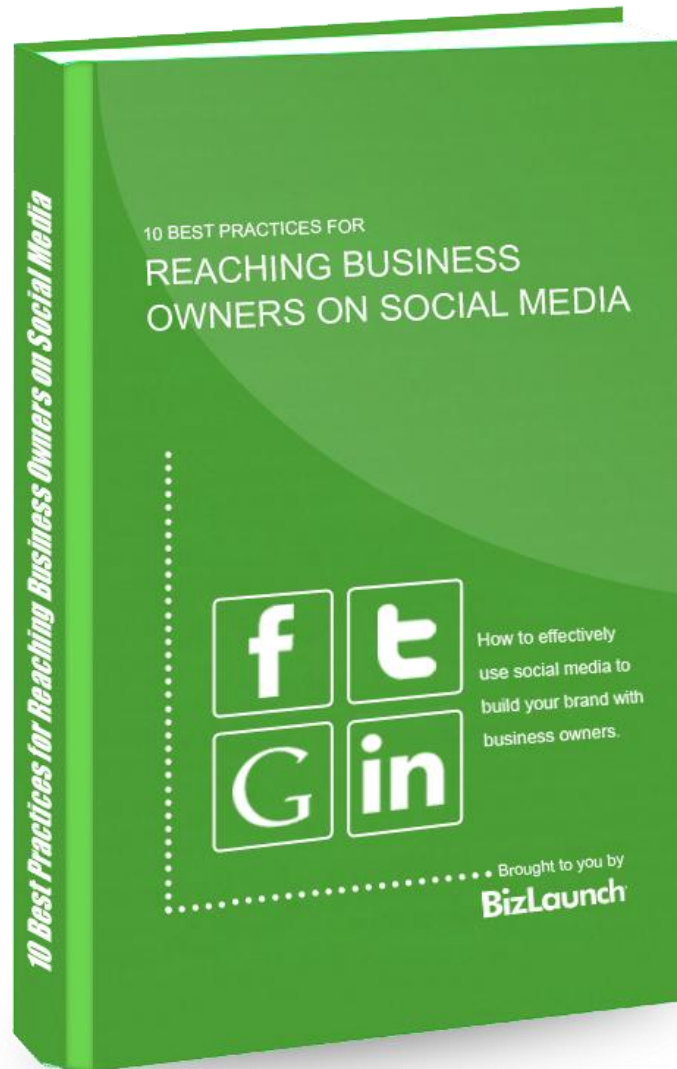


Best Practices for Reaching Business Owners on Social Media



A Guide to Optimizing Your Social Media Strategy to get more Leads and Sales.

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Introduction

Whether it's the IPO of Facebook, the launch Google+, or the latest PR mishap on Twitter, social media has likely caught your attention.

Many marketers would agree that having a social media strategy is a key component of their overall marketing efforts. But many are still figuring out how to create a strong social media presence. When your customers are time-starved entrepreneurs, this becomes even more difficult.

This eBook will help you formulate a plan so you can use social media to connect with the business owners that need your products and services. It will provide you with concrete tips about how to develop a solid social media strategy, where to find good content, and how you can get the most interaction from your followers.

After reading this eBook, you will be able to develop a social media strategy that will engage your small business customers, so they become loyal followers of your brand.

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Types of Social Media

Before we discuss how you can build your strategy, you need to understand that the term 'social media' includes more than just Facebook and Twitter. There are many different social media websites that you can use, and new sites continue to pop-up all the time. Depending on who your customers are, and what you want to achieve, you may want to include some of the less obvious social media sites into your marketing plan. Here is a brief description of the various social media sites.

