

Social Media Starters for Businesses

A Guide to Creating an Effective, World Class Web Presence

Online communities like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn are empowering people to connect on a personal level like never before. This simple guide will show you how to establish a world class web presence designed to help you find and stay connected to your customers.

by Don Lafferty

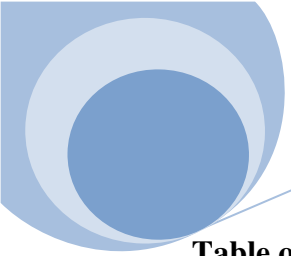
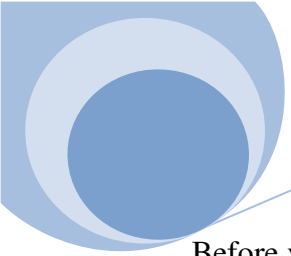


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Before you can craft an effective social media presence and strategy, it’s important to first understand your objectives; the reason you’re putting yourself out there.

Since this document is addressed to small businesses with a wide variety of target markets, I’ll assume that your primary objective is to sell more products or services.

The underlying objectives of your social media strategy are exactly the same as with any traditional marketing or strategy; **selling more requires capturing the attention of consumers who are unfamiliar with you or your company.**

In sales-speak, this is called “business development” or “lead generation”.

In a social media context, business development for a small business yields a few different types of “incoming business development leads”.

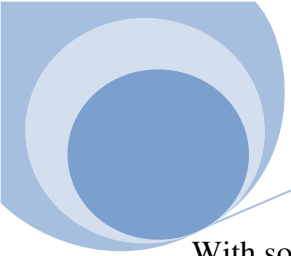
Incoming Sales Lead	Why
Consumers	People who buy your products/services
Reseller/Distributor	Businesses and people who buy and sell products you produce
Competitors / Colleagues	Community Owners / Gatekeepers
Connectors / Media	People who make their living talking about companies, businesses and markets like yours. e.g., Journalists, bloggers, other media

These basic groups represent your target connections in various media-consuming communities, just as they do in traditional marketing strategies. Based on your product or service, it’s possible to identify more focused market segments as your online community grows.

Your activities on the Internet should be designed to **identify** these target connections, **engage** them appropriately and **convert** them accordingly:

Target Connection	Conversion
Consumer	Buy your product/service and tell friends about it
Reseller/Distributor	Stock and recommend your product/service
Competitors/Colleagues	Reveal untapped markets and target consumers
Connectors / Media	Review your product/service or provide publicity for you and your business

If you’ve done your homework upfront, and understand the market for your product/service, affecting these conversions will have a logical downstream positive impact on your overall objective to generate and grow revenue.



With some experience and tools, you'll soon be able to experiment with tactics, measure the results and refine your activities to achieve a more effective work processes. The results of your activities will be measurable in several ways:

- Community growth – increased connections in outpost communities like Facebook and Twitter
- Shares – incidences of others sharing your content with new contacts
- Mentions – incidences of others mentioning your name
- Direct contacts – comments to your blog, direct email or phone contact
- Customer reviews on Yelp and other review sites.
- Mobile check-ins.
- Increased Website/Blog traffic

As your tactics yield positive results in each of these areas, combined with easy, effective methods for your target consumers to purchase your products/services, you'll be well on your way to meeting the overall objective of increasing revenue.

A basic but robust Internet presence combined with simple, disciplined work processes designed to keep that presence relevant and engaging, will give you the structure required to create effective tactics designed to achieve the strategic objectives which will ultimately result in increased revenue.

It starts with a blog on your website. This is your home base; the place where you'll bring your target connections to convert them according to your business development objectives.

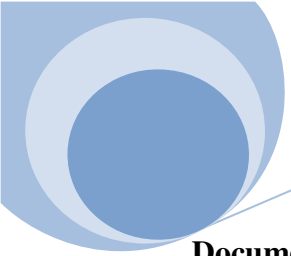
But before you can go any further, you need to consider your ***Branding Strategy***.

Who do you want people to find when they finally meet you on the Internet?

Most business owners have a strong sense of their personal brand and they'll understand right off what this means. Some will need guidance from their trusted advisors. If you're not sure, you can engage the help of a professional branding strategist for a fee, who will guide you through everything from messaging, to web design, to your visual image and interview coaching.

