



Social Media In Business Time Waster or Money Maker

by [Sonya Coates](#)

The buzz around Internet Social Media has turned into a roar over the past year, creating both opportunity and anxiety for countless small businesses. For small businesses trying to decide whether social media will be a time waster or a money maker, keeping abreast of the latest social media networks is crucial.

What exactly is Social Media anyway? In short, Social Media is just an efficient and inexpensive means of connecting to people or businesses you might not otherwise connect to on a more regular basis. Using Social Media Internet tools such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and blogging allows you to interact with your customers and prospects on a more personal level.

Is Social Media applicable to small businesses or is it just the latest fad among kids? With 200 million Facebook users and 20 million people on Twitter, and the number of users increasing daily, these networks are just too big to ignore. Social media networks are here to stay. Using them is absolutely necessary for businesses who want to form connections with the next generation of business owners. As your older clients retire, many of them will pass their businesses down to their children. These children were born with a mouse in their hand and will be accustomed to using tools like Facebook as their primary communication method. The next generation will use Social Media as easily and frequently as you now use email.

Newsroom
Corporate Profile
Press Releases
In the News
Newsletters
Presentations for
groups
Articles

What can my small business hope to achieve by using Social Media? For most small businesses, attracting more visitors to the company website is a primary goal. However, making sure that customers and prospects can easily find your website in an online search is increasingly difficult for most small businesses. Many larger businesses employ professional search optimization consultants to create web pages that result in higher search engine rankings. Many experts are now predicting that the Google search will become less dominant in lieu of other types of Social Media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Not using the Social Media networks to promote and point people to your website is a mistake.

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What is Facebook? If you have teenagers, you're probably already familiar with this site. Facebook is currently more popular with today's youth, but the "over 35" age group is the fastest growing segment. Users can create a profile which contains a picture, name, address, and bio. Users can share messages through mail and instant messaging, making email virtually obsolete for today's younger generation. More and more Facebook users perform searches via Facebook rather than Google, making Facebook a valuable marketing resource for businesses. Having a page on Facebook may help your company locate potential employees. You can also market on Facebook by creating events and having people register to attend. Joining is free of charge.

How is LinkedIn different from Facebook? LinkedIn is basically Facebook for business people. Joining is free, but users can pay a small fee to make more than a few contacts each month. The object of LinkedIn is purely business networking. LinkedIn users create a profile, much like an online resume', that includes their past work experience, education, and a professional summary. This information is used to make connections to other people on the service. Unlike Facebook, there is a minimal amount of messaging or posting of photographs.

What is Twitter and how can I use it for business? The newest social media tool to sweep the masses allows users to post brief messages that answer the question "What am I doing?" Twitter is also used to allow news to spread quickly. It inadvertently also serves to answer the question "What are you thinking?" By using software tools, businesses can set up searches that notify them whenever someone mentions a product or service they offer, or asks a related question. By providing free answers to these questions, the businesses hope to build rapport with the user and perhaps gain a new customer. Using Twitter may result in better customer relationships and stronger customer loyalty, new customers, and increased site traffic and brand recognition. Twitter is used by many business giants, including IBM, Jet Blue, Dell, and SAP, for marketing, branding, and communication.

How can blogging help my small business obtain a higher ranking on Google or other search engines? For companies lacking the budget to hire an expensive search engine consultant, blogging may be an easy way to publish fresh content online and draw more visitors to your site. Blogging is nothing more than writing an article and publishing it on the Internet. The words in the article become indexed by Internet search engines and will hopefully be discovered by potential clients who contact your small business. The more articles you

publish on a current basis, the greater visibility your company will have on Internet search engines, resulting in more visitors to your website. The more helpful content you have on your site, the more likely a web visitor is to read it and contact your business.

Learning your way around the Social Media network may seem overwhelming at first, but remember that it wasn't all too long ago that fax machines seemed mysterious. 37% of adult Internet users and 70% of teens use social networking sites monthly. If these users aren't part of your current or future target markets, chances are they should be.