Website Type	Description
Blogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 300-500 word journal entries that provide useful information about a niche topic. Examples: Blogger, WordPress
Social networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where people connect and interact online. Examples: Facebook, LinkedIn, Google +
Bookmarking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lets you save bookmarks on a website that you can access from any computer. Examples: Delicious, StumbleUpon
Micro blogging	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allows you to blog in one or two sentences at a time. That's 140 characters. Examples: Twitter, Tumblr
Media Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Upload and share files including video, audio, and pictures. Examples: YouTube, Flickr, Pinterest
Location Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• These sites bridge the gap between the online and offline world. They allow people to share and recommend restaurants and venues to their friends. Examples: Foursquare, Gowalla, Yelp, and Facebook Places.
Popularity Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Users upload links to content on the internet and the site's users vote on them, driving the most popular articles to the top. Examples: Digg, Reddit
Aggregators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compile information from a variety of sources on one site. Examples: FriendFeed, Google News

When you're deciding which social media sites to include in your marketing strategy, be aware of the audience on that particular network.

For example, Reddit is a social media site with over 35 million users, but it's notorious for ridiculing anyone who blatantly tries to market to them.

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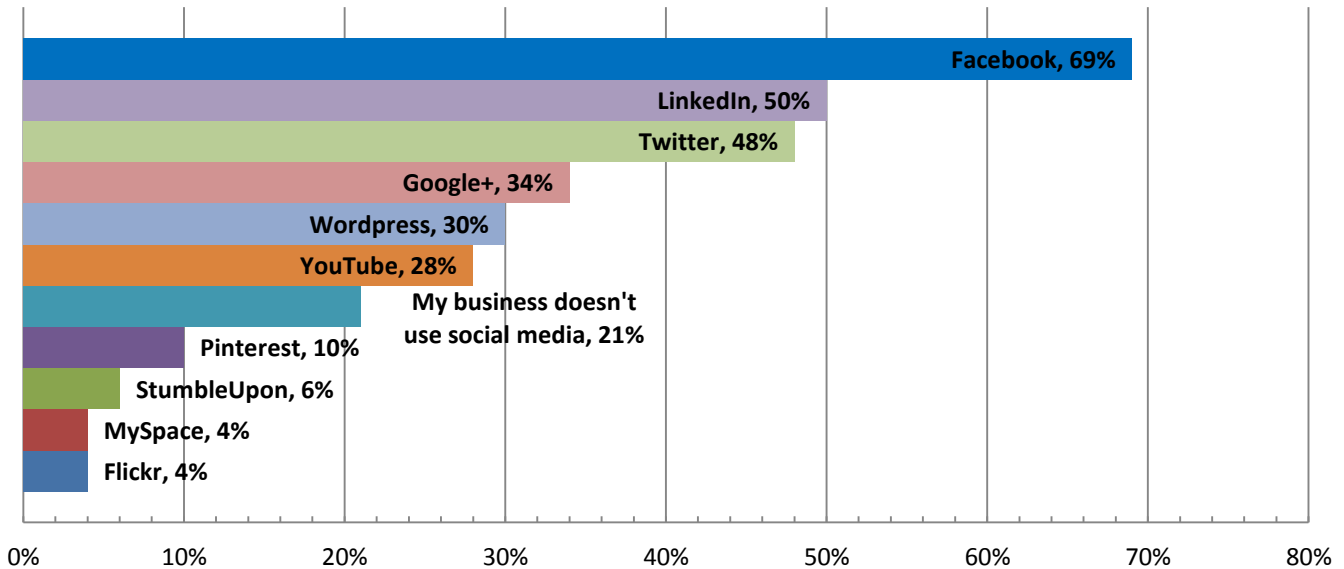
How Business Owners are Using Social Media

In July 2012, we surveyed over 150 North American business owners to get a better understanding of their social media habits. Did you know that 78% of business owners are using social media to promote their business?

