

Social Media for Business

Part 4: Tools for Social Media

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At this point, you've done the brainstorming and put a strategy in place to start using social media for your business. Again, the importance of a strategy cannot be stressed enough.

Deciding what tools you want to use is the fun but sometimes confusing part of social media. There are many tools that you can choose from. Read on to find out what tools are available, where to start, where each tool may be useful to you in your business.

Blogs

A blog, abbreviation for a “weblog”, is the online equivalent of a bulletin board or journal or diary. It is a chronological record of entries. The owner of the blog writes on a blog on a regular basis with the latest blog entry appearing on top of the page. A person who contributes to a blog is called a **blogger**; the activity is called **blogging**. An entry is called a **blog post**.

Depending on the way a blog is set up, people can comment on a blog post. A blog post along with comments is called a **thread**. Blogs help to create content that you can put on other networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. They can help establish you or your business as an expert or resource, and greatly enhance the **search engine optimization (SEO)** of your website.

There are several **blogging platforms** that you can use to **host** your blog. Some popular free ones are [Blogger](#) and [WordPress](#), which are extremely easy to set up and use. However, there are some restrictions in the way that you can set up your blog through these platforms. To overcome these restrictions, you can choose to pay for hosting your blog on [GoDaddy](#) or [Rackspace](#). One note about putting your blog on a third-party site: it will diminish the search engine optimization benefits you receive as a result of traffic to your blog. Hosting it on your company website will generate the greatest SEO benefits.

[Chris Brogan](#), in his blog *If I Started Today*, suggests starting your venture into social media with a blog.¹ While it is possible to make a blog to do things beyond just publish content, it is an easy tool to start using to publish your thoughts about your industry, business, product or service. There are several reasons you would start a blog. Make sure that the reason is aligned with your social media goal and strategy. If your goal is to increase customer loyalty, make sure that your blog promotes this goal. Make your customer a part of your blog by putting up their pictures (of course with their permission), have a customer of the week or month or promote your customer's business if relevant.



An important point to remember is to choose a name for your blog that is a meaningful representation of your business or the purpose of your blog. Make sure to provide a description of you and/or your business, a location and other contact information so people know how to find you should they be interested in your business. Blogs rank high with search engines, especially if you have a blog associated with your website. Using the right words in describing your business, writing the appropriate blog posts and giving proper titles to these posts will help increase visibility of your blog in turn leading to increased traffic to your website and more leads and conversions.

Allowing readers to comment on your blog posts can be an excellent source of input into improving or expanding your business. It is essential that you track these comments and answer questions and reply to feedback, positive or negative, readers might have.

Facebook

Facebook is the social network that most businesses use to connect with their customers. Facebook has almost 500 million users all over the world.² The idea is to connect with your customers (or potential customers) where they are already present without having to attract them to a new website or network. Facebook allows people to share information with each other by posting updates or status messages on their **Wall**. These messages appear on a **Livfeed** in friends' profiles. Friends can read these updates, comment and/or share your posts.

There are different ways in which a business can set up an account Facebook:

- Personal accounts – Facebook allows users with personal profiles to stay in touch with friends and family. It also helps business owners to connect personally with their customers to maintain a personal relationship with them. For example, a hair stylist might use his or her personal profile on Facebook to maintain a personal relationship with clients or remind them that its time for their next appointment. The limitation with using personal accounts is that business and personal life gets mixed. Your customers might have access to more information than you want them to. However, there are ways to overcome privacy issues with Facebook's privacy settings that allows you to block some content from some of your friends. More information about Facebook's privacy can be found through Facebook's [Privacy Settings](#).
- Business accounts – If you're uncomfortable about mixing business with pleasure, you can set up a profile specifically for your business. However, it is a violation of Facebook's terms of use to create multiple accounts for different uses. This means that if you have a personal account already, you can't open a business account using a different name. If you don't have a personal account and don't intend to have one, then opening a business account is just as simple as opening and operating a personal account. You can then use this account to create pages and advertisements on Facebook.
- Pages – You can set up a **Page** for your business using personal or business accounts. Pages allow businesses to start a conversation among people who **Like** a page. People on Facebook **like** pages of businesses whose products or services they use or would like to know more about. When a Facebook user likes your page, any updates you post on your business's page will appear on their wall. You can use posts to keep your fans (those who like your business) and those who visit your Facebook page posted about developments in your business, community activities that your business is involved in, to offer coupons to people who visit your page or run contests. You can also choose to pay to advertise your page. However, allowing it to grow organically will result in more engaging conversations over time. You can also view statistics tracking visitors to your page.

Facebook also allows you to upload and share pictures, videos and links. You can use the **Tag this Photo** feature to tag friends in pictures. This is a great way to reach out to people who don't know your business. How? When you tag someone in a picture, video or status update, the tagged item appears in the person's newsfeed visible to all their friends and Facebook connections. These friends might click on your business' link to find out more.

