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A Guide to Social Media Marketing

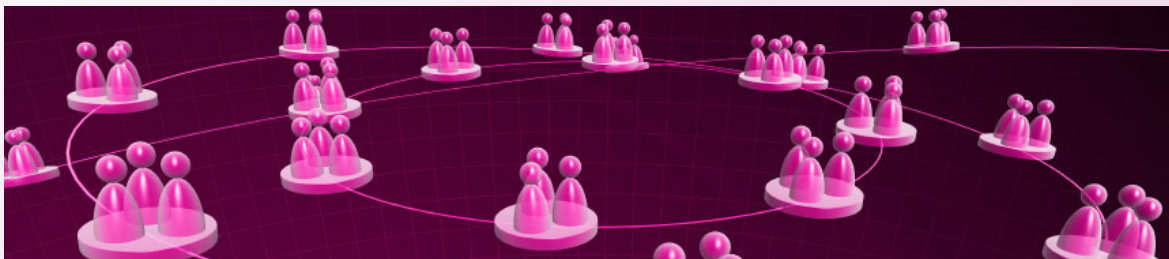


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Social Media Marketing



Social media marketing is a tricky term to identify and is more of a concept to be grasped as opposed to having a simple definition attached to it. However, regardless of what it may or may not be, there is one absolute truth: that a successful social media marketing campaign can go a long way to boosting your online presence, be it for profit or otherwise.

An easy way to approach social media marketing is to have a basic knowledge of precisely what it entails. The term itself can be broken down into component parts which then form the overall whole, with those parts being social aspects, media aspects and – of course – marketing aspects.

The social side revolves around the interaction of people, much as it does outside of the internet, except that in this case those people are generally confined to specific groups and communities (such as wikis, online forums, YouTube, blogs and social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn – more on which, later).

The media aspect refers to what it is that has been created for the purpose of being promoted, the core of the marketing campaign. Just as it is in the phrase “social media marketing” this user-generated content is the very heart of the campaign itself. It can come in many forms, depending on the goal of the campaign (and how it will be promoted, managed, etc), but common types of content will include widgets, video, or even interactive media such as a game or Flash program.

Marketing will be the driving force of your campaign. Effective marketing is what will decide whether the campaign is a success or not and the aim of which is to get your media out there and in the faces of the right people, who will then continue to spread said item across the internet in a similar fashion to viral marketing. Word of mouth, if you will, but on the internet.

The aim of this guide is to put you in a better position to understand all the inherent elements of social media marketing and to subsequently have them work in your favour, for the good of all involved. There are many ways in which you can successfully



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go about this, but first you have to understand that while the specifics of social media marketing might take some time to learn and master, there is a core principle: social media marketing involves taking user-generated content and having it spread – via social channels – all over the internet as quickly and as effectively as possible.

Another item that needs to be clarified is the confusion over what social avenues the whole “social media marketing” area might encompass. With “social networks” being a prominent buzzword of late, it is easy to think that social media marketing primarily makes use of just websites like Digg, Reddit, Twitter, StumbleUpon and their brethren, but this just isn’t the case. Effective social media marketing can make use of all of those sites and more, including – as mentioned previously – forums, communities, collaborative sites, sales, public relations and bloggers. With the blogosphere being a point that can play an incredibly important part in a given social media marketing campaign and sadly something that all too many are prepared to neglect and forget about.

A wonderful characteristic of social media marketing is that it can be utilised however you see fit and to any extent that you wish, from full-on social marketing mode to a slight content-nudge. It all depends on the nature of the content you wish to promote and the nature of the campaign itself.

Generally there are three ways in which you can approach social media marketing and three strengths of it that you can use to boost your campaign to become a success. You can have social media marketing and associated sites work alongside your content, boosting its success. You can opt to not use the sites at all, thereby relying more on a viral/word of mouth principle, or you can solely rely on social media sites to propel your campaign forwards.