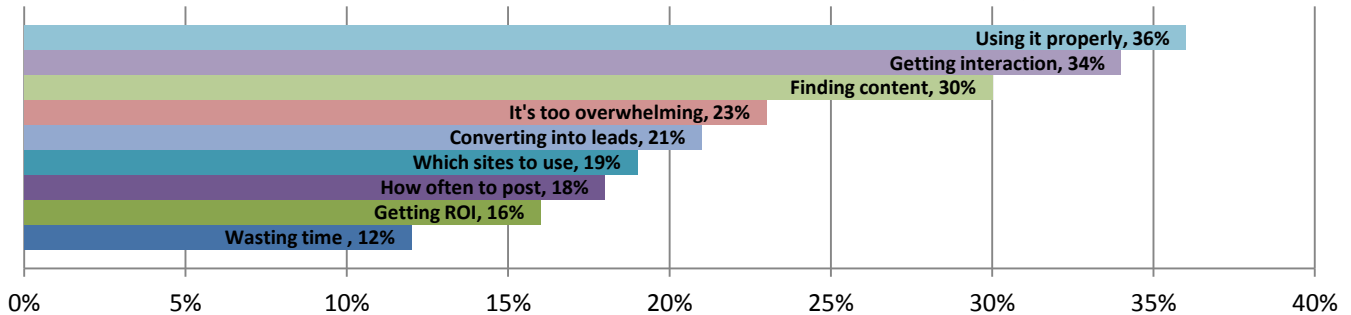
Top 3 Reasons Business Owners Are Using Social Media:

1. To get brand awareness
2. To get more leads
3. To interact with customers

The Social Media Sites Most Used by Business Owners



Business Owners' Social Media Challenges



You probably share at least one of these challenges too, so next we'll discuss how you can overcome them.

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10 Best Practices for Creating a Social Media Strategy

Social media can be overwhelming if you don't have a proper strategy in place. Getting business owners to follow your brand is a lot easier if you use these best practices.

1. **Determine your strategy.** Having a Facebook account doesn't mean you have a social media strategy. What is it that you want to achieve? How does social media compliment your other marketing efforts?

Fist, determine your strategy and objectives. For example, are you trying to raise awareness? Or are you trying to get more interaction from your followers?

2. **Pick your networks.** Don't try to be everything to everyone. New social media sites are popping up every day and you don't need to be on all of them.

Pick the top three sites most visited by your customers. By focusing your efforts, you'll build a following on the sites that your customers are using.

3. **Stay true to your brand.** Ensure your page and your posts are consistent with the personality of your brand. Don't try to be something you're not, but try to show some personality.

Develop a standard look and feel for your accounts.

4. **Provide good content.** Share content from your blog, share pictures and videos, or links to other content online. Don't be afraid to stir up a discussion about a hot topic or use humor in your posts as they usually get the most interaction.

Make sure your content is interesting, informative, and relevant to your audience.

5. **Update regularly. Develop a regular schedule for posting.** Plan weekly scheduled activity and assign responsibility to ensure that you don't fall silent. Also, be sure to respond to comments and questions quickly to show your followers that you care.

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6. **Use a call to action.** Tell people what you want them to do. Some examples are; "Click here", "Watch this", "Like if you agree" or "Fill in the blank". You can also use traceable URLs to measure your efforts in Google Analytics.

Always tell your followers what you want them to do.

7. **Use a social media aggregator.** To save time and energy updating multiple social media accounts you can streamline your social media efforts into one program.

Hootsuite or TweetDeck can save you time updating your accounts.

8. **Don't push sales.** Do not use social networks to spam your followers with coupons or other offers. Also, don't join a social network just to promote a product or brand. Success on social networks takes time. Treat your followers like friends – and build a relationship by providing content that they will value.

20% of your posts should be about you & 80% should be other content.

9. **Don't try to control everything.** Don't avoid social media because you are worried about receiving negative comments. Use complaints from customers as a chance to improve your product, service or customer support. It's also important to know that the conversation about your product is happening whether you're involved or not, so you might as well participate.

Always respond to negative comments in a direct and professional manner.

10. **Be patient.** Social media can seem like a waste of time especially if you don't see results right away. It takes time to build a community using social media. .

Did you know that you can track your progress using Twitter Counter and Facebook insights? These tools help track what's working and what's not.



