Article Side

How to use social media to get more customers by Bloomtools

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Everyone is talking about social media â€“ websites like Myspace and Facebook have millions of members and big businesses everywhere are using online communities and interactive content to attract customers and build their brand loyalty.

But social media isnâ€™t just for corporate giants or catching up with old friends. Because the Internet has now matured to a level where websites are highly-functional and very affordable, small bricks and mortar businesses can use social media to get more customers and make more money online.

The key to this is making your website an online community where your customers can interact with you and each other, as well as offering engaging content and features that draw them back to the site regularly â€“ because the more time they spend on your site, the more chances you have to get them to buy from you.

Here are some strategies for achieving this on your website and some practical examples to help you see how you can apply these ideas to your business:

Photo gallery

If you sell products, you should have a photo gallery of your range on your website â€“ more than 50% of consumers research online before they come in-store to purchase so you should be using your website to draw them in. Photo galleries also have some other really interesting applications for different businesses and they are a great tool for engaging with customers and giving them a reason to return to your website (and even share it with their friends).

Hairdresser â€“ â€˜before and afterâ€™ photos of clients that have just had their hair done

Construction company â€“ images of buildings in progress for owners to share with their friends

Costume hire shop â€“ customers can upload their images and site users can vote for the best one

Internet Forum

Chat rooms are the best way to build a community around your business. Your customers can ask each other questions and discuss topics and if the chat room gets popular, you could have hundreds of visitors coming to your site on a daily basis to participate in conversation. The key to a successful forum is to make it worthwhile for people to participate â€“ they need to get something out of it, so if you donâ€™t have the type of business that easily generates discussion, you can attract participants by sharing your own expertise through your online forum.

Clothing retailer â€“ once a week the owner does a live chat with site users to answer their fashion questions

Photographer â€“ forum is a place for people to discuss the industry, make contacts and ask the photographer questions

Sporting club â€“ members join the forum to discuss club issues and events as well as world sporting news

Classifieds system

The form of classifieds that we all know is newspaper classifieds, which is where you pay to place an advertisement in the newspaper to buy or sell something. Online classifieds work in the same way â€“ you pay the website owner for the opportunity to advertise something on their site. This tool is ideal if you want to start an online business or directory because itâ€™s an easy way to get your site making a profit for you and it builds a community of users that visit your site on a regular basis.

Camping store â€“ as well as selling new products online, this store allows users to advertise second-hand equipment on their site for a small fee

Car yard â€“ instead of selling the advertising space, this business uses the system to advertise all their cars for sale

Chamber of commerce â€“ to make their site a complete local business directory, the chamber allows all businesses in the area to pay to advertise on their site

Bulletin board

This is a simple and effective way to introduce two-way communication between your business and your customers. A bulletin board allows you to post messages and information on your website and also for your customers to post their own messages â€“ from events, to items for sale, to questions for your business or other users. Itâ€™s a very simple system, so it has a multitude of applications for different businesses. Also, the website owner retains control over the board and can block any inappropriate messages from being published, so itâ€™s very secure.

Training company â€“ use the board to post training session details and business news and clients can post their own questions or success stories

Real estate â€“ the board is used for potential house buyers to ask questions to locals in the community and also for community announcements

Furniture manufacturer â€“ this board is in a secure part of the website and is for the manufacturer to communicate with his stockists about the products

Competitions

Everyone loves to win something, so competitions are a very successful tool for your website. They have multiple benefits â€“ building up your database with all the entrantâ€™s details, up-selling and promoting your products in a different way, and also getting people to visit your site regularly. If you do run a competition on your website, always offer something valuable as the prize so you get a lot of entries, make sure get the proper permits and get entrants to subscribe to your newsletter so you can continue to market to them.

Interior decorator â€“ get current clients to refer a friend and they can go in the draw for a $200 discount off their next room makeover

Butcher â€“ get customers to submit a review of their favourite product and go in the draw to win a monthâ€™s supply of meat

Financial planner â€“ after reading the financial plannerâ€™s ebook on money advice, clients and potentia clients can go in the draw to get a free consultation

Surveys

Surveys are one of the most underrated lead generation tools for business, and because they can now be conducted online, they are really simple and cost-effective. All businesses should use

customer feedback surveys to improve their service, but because the question and answer format is so flexible, a survey can be designed to suit multiple businesses and multiple purposes â€“ you are only limited by your creativity.\

Real estate agent â€“ potential buyers complete a survey about what they are looking for in a house and the agent emails them relevant properties

Coffee shop â€“ customer answers short questions to determine how they want their coffee, then it is made by the staff for the customer to pick up or have delivered

Fashion retailer â€“ site user answers some questions about their clothing and shopping habits and then they get access to a VIP sale

Getting results online is all about being different and offering something that attracts people to your website and then keeps them coming back. There are a lot of web tools out there, so you need to sit down and think about creative ways to use them in your business and then find a website developer that has the software, team, experience and reliability to deliver a quality solution for your business.

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