

How to choose the best social networks for marketing

Being effective in social media marketing requires choosing the right social networks on which to spend time and effort (and money). And you do have to choose because a) there are too many networks and b) some will work better than others.

To choose the “right” social networks you should consider:

Your offering. Are you a retailer or a service provider? How much explanation does your offering require?

Your target audience. Who is buying your product or service? Where does the target prefer to receive information? Where is the target likely to make a decision?

Your strengths. Are you visual or do you like words? Are you more likely to take and post pictures or write a 1000-word blog post?

Where have you had the most traction? If you haven’t yet been measuring response, then start right away. Google Analytics will tell you where people are coming from, and this is very valuable information. If most of your customers are coming from a particular social network, it makes sense to focus your energy and effort there.

I met a blogger who writes about event planning, and she gets the most visits to her blog from Pinterest. So she focuses exclusively on building her Pinterest presence. Then there’s the women’s clothing and accessories retailer who gets most of her online orders through Facebook. She has decided to budget for Facebook ads and sponsored posts and it is really paying off.

In both cases, these people understand their product/service

and where to best market it. And they have decided to really focus on the social network that provides the most bang for the buck.

How many social networks do you focus on? Are you finding some work better than others?

It's so basic, it makes sense!

Have you ever been to a networking event where you meet people, ask what they do and they give you a long rambling explanation or a very obscure description. You are then confused and ask them to clarify, and then they say this: Basically, I do [something you can understand].



Aha by Himmelskratzer on Flickr

Some people can just give you their job's title, such as chief counsel at xyz industries, and you can understand what they do. And some people have easy to understand professions such as doctor, accountant, insurance sales or real estate development.

Also, describing yourself as the “senior” manager or vice president does not help explain what you do.

But take for instance someone I met recently. He started off by telling me where he works (a company with advocacy in the name, but that doesn’t actually advocate). Then, he told me they work with individuals who are looking to ensure their access to financing (or something like that). Then he said: “Basically, I sell insurance.”

Generally, when you start a sentence with basically, you are about **distill the essence of something to its most UNDERSTANDABLE part**. Like a structural engineer who tells you that basically, she works to make bridges safer. Or the content strategist who tells you that, basically, he works with companies to find the most relevant information for their customers.

So before you go to your next networking event, or write your about page on your website, ask yourself: what is it that you do (or your company does), basically?

If it’s basic, it generally makes sense!

UPDATE

Media trainer Brad Phillips has a great suggestion for improving your elevator pitch: start with the why. Here’s a link to the post on the Mr. Media Training blog.

Did Mad Men write this commercial?

Now, I should say upfront that I do NOT watch Mad Men, the AMC series about the advertising business in New York City in the 1960s. However, I do know that it shows the very real sexism of the time that ran rampant in advertising agencies. Women were generally in support staff positions rather than as creatives or agency principals (come to think of it, even in the 1990s, when I worked in advertising, the agency principals were all men...).

On the radio a couple of days ago, I heard a commercial for a home security company. In the spot, a woman is narrating and telling the audience that since her husband started traveling a lot for business, she is afraid to be alone in her house. And because she wishes to retaliate against her husband for taking the job that makes him go out on the road so much, and leaving her all alone, she has decided to get a home security system so that she can feel safe. Now, if she hears a noise, she doesn't need to reach for the Xanax, but rather look at her computer screen and monitor all the rooms in the house. (I am not making this up, except for the Xanax part.)

The commercial makes several assumptions:

- 1.) Women are afraid to be alone (being the weaker sex and all).
- 2.) Only men have (big, important) jobs that require travel.
- 3.) Women can make the decision to buy something, but the husband (who is the breadwinner after all) is the one controlling the household finances.
- 4.) Only married people own homes that would require home security (single people always live in apartments apparently).

(I could add 5.) Marriage is only between a man and a woman , but this is so ubiquitous in advertising that it's a topic for another day).

When I heard it on the radio, I couldn't believe that a company wanted to advertise its services in this way in 2014. Women have been in the workforce for a long time and they travel for business. In fact, I found the commercial to be quite offensive. But clearly, in the mind of this sexist home security company, as a single woman who is not afraid of being in my own home by myself, I am not the target market.

What is particularly a bad marketing decision is to be so narrowly focused when home security is something that could be sold to every home owner. This commercial not only is **too narrowly targeted but it could serve to turn off potential customers** due to the various outdated assumptions it makes.