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Best Practices for Popular Sites

Now we will take a look at a handful of important social networking sites and we'll show you some best practices for each. By following these do's and don'ts you'll be well on your way to creating a strong online community.

Let's get started!

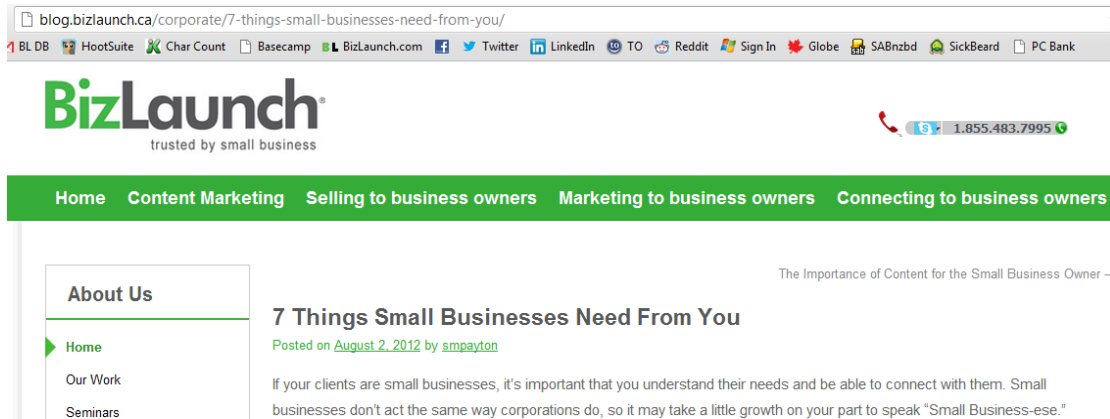
Blogs

Do

- Include one or two keywords in your post that you want to rank for.
- Make your titles interesting "7 Things You Need to Know," or "5 Ways to.."
- Source your content, and include links to other related content.
- Respond to comments on your account, and comment on other blogs.
- Allow guest posts, and offer to guest post on other blogs too.
- Share your posts on your social media accounts and let others share too.

Don't

- Oversell. Speak about your products no more than 20% of the time.
- Post about everything. Stick to your niche.
- Go over 500 words. Anything more than that is too long for a blog post.
- Forget to use subheadings to break up the content.



The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a blog post on the BizLaunch website. The URL in the address bar is blog.bizlaunch.ca/corporate/7-things-small-businesses-need-from-you/. The BizLaunch logo is prominently displayed at the top left, with the tagline "trusted by small business" underneath. A navigation menu is visible below the logo, with options: Home, Content Marketing, Selling to business owners, Marketing to business owners, and Connecting to business owners. The main content area features the article title "7 Things Small Businesses Need From You", posted on August 2, 2012, by smpayton. The article's introductory text reads: "If your clients are small businesses, it's important that you understand their needs and be able to connect with them. Small businesses don't act the same way corporations do, so it may take a little growth on your part to speak 'Small Business-ese.'"

★ To keep your readers coming back, you should aim to have at least one new blog post per week.

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Facebook

Do

- Post pictures and videos - they're great for grabbing attention.
- Use polls and questions to engage your followers.
- Use humour to engage and encourage sharing.
- Watch the frequency and timing of your posts and adjust as necessary.
- Do track the performance of each post on your page.

Don't

- Automate your status updates or have your twitter feed integrated into Facebook.
- Be afraid to show you're human. Thank people, share stories, ask questions, and respond to comments and recommendations.
- Post anything longer than 200 characters. In fact, the shorter the post the more likely it will be shared, commented on, or liked.

 **To grow your followers, you should only post one or two times per day.**


Twitter

Do

- Give your followers the latest info about your business. Give a glimpse into your something you're working on, share photos, and provide updates, etc.
- Monitor your interactions and mentions as well as what others are saying about you.
- Reply to, re-tweet, and reward your followers.
- Provide discounts, samples, promotions, and advice.
- Ask for retweets, but also retweet others. Interaction is a two-way street.

