

The Social Media Marketing Advantage for Small Businesses – SAMPLE

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Social Media Marketing Today

Marketing, just like other phenomena, continues to evolve with the passing of time. For a while, banner ads and keyword campaigns used to be the advertisement of choice in the cyberspace. However, the change in technology and evolution of social relations online resulted in a new way of marketing - Social Media Marketing (SMM). Companies, especially small and newly-established ones, can take advantage of Social Media Marketing techniques and reach a broad market quickly and inexpensively.

What is Social Media Marketing?

Social Media Marketing (SMM) uses the resources of Web marketing through social media sites with the purpose of building ideas and concepts, raising Internet visibility, managing PR, branding and reputation, and above all, promoting products and services. Social Media Marketing incorporates podcasts, blogs, references, online videos, message boards, and posts on social networking sites to reach a great mass of audience. Other examples of media used for Social Media Marketing are news sharing, game sharing, and photo sharing.

The primary goal of Social Media Marketing is to advertise to the masses; therefore it makes use of various popular social networking sites that attract a huge number of users.

The top 10 Social Media Sites:

- 1.Digg
- 2.Del.icio.us
- 3.Wikipedia
- 4.Flickr
- 5.Reddit
- 6.Newsvine
- 7.StumbleUpon
- 8.Technorati
- 9.MySpace
- 10.Yahoo! Answers

Aside from the above-mentioned websites, other popular social bookmarking and networking sites include Ma.gnolia, Yahoo! 360, LinkedIn, Squidoo, Wikihow, Ning, Frappr, Furl, Wetpaint, and 43 things.

How Social Media Marketing Boosts Small Businesses

Social Media Marketing is simply a form of advertising that reaches out to a wide range of target audience in a fast, convenient, and inexpensive manner. With the use of social bookmarking, media, and networking sites, a small-medium business entrepreneur can afford to promote their services or products on the Internet without dipping into profits.

The secret to effective Social Media Marketing is focus. Social Media Marketing experts recommend targeting a limited number of websites that serve the needs of a specific target market instead of focusing on numerous social media and bookmarking websites. The rationale here is that not all Web readers or visitors will buy your product or service. So instead of fishing for traffic in highly irrelevant websites earn real audience at websites that provide Web visitors with the same or related service to what your company offers.

Furthermore, learning about a social media site's characteristics, its strengths and weaknesses, can help you know how to efficiently use each site for your small business. For instance, if your aim is to generating leads from users of social networking sites, sites like MySpace, Friendster, and Multiply may prove more beneficial than Digg, Pingoat, and Technorati.

Aside from focus, another important element of Social Media Marketing is earning credibility. This means that you have to deliver exactly the product or service you promised. For instance, when you are using a blog to promote your products, a great description and title of your article or entry must be supported by useful and informative content. Web readers will not read your entire article and click on your links if you have poor content over-stuffed with keywords. When you are using a blog or writing an article for Digg, it is advised that you link to other sites generously but only if their content is relevant to yours.

Important Characteristics of Social Media Marketing

The actual definition of Social Media Marketing is something that is still not completely determined. But whatever the final definition may be, Social Media Marketing has unique characteristics that can be used as references when discussing its meaning:

1. Social Media Marketing allows people to participate and contribute

Many people participate regularly in Social Media Marketing. One example of the most popular sites is YouTube, which gets around 25 million visitors each month. This simply indicates that a lot of people enjoy communicating with others in interactive communities. By using YouTube alone, a company can increase its chance of attracting more clients, especially if its videos are interesting and are of high quality.

2. Social Media Marketing is open, direct, and transparent

Social Media Marketing has to be honest - it must disclose the company's nature to easily build trust with current and prospective clients. It is important to be truthful in dealing with online viewers the same way one would when dealing with friends off-line. Remember that a company's brand image rides mainly on how people see them, thus, in using social media marketing, being honest and open is important.

3. Social Media Marketing builds relationships

In Social Media Marketing for small businesses, it is important to establish connections with those people who visit and contribute often. To do so, conversations must be maintained for a certain period of time. Conversations must occur in real time with real people. Customers do not merely wish to be offered products and services; they want to be connected and be heard. Keep in mind that each customer can bring you referrals, do not treat online communication as a one-time sale.

4. Social Media Marketing is community focused

Social Media Marketing for small businesses depends entirely on online communities. This is because online communities are the most trustworthy source for information and review a certain product or service. People provide opinions based on their real-life experiences. What companies must remember is the most valuable opinions are the ones that have not been endorsed or sponsored.

This may seem a bit controversial, but only on the surface. If you offer a good service or product and take care to build relationships with online communities, you will get un-endorsed positive opinions and the word about you will spread. This, however, requires patience and time. Do not expect an overnight hype about your product. If you decided to focus on generating sponsored opinions, this too will help you increase sales, but it will be not be as lasting and not as cost-effective, you will need to be feeding and sources and constantly looking for new ones.

Overall, Social Media Marketing is an excellent medium for a small business or young startup. It allows you to promote your products and services while also building lasting relationships in targeted online communities.