The boost method works by having whatever content is being promoted hosted on a given site and then having that content promoted via the traditional methods of social media marketing (via the social channels, forums, communities, etc). So in essence, you start with a tiny viral media, promote it and then have it expand across the internet in the desired fashion. This is very much a traditional method of social media marketing.

You can host the campaign on your own (or the content’s own) site and keep it that way, choosing not to promote it at all via the traditional social media marketing, but instead giving it a “best kept secret” feel and having it spread through word of mouth. A fine example of this would be Burberry’s social media project “Art of the Trench”. This was a website which featured everyday people wearing trenchcoats, but also allowed for other photographers to submit their own trenchcoat photos, the best of which Burberry displayed on the website. A simple idea, but remarkably effective.

Another way to use social media marketing is to promote what needs to be promoted by only using social networking websites. This may not even require any user-generated content, but just simple promotion of a given object. For example, Facebook allows for



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the creation of groups and fan pages, which can easily be utilised to spread awareness of a product, business or even just an idea. The theory behind this method is that this group (or post, etc, depending on which vein of social networking you choose to pursue) will expand, increase and hopefully spread, thus acting as more traditional social media marketing, but in lieu of any user-generated content.

As for which social media websites you should be looking at, we've compiled what we hope is a helpful list of some of the most popular and useful sites that are used for social media marketing purposes.

Facebook - With 350 million users, you cannot doubt the popularity of what is perhaps the world's foremost social networking website. With the ability to create groups and pages on just about any topic or content under the sun, it would be a foolish move to not take advantage of the sheer scope of what Facebook has to offer the social media marketer.

Twitter - Love it or hate it, there are still many millions (the exact number has never been released) of people that love to tell you what they're doing in 140 characters. This new era of "micro blogging" that has been ushered in by Twitter provides business and advertisers with a great platform from which to launch virtually anything, all in a sentence or two.

Digg - With around 235 million visitors a year, securing a spot on the Digg homepage can send some serious traffic and attention your way, which is exactly the kind of exposure you're going to be after if you want a successful social media campaign. Even if you fail to hit the front page, Digg can still generate a massive buzz for your content.

YouTube - If your social media campaign revolves around video-based content, then there is no better place to display it than a video-based website that garners millions of visitors a day, some – but sadly, not all – of whom can be directed right to your video through judicious use of the tagging system, as well as a good description, eye-catching title and thumbnail image.

LinkedIn - This business-orientated social networking site boasts more than 50 million registered users, which could prove a valuable asset to any social media campaign. In a similar vein to Facebook, LinkedIn provides users with access to groups, events and the significant ability to build – and therefore utilise – many personal networks.

Wikipedia - Whilst not at the forefront of everyone's minds when it comes to planning a marketing campaign thanks to Wikipedia's somewhat convoluted deletion criteria and processes (although it is generally safe to say that overly self-promotional articles, i.e. blatant spam and advertising, are frowned upon), it nevertheless offers a valuable opportunity to reach a larger audience. If you have content which can justifiably be tagged onto the end of an article as a reference or external source, or even content that might warrant its own page, then it is worth a shot.



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MySpace - Once the pinnacle of social networking, it's no secret that MySpace is faced with an ever-dwindling user-base thanks largely in part to Facebook. However, it still retains a large number of visitors and users, thus still providing a great social media marketing platform for those that know how. Content can be communicated over MySpace via groups, friendship networks, events, bulletins and even individual pages.

Reddit - Working on a similar principle to Digg, Reddit offers social media marketers a great opportunity to expose content to a large amount of traffic and interest, especially if your article, video, story or picture hits the front page. There's no harm in trying – perhaps a social media marketing mantra.

StumbleUpon - Another social bookmarking service, but one still useful to a social media campaign, as it has the ability to send even more traffic to your content, which – after all – is the aim of this particular game. A popular link on StumbleUpon is well worth the time invested in promoting it there.

For more information on Viral Marketing, contact
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