Don't

- Overdo it. Tweeting too often will cause people to stop following you.
- Overuse the same responses. This comes off as being insincere.
- Tweet about anything and everything. Tweet about your niche.

 **To get the most interaction, you tweet 4 times or less per day or less.**

[Tweet this eBook!](#)

LinkedIn

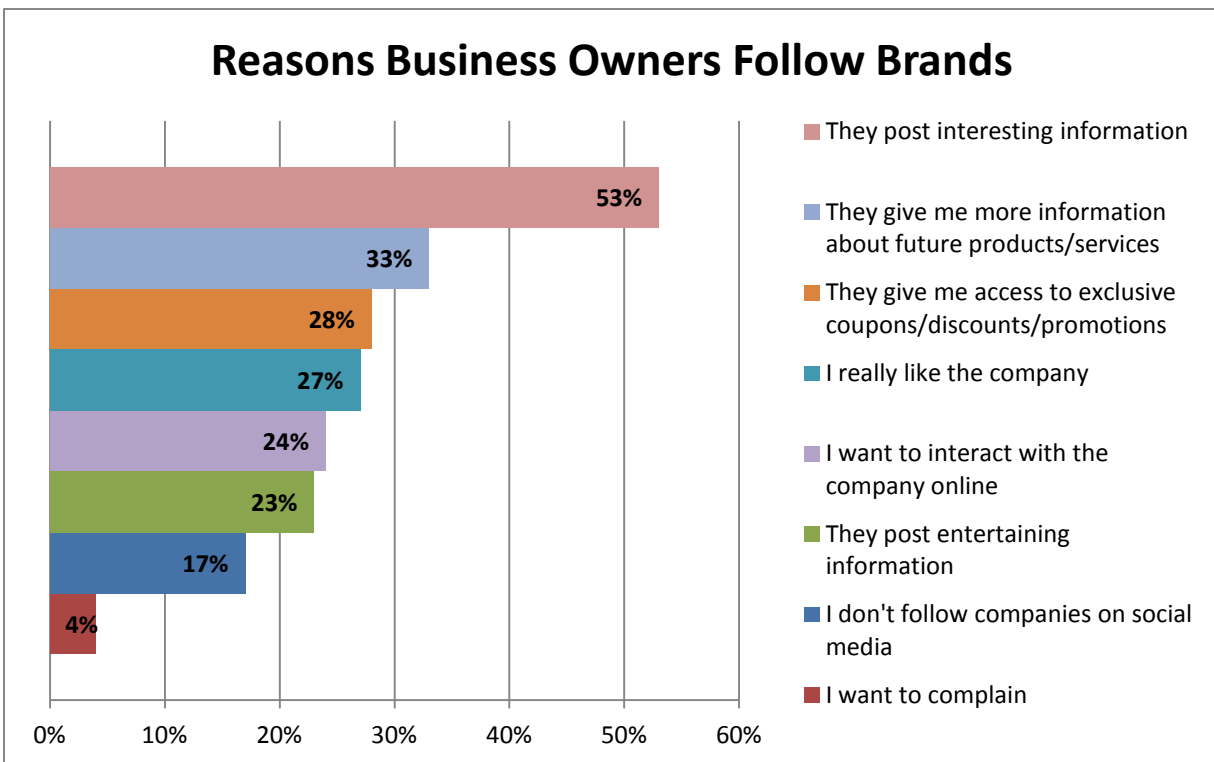
Do

- Set up your company page, so you can start attracting followers.
- Connect with people in your industry, potential clients, and suppliers.
- Join groups related to your industry.
- Identify three groups where your customers hang out and start commenting and posting links from your blog.
- Comment on other people's posts to start a discussion.