Other companies are being more reflective of the reality of gender roles. For example, a national detergent brand has a TV commercial where the dad is doing the laundry of his very rambunctious (and dirty) little girls. Or the insurance company that shows a single mother shopping for life insurance.

We are not living in the 1960s. Companies that use dated (and sexist) notions are alienating potential customers...and that is not good for the bottom line.

*In the Washington area and looking to jump start your blog? Attend the **How to Write Your Blog** workshop on April 1. Sign up before March 21 to get early registration pricing. Registration [here](#).*

Why customer retention should be job one

It's easy to lose customers and very hard to get them back. Once they are gone, chances are they won't be back.

The reality is that there are many people and companies doing what you do. There's always an alternative for customers who are unhappy for any reason. Too many companies seem to lose sight of this reality, and they do little to ensure that they keep the customers they have.

Here's how my heat/AC contractor failed to retain my business:

Back in November, my schedule changed and I was not going to be working out of my home office. In December, I generally get a home heating inspection with my heat/AC contractor. It helps to make sure all parts are working properly and that my heat will continue through the winter. This company is a family-run place where I have been a customer for three years.

Strike one: I got a reminder card from the company in late November. I called right away to schedule an appointment. They had no open slots until LATE December, one month away. Mind you, I had just gotten the card.

Strike two: I explained to the scheduler that I would not be home because of my situation and that I was hoping for a Saturday appointment. It turns out this company does not do inspections on Saturdays, only emergency work. Then I asked for an early weekday appointment. Again, the scheduler could not accommodate me. She told me that she could not find a technician in my area that would be available for their first appointment at 8:00 a.m.

Strike three: I informed the scheduler that I would be forced to switch companies if she didn't try to accommodate me because I did not want to have a heat inspection later than December (remember, they were already scheduling late late December). No response and no attempt to rectify the situation.

And they are out: After some research, I called another highly rated heat/AC company that not only was scheduling earlier in December (meaning they have more technicians) but would also provide guaranteed 8:00 a.m. appointments. It cost \$20 more per annual contract than my previous company, but the ease of scheduling was worth it to me.

My first heat/AC contractor lost my business not because it wasn't good at it what it does but because it made no effort to accommodate me. They seemed to forget that there are other contractors out there.

Most heat/AC contractors do not market actively. Many have websites and most work on their ratings on places like Angie's List, but they mostly depend on word of mouth. This is why working to RETAIN customers should be a large part of their business model.

Customers that stay are a continuing source of income AND of referrals.

Again, the reality is that keeping customers should be job one: Losing customers is easy and getting them back is difficult. No amount of marketing will bring back a customer that has found a better alternative.

What are you doing to retain your customers or clients? I'd like to find out what specific actions you are taking and I will be sharing those in a future blog post.

Stop! Don't start on that next project until you can answer this

It's January and chances are you are working hard to get the year off to a good start. You may be in charge of creating something—a newsletter, a flyer, an ad—that is intended to achieve a communications or marketing objective. It may be to publicize an upcoming event or perhaps to solicit support for a cause or maybe you are advocating for a policy change. We'll assume that this project is part of a larger strategy and will help further your overall communications goals.



Before you start any marketing/communications project you should be able to answer these five questions:

1. What is the main **objective** for the piece? Or ask yourself this: What do you want the audience to do with this piece?
2. Who is the **target audience**? Really, who is it? Be specific.
3. What are the top **three messages** you want to convey?
4. Knowing who the target is, what is the **best way to**

communicate your message? Will you use graphics? Which ones? What kind of language will you use?

5. Has this piece been **done before**? If so, why are you doing it again? What was it that worked or didn't work before? If not, why are you doing it now?

This may seem obvious to some, simplistic to others, but surprisingly, many people trying to create communications aren't able to answer these questions. Why else do you think we are inundated with useless letters, flyers and brochures? Even if you are a pro, doing this exercise will help you to create a better product, guaranteed!

What is your process for getting communications projects done? Please share!

It may be all about likeability

There's all sorts of analysis going on right now about Tuesday's election results. Chris Christie, a Republican, got re-elected as New Jersey governor with a 30% or so margin over his opponent. In Virginia, Terry McAuliffe, a Democrat, won the governorship with a razor-thin margin of 2% over his opponent Ken Cuccinelli.

