to get started with social media or take your existing social media efforts to the next level.



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