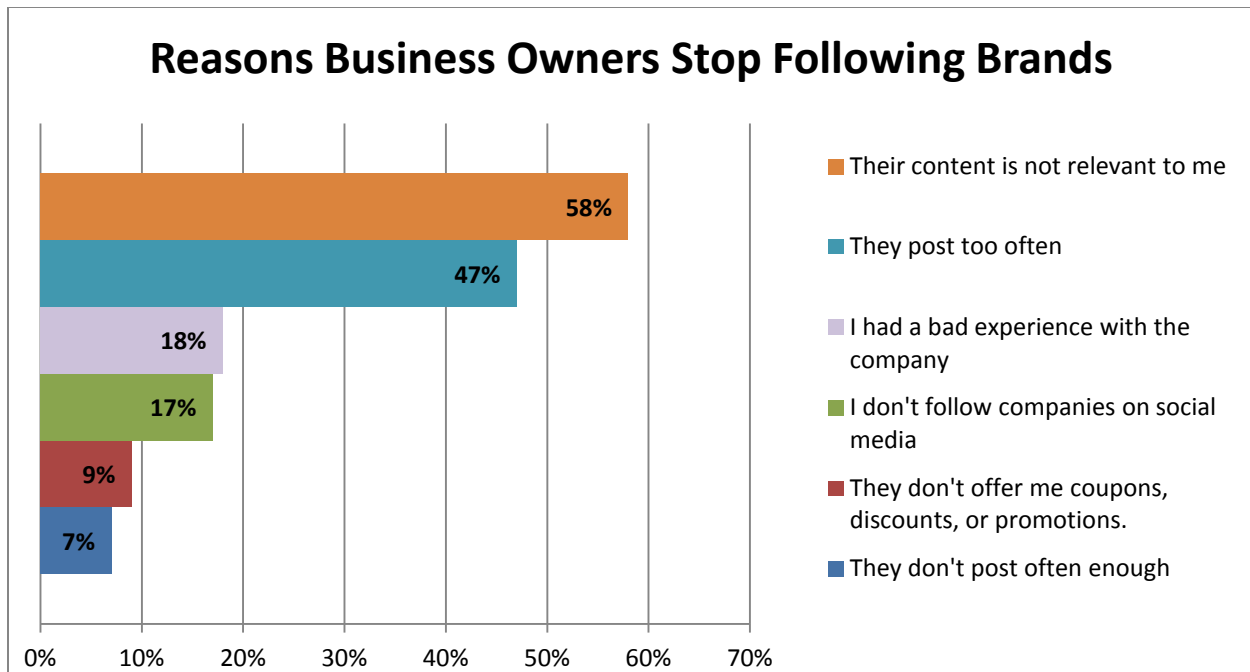
Don't

- Send sales messages via direct message.
- Self promote. Educate your customers instead of using a hard sell.
- Neglect your company's page, group or users. Post often and respond to comments whether they are good or bad.

Why Business Owners Follow or Stop Following



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As you can see, business owners want good content. If you can provide good content, you can get more followers. But beware, if you post too often they may abandon you.

Next we'll talk about the 5 Needs that you'll need to address if you want to post good content and later we'll discuss how you can build a schedule to optimize your posts.

The 5 Needs of Social Media Users

As indicated earlier in this guide, the number one reason that business owners follow companies is because they post interesting information. You're probably wondering what "useful information" is, but generally there are 5 factors that define this type of content. They are:

1. Utility - Give Them Something They Can Use

Can your followers use the information you post to better their current situation in some way? Posting useful tools, templates, or downloads can help your customers succeed, and keep them coming back for more. For example, if you are in the banking industry, provide templates that customers can download and use to calculate their breakeven point, or provide a calculator to help them reduce debt. It is very likely that you already have these tools on your website, so why not share them? You can also use these tools to get more leads by asking customers to provide their email address before downloading them.