If you have been following the Virginia race, you know that Ken Cuccinelli is very conservative. He has publicly-known views against abortion, birth control access, equal rights for

homosexuals and he denies climate change. He is also very vocal in his opposition to the Affordable Care Act known as Obamacare. Apparently, many people in Virginia share these views, but not enough people to catapult him into the governorship.

Pundits have been saying that Cuccinelli lost because he was outspent by McAuliffe. Some say it is because of how the nominating process took place (no primary, just a convention of the party faithful who tend to be more to the right of the general voting population).

I think that one of the reasons Cuccinelli lost is because he is not likeable. You could never imagine hanging out with him. He rarely smiles and when he does, it is not a "real" smile. Contrast that with Christie. Christie is a big bear of a man—hugging people left and right. He is a huge fan of Bruce Springsteen and not afraid to let that be known. You could definitely see yourself having a beer (or two) with Chris Christie.

Cuccinelli is a sour, judgmental kind of a guy. He doesn't approve of many things and he has made it his mission to rid Virginia of these things. His rigidity is antithetical to likeability. Christie, on the other hand, is more pragmatic. In spite of his party's opposition to Obama, he embraced him (literally and figuratively) in the aftermath of Sandy. His pragmatism helps boost his likeability.

The Washington Post reported that Cuccinelli did not call McAuliffe to concede or congratulate him after the election and he says he will *never* call him. That sounds like both sour grapes and lack of sportsmanship. Not likeable.

People don't elect people they don't like. It's that simple. It goes beyond politics and policy and it comes down to likeability. I think George W. Bush won against John Kerry because Bush is the more likeable person. Kerry seemed very

patrician and detached (not unlike Mitt Romney, if you think about it) while Bush had his Texas twang and swagger.

How does this translate into marketing and communications? Simple. Focus on the likeability of your product or service. Don't advertise a product by denigrating the user or a potential user. People like positivity, and they are turned off by negativity.

It's not random that Facebook asks you to "like" pages/companies/products. If you like something, you want to find out more about it, right?

Do you want to improve your blogging? Attend the How to Write Your Blog workshop next Tuesday, November 12 in Washington, DC. Only five spots are left, so register today!

Why customer communication is marketing

Not every business needs to spend lots of money on marketing communications (ads, PR, etc.) but every business should spend time/effort/money on communicating with existing customers. Why? Because these businesses probably depend on referrals for their livelihood.

Even if you don't have a marketing budget (although you should have some dollars set aside for your website and social media efforts), you must budget for customer communications. Keeping in touch with current customers is a serious no-brainer. There are several ways to do it, depending on the size of your customer base: newsletters (electronic or print), postcards, letters, blogging on your website and even phone calls.

At a bare minimum, your existing customers need to hear from you once a year. And yet, how many businesses do not communicate with customers at all?

Let me give you a personal example. I bought my home insurance from an agency recommended by my real estate agent. In the three years I have had this insurance this is the number of times I have heard from the insurance agency: zero. Not once. This past week, I got a policy renewal that listed a 20% increase in my premium. I called the insurer to find out what happened. It turns out that there has been a statewide, across-the-board increase, which, by the way, was announced in February. Except that I didn't know. Because my insurance agency did not bother to inform me.

Since my agency does not communicate with me at all, I will be shopping for a new agency this week. I have no need to be loyal to the agency because they have shown absolutely no loyalty to me as a customer. They haven't kept me informed about insurance changes. They haven't inquired as to whether I need any type of other insurance. They have never even asked me if I am satisfied with my insurer.

Having a customer communication program is marketing. It can help maintain current customer relationships and it can lead to referrals. It keeps your business top of mind. The company that painted my house knows this, which is why it sent a card at Christmas. My heat/AC contractors send out postcard reminders in the spring and fall that it is time to have the system checked. The mechanics send discount coupons and reminders it is time for service on the car.

Set up a customer communication program

The first step is to develop and/or refine your **customer database**. You must collect basic customer information: address, phone number, email.

Assign a **budget**. Call it marketing or call it customer

retention or call it a referral program. Just budget for it.

