

A background image showing a group of people in a meeting. A woman on the right is looking up and to the side, holding a pen. A man on the left is partially visible, gesturing with his hand. The image has a warm, orange-red tint.

Getting started with social media marketing

A guide for startups

Posting for success

Love it or hate it, social media is here to stay. So as an ambitious startup looking to get your brand out there in front of prospective customers' eyes, a profile on at least some of the big platforms is an absolute must.

Sorry if that makes you want to chew your knuckles with embarrassment at the thought of putting your new baby out there amongst the brazen bragging and smug posts. It's true that self-promotion is hard. It takes a thick skin to rise above the judgement and share your ideas with the metaverse.

But if you can't use socials to tell the world how fantastic your products or services are, why do it at all? When is posting boasting? How often is too often and at what point does self-promotion simply become shameless?

Read on for a startup's guide to getting creative on social media.

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What are the ‘rules’?

The 80/20 Rule was once the gold standard of effective social media marketing. Yesterday’s marketing managers decreed that 80% of your posts should inform, educate, and entertain your audience, while only 20% should directly promote your business. But since that rule was invented, the game has changed. Social has developed, matured, fragmented and become more tribal.

Perhaps these days it’s safe to say that the only rule is there are no rules. What works for one brand is unlikely to work in the same way for another. And what works on one channel almost certainly won’t garner the same attention on a rival platform.

Instagram

Take Instagram, for example, the wild west of social media. It is defined by self-promotion and endless pics of those ‘look at me!’ moments. Even the most modest, restrained users are there to shout about something and businesses are well within their rights to follow suit.

Is it possible to overdo the ego on Insta? Probably not. Just take a look at the hugely popular feed of Gary Vaynerchuk and you’ll see what we mean.

Some glossy product pics with accompanying brand-friendly message and a few well-chosen hashtags will well-suit this image-driven platform. But forget the algorithm at your peril. Instagram feeds are famously curated by the platform, meaning not everything you post gets served to all your followers.

The bitter truth is your main challenge on Insta is quality. By all means post every day about how wonderful your products are, create a perfectly pristine grid of pics and fill your Stories with witty banter and background goings on. Just, whatever you do, don’t make it boring. Because that’s a sure way to fall out of favour with your followers.



Twitter

Twitter, meanwhile, is a different beast entirely. The good news for businesses is that most people's feeds move so quickly you can pump out a good half dozen tweets in a day and most of your followers won't even register more than two or three (which, for marketers, is both depressing and reassuring... weirdly).

Audiences engage with Twitter in a variety of different ways – some will avidly follow their feed every weekday from 9-5; others will scroll sporadically in snatched moments throughout the week. And still others will drop in and out as it suits them. Feast or famine.

But while you won't put anyone's nose out of joint on Twitter by championing your products or services a few times a day, the key to success here is getting involved with the community.

Learn about the people who are likely to benefit from your product or service. Follow them and dare we say it, 'engage' with them. 'Like' people's tweets, comment on what others are saying, offer useful advice and relevant pearls of wisdom within your field of expertise. Soon your timeline will be alive with activity and your message spreading far and wide.

Facebook

And then there's Facebook.

While this may feel like a tricky channel to master, it's actually refreshingly uncomplicated. Blimey, most of us have been on it in a personal capacity for well over a decade now. And while promoting your business on there may at first seem like a minefield, in reality you'll find the similarities outweigh the differences. For a start, your audience will soon tell you if they don't like what you're posting. And crucially there are clear stats available on how often to post.

For the best engagement, most studies agree that one post per day is optimal, with a maximum of two posts per day (according to HubSpot, pages with fewer than 10,000 fans experienced a 50% drop in engagement per post if they posted more than once per day). Again – and this is a common social media oversight – many companies don't take the trouble to 'like' or respond to their audience's comments, which ought to be a marketing crime punishable by red hot poker.

The bottom line

Broadly speaking, across social media, it's about quality, consistency and community. If your content's creative enough, you can post as often as you like. But if the quality's not there – i.e. if it's not entertaining, useful or interesting – you'll soon see your engagement or follower stats dwindle.

Ultimately, social media isn't about broadcasting your message – or not all the time, at least. It's about fostering conversation, growing communities, learning about your followers and providing real value to them.

When you're just starting out it might seem like there's a huge social media mountain to climb, but our advice is to start slowly, keep an eye on what's working and don't put pressure on yourself to be all things to all people. Social media is an opportunity not to be missed when resources are tight and your startup marketing budget is being squeezed. It's also dynamic and can change and become more polished over time as you begin to understand what works.

Perhaps when all is said and done, the most important 'rule' for startup social media marketing is simply that... to get started.

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