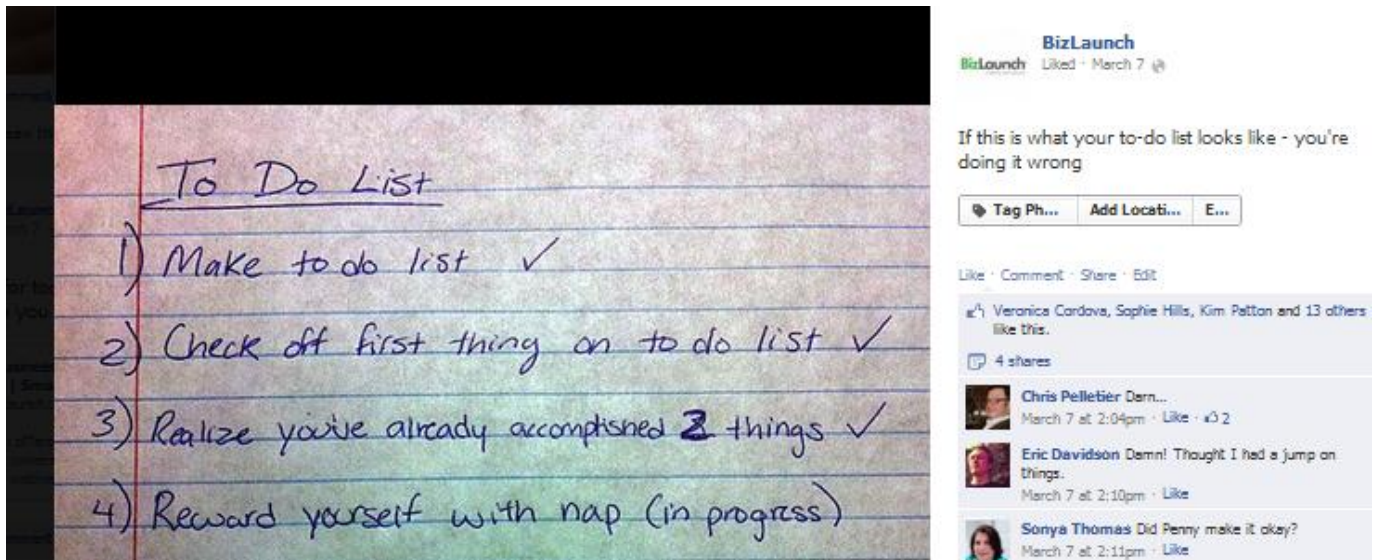
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Assets			
Current Assets			
Bank	\$0.00	Insert your year-end balances into this statement and develop your own balance sheet. If the balance sheet doesn't balance you've made a mistake. If you require more headings just insert rows using "insert rows" from the Insert Drop-down Menu.	
Accounts Receivable	\$0.00		
Inventory	\$0.00		
		Total Current Assets	\$0.00
Fixed Assets			
	Cost	Capital Cost Allowance	Book value
Equipment	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Motor Vehicles	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Other Assets	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Total	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
		Total Fixed Assets	\$0.00

Here is an example of a template that you could offer on your website. If you don't have templates, [we can create them](#) for you using your branding.

2. Entertainment - Post Content They Will Share

In order to get your content shared, it should be sticky. Sticky content is anything that is likely to be shared, liked or commented on by your followers. Funny posts (like the one below) seem to get the most attention from users online, but you can also do this with questions, quizzes, or games.



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3. Knowledge – Provide Them With Useful Information

Chances are that you're up-to-date on the issues that affect your industry, so why not share this information with your followers? You can get content by setting up a Google Alert for phrases or keywords that describe your industry, you can write eBooks or whitepapers, or you can blog about key issues that affect your followers. By providing information, you become a thought leader and people will follow you to get the information they are looking for.



One way that we help our clients do this is by hosting [webinars](#). Our webinars help companies connect with small business owners, but they also help business owners expand their skills. And because BizLaunch webinars are so interactive, business owners also get to learn from each-other!

4. Rewards – Give Something Away

Another way you can provide value to your followers is by giving something away to them. You can do with contests, coupons, discounts, or just about anything. If you choose to reward your followers, make sure it's something they will value. Make sure you have read the terms of use agreements very carefully on the social media site before running your contest.