Decide how many times per year you will have contact with your customers, taking into account factors including your budget, how you will communicate with customers, and the nature of your business. If you are a seasonal business (you sell Christmas baskets or you do taxes for example), then you could send out your communications once a year. If you depend on having informed customers (you deal with investments), you may need to have a monthly or even weekly newsletter.

Decide what **type of information** your customers need.

Line up the right **vendors** (printers, direct mail companies, e-marketing, etc.)

Do you have a customer communications plan? If so, what do you take into account?

Want to learn how to have a more effective blog? Attend my next How to Write Your Blog workshop on November 12, 2013 in Washington, DC. Get the details and register today!

Should you launch your business before your website?

At the gym today I saw a flyer for a private chef/prepared foods service. The concept is that you will get prepared meals delivered to your home on your schedule. What caught my eye was that at the bottom of the flyer it said: "Website coming soon."

This got me thinking: Should you launch your business without having a website in place? My gut tells me you should have

your website up and running. However, nothing is so black and white, and probably, the answer depends on various factors, including:

- Type of business
- How you get business (referrals, word of mouth, advertising)
- Soft launch
- Size of business

Lastly, before launching, you need to understand how essential a website will be to your business. Will people need to consult your website to find out how to do business with you? In the case of the private chef, a potential customer may want to check out types of food you offer, testimonials, pricing, timing. Obviously, these questions can be answered by phone or in person too, but will you have time?

I think there is more to be gained by having your website up and running BEFORE you launch. Does this mean you can't launch a business without a website? No. But it could cause problems for you as you try to build up your customer base.

What do you think? Vote in the poll:

[yop_poll id="2"]

I'll have a venti and some politics please

It was not until I saw a full page ad in today's Washington Post that I realized Starbucks has waded directly into the government shutdown debate. The full page ad (right hand page, far forward, four-color, in media buying lingo) has the

headline:

Sign the Come Together Petition

You can see the text on the Starbucks home page and apparently, at all Starbucks stores starting today.



019/365 by Joseph
Nicolia on Flickr

Also today, in the Post's business section, Allen Adamson, a branding firm director, is quoted about this Starbucks' move:

It's always risky when brands mix politics and business.

It's quite clear that Starbucks is taking a strong political stand against the shutdown, but I am not sure it will be risky. In fact, it may be a huge win for Starbucks (and maybe for the government, if it helps end the shutdown). To my knowledge, Starbucks is the first and only national brand that is saying something publicly about the shutdown— and it's always good to be the first and only in marketing. Plus, it is using the petition to have people sign up to get updates, either by email or text. You know what that means: database expansion!

Finally, this is a political ad, but it is not overtly partisan, and that's the key. It assumes that most people are against the government shutdown, and the ad does not point fingers at specific parties or politicians. In this way, Starbucks does not alienate its conservative or liberal java addicts. It may not be your cup of tea, but perhaps it is your venti of coffee!

Did you see this petition in Starbucks or the ad in the paper? What do you think? Wise move or not? Let me know in the

comments.

Is having a point of differentiation enough?

Last night, I met a friend for dinner. He chose a Thai place that was half-way between his place and mine. Upon reading some reviews online, I found out that this is the only Thai place in the area that's Halal, that is, observes Muslim dietary rules.

When I got there last night, it was empty save for a couple of people. Few people came in until a outwardly observant Muslim family came in. When they were done eating and had left, the owner pretty much closed up shop and kicked my friend and me out. From the time we had arrived at 6:30 p.m. until we left, no more than ten other customers had been in the restaurant.

The food at this Thai place was not very good. In fact, it was mediocre. It wasn't spicy enough, or attractively presented enough or even interesting enough. They did not have Thai standards like green papaya salad or red curry. Based on the food alone, I would not go back.

The only relevant differentiator this Thai restaurant offers is that it's Halal. Is that enough? **Can you have one strong point of differentiation and have that keep your business alive? Well, the answer is yes, but there is an "if" attached.** In this case, you could have Halal as your point of differentiation ONLY IF your food is on par with other similar restaurants.

In a world where there are multiple offerings for everything

(many organic grocery stores, tons of sushi restaurants, hundreds of nail salons), **you have to meet the standard or exceed it AND then find your point of differentiation.** For example, if you have a nail salon, not only do have to comply with sanitary guidelines required by law, but you should find something that your competition does not have (the most colors, the most comfortable chairs, etc.).

What do you think? Is having a point of differentiation enough?