Social media *is social*, so don't be standoffish as you build your Internet presence. Be prepared to include images that actually show what you look like, not what you looked like when you were twenty pounds lighter or had a full head of pre-gray hair. People see through that stuff in a Web 2.0 world and it'll hurt more than it'll help.

The social media savvy people you're going to meet as you build community will be able to sniff out a fake pretty quickly, so be genuine within the guidelines of your branding strategy and don't be *just* a product – be yourself.



Documentation

Setting up your platform will require a handful of passwords, backup email addresses, secret questions and other important bits of information. It's easy to think you won't forget this stuff until the time comes when something goes haywire and you need it, so I recommend you keep a dedicated, bound notebook with all this information. Even if you forget the page where you wrote it, you'll know everything is in that book.

Image Hosting

In the process of building your Internet presence you'll have plenty of occasions to use pictures. Most platforms allow you to upload your pictures directly, but wherever you can, I recommend uploading your pictures to a free third party site like **Photobucket** or **Flickr** where the picture will be available for use in a variety of web-based applications.

When you upload a picture to one of these services you have the ability to "tag" the picture with relevant terms that can then be picked up by **Google** in a search.

Building Your Presence

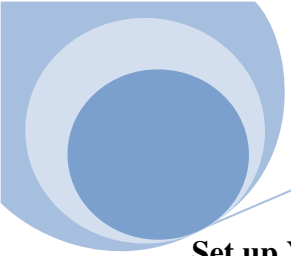
Home Base

Your website, blog or Facebook fan page should be designed to showcase your brand. This is your only Internet property that isn't an outpost and will serve as your home base, so be sure to include everything that feeds your platform, framed in the context of the personal branding strategy.

I recommend a hosted **Wordpress** blog. Browse to <http://wordpress.org> for easy-to-follow instructions on getting started, or pick up a copy of *Wordpress for Dummies*, still the definitive resource for getting started.

The best online resource for bloggers, even experienced bloggers, is Darren Rowse's **ProBlogger**, where you'll find a tremendous trove of excellent how-to information for all types of blogging objectives.

Include pictures on the static sections of your blog *and* in your articles. Pictures break up blocky chunks of copy, add visual interest and provide an emotional and contextual reference to the material.



Set up Your Outposts

Your brand is established back at your website and blog, where your ultimate objective is to convert a casually interested visitor to a loyal customer, a trusted colleague or an evangelist. Each of the following communities have their own attractions to the members you'll find there.

Your goal in each of these places is to establish a branded presence designed to lure target community members back to your website where your brand and your product/service are showcased.

Facebook <http://facebook.com>

Create a Facebook account for yourself, and then immediately create a Facebook Page for your business. This ensures that you're operating within Facebook's terms of service.

You can use a company logo or a picture of your building as a profile photo if you really want to, but the real juice in social networking comes from personal connection, so until your community is growing and vibrant, I recommend using a close-up headshot of the person or people who are the public faces of your business.

When managing your settings, be sure to allow people to post comments, pictures, and videos to your timeline. Remember, you're in a conversation, not a monologue and you want your connections to feel like the stuff they say matters. You also want to give others the opportunity to engage with the rest of your community.

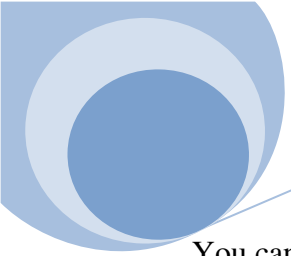
Facebook has almost a billion registered users worldwide, and is the #2 method people use to share content on the Internet (email is #1), so take the time to become familiar with the tools available inside this community.

Facebook provides utilities for creating event pages, blogging and photo albums. Facebook also provides useful tracking tools for business pages, and a tremendously effective and affordable pay-for advertising program that you can use to promote your page, event or website.

When creating your profile, be sure to include a link back to your website or blog, and an email address where people can *reliably* reach you.

Twitter <http://twitter.com>

Set up a Twitter account *under your company name*. Just as with your Facebook page, you can use your logo or a picture of your business as your profile photo if you really want to, but until your community is growing and vibrant, I recommend using a close-up headshot, with a Twitter background that's in sync your branding strategy.