There are many more things you can do on Facebook. To get started with Facebook, go to www.facebook.com and set up your business profile.

Twitter

Twitter is the micro version of a blog. Users have 140 characters to **tweet** their thoughts just like they would on a blog. Twitter is typically used to tell your **followers** what you are doing or what you are thinking about. You can also **follow** other people or organizations to learn about what they are doing or thinking about.

The account can be set up as a person or as a business. Twitter requires account holders to have a name and a description of the account. As a business, there are several options available to set up the account. If your business is XYZ Company, you can choose to set up a Twitter account as *XYZCompany*. You can have several Twitter accounts for the same business with each account addressing different aspects of business. For example, you could have a Twitter account *XYZCompanyJobs* to announce job openings in your business, another account *XYZCompanySupport* to provide customer service or separate accounts for each of XYZ's product or service. You can also opt to allow your employees to set up Twitter accounts as *EmployeeAtXYZ* or just *Employee* and have them describe themselves as representative of XYZ Company.

A key focus should be the description of the Twitter account. Ensure that you describe yourself in a way that search engines can understand. That way, when customers are looking for products or services similar to what your business offers, your Twitter account will show up in search results. Another point is to use **hashtags**. A hashtag on Twitter means any word preceded by the "pound" (#) character. Using a hashtag in your tweet is like setting up a Google Alert. An example of the use of a hashtag in a tweet is:

You tweet through your Twitter account: Watch out for our new product #ABC

One of your followers tweets: I'm excited about #XYZCompany releasing its new product #ABC.

By typing #ABC in Twitter's search bar, you can find people who are talking about your new product. This is a useful tool to listen, monitor and measure. We will discuss this more in the next part of the series **Part V: Monitor and Measure**.

Some purposes of Twitter for businesses are – to build awareness about your business, attract new customers, address customer service complaints that are tweeted, find suppliers, promote your blog or run promotional campaigns. People follow a Twitter account when they find the content put out through that account interesting. They might not be existing or potential customers even. However, using Twitter, a small business can build buzz about their business.

Go to www.twitter.com to set up your Twitter account and start tweeting!

Twellow

Twitter has several applications associated with it that can help develop business. Twellow is one such application. It is the yellow pages of public Twitter accounts. You can find Twitter accounts under different categories such as retail, technology, media and marketing. Using the TwellowHood tab on the website, you can find Twitter accounts in your area of business and start following them. This will allow your business to appear in

the account holder's **Twitter feed**. If they are interested in your business, the account holder will follow you back. For example, if you were a restaurant in Bellingham, WA and you followed people in the area who are on Twitter, you would build awareness about your business among these people. You may choose to offer discounts to people who follow you or offer a discount to those who visit your restaurant within the next week.

www.twellow.com

Linkedin

If your business has something to offer to professionals, LinkedIn can be an excellent network to utilize. While many features offered by LinkedIn are for-fee, you can create a profile for your company and post developments within your organization at no cost. If employees in your organization have LinkedIn accounts, they too can edit the company's profile. It can be a useful tool if you sell to professionals, or it can also be used as a recruitment tool when you are hiring.

You can become part of groups that are related to your business and answer questions that people might have about the industry your business functions in or application of your product or service as a solution to problems people might have. For example, if you are a photographer, you can join a group such as *Canon EOS Digital Photography* on LinkedIn and help other photographers with questions they might have about photography.

www.linkedin.com

Flickr

"A picture is worth a thousand words." If you don't want to use Facebook to upload pictures, Flickr is a great alternative. Flickr allows you to share your pictures, use pictures taken by others (usually by giving the photographer credit) in your blog posts, and connect with other Flickr users to learn more. If you are a restaurant, a retailer or a service provider, taking pictures of your facilities allows people to visualize your business. Use Flickr to share your pictures. It is simple to set up your account and upload pictures. There are also options to make your images private and accessible only to friends or people with whom you share a link.

Go to www.flickr.com to start sharing your pictures.

Yelp

Imagine your burrito store listing show up when someone types *burritos near Bellingham, WA*. Not only does your listing show up, but so do the various positive (or alternately – negative) reviews about the burritos and customer service at your restaurant. That's what [Yelp](http://www.yelp.com) can and will do for local businesses. Many people use the internet or their smart phones to find things to do or place to go. Smart phones such as Blackberries or iPhones have applications that help smart phone owners to search for places to eat, shop, drink and play along with reviews from locals or people who visit these places.

If you are a retailer, make sure that your business has a listing if one does not already exist. It is usually free to use these services. Add a brief description of your business to these listings so people know what to expect from your store. Encourage people to provide their feedback about your business on these networks.

References and Additional Resources

¹ Brogan, C. (2008, November 22). *If I Started Today*. Retrieved August 31, 2010, from Chris Brogan: www.chrisbrogan.com

² Ostrow, A. (2010). *It's Official: Facebook Passes 500 Million Users*. Retrieved August 31, 2010, from Mashable: www.mashable.com