5. Recognition – Show Your Appreciation

Your followers play a big role in your success on social media, so why not reward them for sharing, liking, and commenting on your posts? You can name a fan of the week, reward the followers who share your content the most, or give a prize away when you reach a key milestone. Rewarding your followers shows that you care.



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Now that you understand why people follow brands, you can start developing a weekly schedule for your posts.

Timing Your Posts

Timing is extremely important when it comes to scheduling your posts. Make sure that you time your posts when most of your customers are likely to be online.

Luckily for you, we've already done this research. From researching over 150 small and medium sized business owners in Canada and the United States we know that:

- **63% are checking their social media accounts at least once a day or more.**
- **67% are checking their social media accounts before 12 pm.**

Now that you know when business owners are online, you can start to plan your social media activity. Here's an example of a basic schedule you could use. Of course you could add time of day, specific groups, or other the type of content you will post.

Network	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Facebook	2 Times	2 Times	2 Times	2 Times	2 Times	2 Times	2 Times
Twitter	4 Times	4 Times	4 Times	4 Times	4 Times	4 Times	4 Times
LinkedIn	2 Times	2 Times	2 Times	2 Times	2 Times	2 Times	2 Times

You don't have to follow this schedule, but try to develop a consistent approach that works for you. Also, notice how the schedule doesn't fall silent on the weekend? This is where you can use Hootesuite or another program to automatically post for you.

And, always remember, these posts should be a mix of pictures, links, comments, status updates, videos, and blog content that educates your customers.

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Companies Who Are Getting it Right

Lastly, we wanted to show you some companies who have been getting it right when it comes to interacting with business owners on social media. Here are some really good examples:



Through their PartnerUp Program, [Deluxe](#) has created an online community for business owners. This program features small business owners and provides forums for them to connect online. Where Deluxe shines is their ability to integrate this program into their social media efforts.

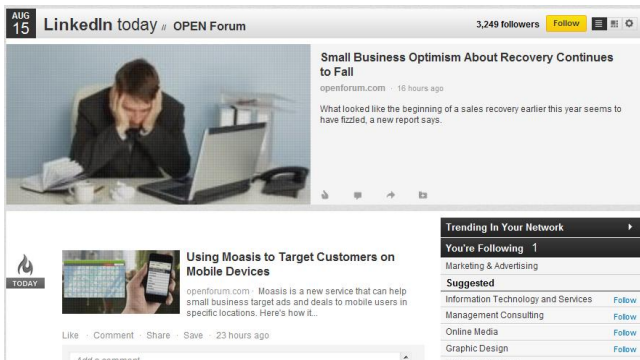


HubSpot is all-in-one marketing software that brings your whole marketing world together in one powerful, integrated system. Presenters of Inbound Conference.
Cambridge, MA · <http://www.HubSpot.com/>

Followed by [theBSDb](#), [Best SBDC](#), [KutztownSBDC](#) and 10+ others.

17,862 TWEETS	39,085 FOLLOWING	232,245 FOLLOWERS
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[HubSpot](#) is a master when it comes to content marketing. They understand the type of content their customers are looking for, and then they provide it in a way that works. Their content provides value to their customers and comes in a variety of eBooks, webinars, articles, and blog posts. They are also great at cross-promoting their efforts on social media, and using their content to generate leads.



Another great example is [AMEX Open](#). They have over 11,000 followers on their LinkedIn page and they continually post information that small business owners value.

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Conclusion and Additional Resources



We hope that by reading this eBook, you've gained a better understanding of how small business owners are using social media. You now know some best practices for creating your social media strategy, and the type of content you should post in order to develop strong relationships with your followers.

Now that you know the best practices for reaching business owners on social media, get out there and be social!

Always remember, we're here to help! As small business experts, we can help you plan your social media strategy and can develop webinars, articles, blogs, templates and videos that your small business customers will love.

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