You can find plenty of resources out there that'll guide you through the process of designing a best-in-class, custom, branded, Twitter background.

Create a 160 character bio that clearly conveys what your company is all about, and include a link back to your website, blog or Facebook fan page.

Before you start following *anybody*, choose an application to streamline the management of your Twitter account. I recommend [Hootsuite](#) or [TweetDeck](#), free tools that enable you to create categories into which you can slot the people you follow on Twitter.

For example, if your business is a Law Firm targeting potential clients in Lower Bucks County, you might set up the following key word searches to pinpoint your target connection on Twitter:

Search Term	Logic
Parx	People mentioning Parx Casino are likely to live in the area.
Bensalem	People mentioning Bensalem are likely to live in the area.
Neshaminy	People mentioning Neshaminy are likely to live in the area.
Feasterville	People mentioning Feasterville are likely to live in the area.
Churchville	People mentioning Churchville are likely to live in the area.
Richboro	People mentioning Richboro are likely to live in the area.
Levittown	People mentioning Levittown are likely to live in the area.

As you identify the nature of the people mentioning your key search terms, you'll be able to engage them appropriately to introduce your company to them in a non-spammy way, offering them some kind of value to engage deeper. By employing tactics designed to capture the attention and imagination of these target connections, you'll create community, build buzz and convert casual visitors to loyal customers.

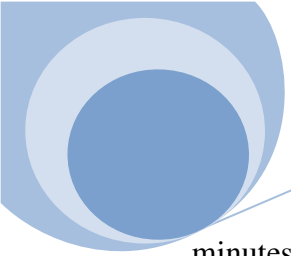
YouTube <http://youtube.com>

YouTube is the second most trafficked search engine on the Internet, second only to Google. Even if you haven't produced video of your own, it's prudent to have a presence in the YouTube community where you can connect with other YouTube members.

You'll find the same types of connections in this community as you would in any other online social network: consumers, colleagues and connectors. Subscribe to their YouTube channels, invite them to be your friend and "favorite" (that's a verb) their videos.

Find and favorite videos of non-competing companies in your market space as a way of demonstrating your company's core values, products and services.

You can produce a simple video of *you* talking about your products and services, the history of your company, your value system, your life in the profession. Keep it positive, keep it under 3



minutes, and conclude by inviting viewers to connect with you on your blog, on Twitter and on Facebook.

Pinterest <http://pinterest.com>

Pinterest is a hot new social network that enables you to organize and share all the beautiful things you find on the web. So it enables people to share all the beautiful things they find on *your* website; like pictures and descriptions of your products and services. People use pinboards to plan their weddings, decorate their homes, and organize their favorite recipes.

Build your pinboards to showcase not only your products, services and people, but to give a sense of your company's style or brand values.

LinkedIn <http://linkedin.com>

LinkedIn used to be considered an online resume on steroids, now it's one of the most active, business-oriented communities on the Internet, and an absolute necessity for authors of both fiction and nonfiction.

As with your other profiles, include a close-up headshot and fill your profile with anything and everything that will help people find *you* in a search. The LinkedIn community is business-oriented, but a novelist can still develop excellent connections here.

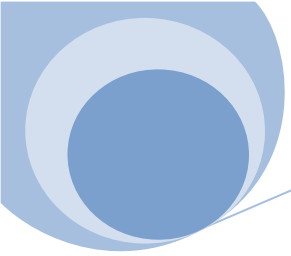
This community is 100% searchable within its own walls, so once your profile is tight, search for groups, subgroups, discussions, and news where your three types of target connections reside. Answering questions and participating in discussions gives you the opportunity to showcase your material and thought leadership in bite-sized bits, providing an effective forum to get the attention of target connections.

Create your own LinkedIn group based on the interests of your target readership. Once you establish the group, you can float research queries, start discussions about other authors or books in your space and prequalify potential business opportunities using more detailed tactics.

LinkedIn Applications provide another layer of interaction and information sharing that you can customize depending on your needs. You can connect your Wordpress blog to your LinkedIn account so when someone is checking out your public profile, they can see your most recent blog post. Again, this showcases your core material prompting your target connections to visit your home base where you do business.

Google and Google +

If you don't have a Google account, create one. If you already have a Google account, be sure to tighten up your [Google Profile](#). You'll have the ability to include pictures, videos and links to all your other Internet outposts.



Use Google + as a way to distribute your content and to create community by connecting to others in your industry and potential customers you consider target connections.

Presence Management

Now that you've got a world class Web Presence backed by a well-conceived strategy, it's time to develop work processes that enable you to maximize the time you spend working it.

This is known as Presence Management. This is also where the notorious social media time suck can kill you if you don't plan your work properly.

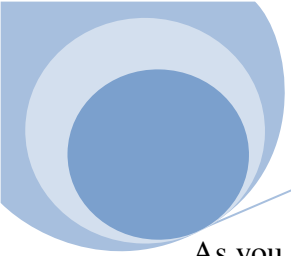
It's hard for me to speak directly to your personal presence management and related work processes, since yours will be very specific to your books, markets and objectives, so start by creating two to-do lists; a daily and a weekly. For broader maintenance issues, like adjusting blog structure and design, adding photo albums and other big-picture stuff you can create a checklist that you revisit every 3-6 months.

Your daily checklist might look like this:

Respond to blog comments
Send emails to thank people who've commented on my blog
Update Facebook Status
Respond to Facebook comments/friend requests/messages
Update LinkedIn Status
Respond to LinkedIn connection requests/messages
Respond to Twitter @ replies
Respond to Twitter direct messages
Tweet out an interesting blog post by a target connection (mentioning them with an @ reply)
Leave a comment on 1 other blog

Your weekly checklist might look like this:

Change Facebook profile picture
Write 2-3 blog articles for later posting
Leave Wall Comments for 10 Facebook connections (then go back to your own wall and delete the notifications)
Find and join 2 pertinent Facebook groups and leave comments with links back to my blog
Do a Twitter search of 5 key terms to find 100 new people to follow
@ reply the top authors in my genre on Twitter
Post a question on LinkedIn including a link to a deeper article back at my blog



As you engage in these types of activities – social activities – you’ll generate additional interaction requiring your personal follow up. Don’t let this stuff fall through the cracks. These are business development “leads” and should be treated with great care. Every one of these interactions is an opportunity for you to convert a casually interested connection to a loyal reader, a trusted colleague, or an evangelist who will extend your reach *and* your network. It’s also an opportunity to damage your reputation if mishandled, so consider how you’d want to be treated, and conduct yourself accordingly.

Time Management

Everybody’s heard how Facebook and Twitter can suck hours away in the blink of an eye, so when scheduling community-building and business development activities, it’s important to enter the process with a grasp of the time and resources you’ve got available to invest, and then stick to it. The sheer number of beneficial connections you’ll find is staggering, and one more click will always lead to another, and another, and another, so at the end of your allotted time, set it aside. There will be even more opportunity waiting for you when you get back to it.

If you’re doing things right, it won’t be long before you’ll need some tactical help to manage the mushrooming number of tasks on your daily to-do list.

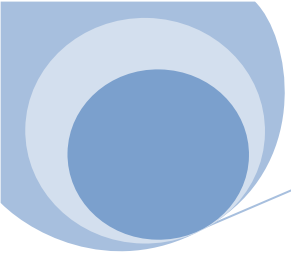
This is the time when many business owners enlist the help of an agency or assign responsibility in-house to an employee who can engage in tactics and tasks designed to support the company’s community-building and business development objectives.

Conclusion

Make no mistake; this is only the tip of the social media iceberg. Every community and topic covered in this guide has a plethora of additional tools, tactics and community-specific nuances that will help you achieve even greater levels of effectiveness with your strategies and tactics.

As you establish your presence and observe the conduct of other community members, you’ll be able to expand and tailor your own activities in each of these Internet outposts to meet the needs of your individual strategies, successfully enticing visitors back to your home page.

The Web is brimming with experts, tools and tactics that can sometimes overwhelm and confuse the uninitiated, so incorporate these building blocks into the foundation of your Web presence, watch carefully to see the way others do it, engage, and be social.



Don Lafferty is an Internet marketing strategist who helps businesses integrate social media tools and tactics into their traditional marketing, PR and business development strategies.



You can find him here:
<http://mingsocial.com>