

212MEDIASTUDIOS

212mediastudios.com

574-269-0720

info@212mediastudios.com

2020 Social Media Guide

Since the advent of social media in the late 1990s, billions of people have started networking online in some capacity. With sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram, we now have the ability to digitally connect with people all over the world. In just 20 years, social media has changed drastically. Technology is constantly evolving—and with it the algorithms and analytics social networking sites use to communicate with users and connect them to each other.

With the dawn of a new decade, social media is no longer what it used to be, and forward-thinking businesses need to stay a step ahead of the trends. A variety of sites offer serious opportunities for customer engagement if you can harness their power correctly and understand which platforms are the best for you.

Today, implementing a social media strategy is more valuable than ever—especially with continually evolving tracking and targeting tactics. You must combine your traditional, organic strategies with new methods that will showcase your company. Every social media platform provides a different purpose, so it is important to fully understand your own goals and the advantages of each platform in order to make the right decisions for your business.

LinkedIn

While most social media sites excel at offering B2C advertising opportunities, LinkedIn is most useful for B2B companies. Users on LinkedIn are business professionals who want to showcase their careers—which means B2B sellers can easily find decision-makers in the industries they want to target. You can build relationships with executives in the companies that would benefit from your product or service, which personalizes your business. LinkedIn allows you to interact with prospective customers and help them see the face behind your company.

As an initial step on LinkedIn, it is important to cultivate a company presence. Create a profile for your business, and post updates and relevant content regularly. Encourage your employees to share your content to expand your reach and engage both new and current followers. When you plan your posting schedule for LinkedIn, remember that it is often used during work hours because it is a business-oriented platform. If you post after work or over the weekend, it is less likely that people will interact with your content. Instead, post in the middle of the week, between Tuesday and Thursday, and during times when people are likely to be taking a break from work—such as between 10:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. or between 3:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m., according to HubSpot.¹

LinkedIn is not after mechanical, impersonal engagement. It is a site where people go to interact with other business professionals, ask questions, and provide insight. To stand out on this platform, you should ask your connections what their business challenges are and what their companies are currently experiencing. When you create an initial connection—before trying to sell a product—you can humanize your own company and begin to build relationships with potential customers. Once you've established your company's presence on LinkedIn through post content, you can also consider supplementing that content with paid advertising.

Over the past couple of years, LinkedIn has invested significantly in the digital advertising space. With LinkedIn's features, you can easily target locations, demographics, education history, specific job titles, and even seniority levels.² These tools help you reach the decision-makers in companies that need your product or service. Through your strategic ad placement and consistent posting, you can cultivate customers who do not just know your product, but also feel as if they know you. In 2020 and beyond, companies in the B2B industry would do well to familiarize themselves with LinkedIn best practices and implement a comprehensive strategy to incorporate both engaging post content and supplementary ads to target the right audience.

Facebook

As technology advances, it has become increasingly difficult to ensure that people see your posts. Facebook's algorithms automatically prioritize content that its users are likely to engage with, based on their previous activity and interests. Success on Facebook is dependent not only on what time you post, but also on how many people interact with your content.

If you want to encourage interaction with your content, keep in mind that quality matters more than quantity. If you post 15 times per day, it is still possible that none of those posts will reach your audience—in fact, too much posting can

actually deter your customers. Consider these stats from Jeff Bullas:

- Posting one to four times per week produces 71% more user engagement than posting five or more times per week.
- Posts with less than 80 characters receive 66% more engagement than longer posts.
- Posts that generate the highest engagement are less than 40 characters in length.³

When it comes to getting good interaction from your audience, timing is critical. Seventy-four percent of Facebook users check the site every day, which is more than any other social network.⁴ To maximize your reach, post when people are likely to be checking their feeds. This can include over the lunch hour or in the evening after work.

In order to naturally generate a buzz about your brand on Facebook, you need to ensure that your posts show up in the feed—and the way to do that is by encouraging interaction from your followers. Your posts should not just promote your company. Instead, ask questions and invite opinions. For example, if you are posting on a Friday, ask your followers what they are most looking forward to over the weekend—and then tell them what is on your agenda. It is a great way to humanize your business, and if your followers engage with it, your post will appear in more newsfeeds and expand your reach.

To complement this organic reach on Facebook, you can also promote your content through targeted ad campaigns. When you set up an ad on Facebook, machine learning makes it possible for the site to detect which of your ads are performing best—which means when you set a price limit on your campaign, Facebook can automatically distribute that budget to provide the best ROI based on the ads that are performing best.⁵ Effectively managing your presence on Facebook requires a long-term strategy. You should be able to balance your organic reach with creative ad placement in order to consistently engage your audience.

Instagram

Despite its late arrival to the social media scene, Instagram took the world by storm when it launched in 2010. Today, it has more than one billion active monthly users—and 80% of account users follow a business, which presents a unique opportunity to interact closely with potential customers.⁶ Instagram's foundation in photos is also an advantage for marketers, since visual appeal matters to purchasers in 93% of cases.⁷ Catching an audience's attention with an engaging image goes a long way toward closing a sale.

For industries like health and wellness, travel, and beauty, Instagram is a valuable social media tool. Companies can engage new followers and encourage them to learn more about their products—simply by posting a picture and adding hashtags. Sixty percent of users have discovered new products on Instagram, and more than a third of users have purchased a product online with their mobile phones.⁸ To attract new followers, it is a good idea to do some background research on popular hashtags in your industry. What interests your target market? Which accounts or hashtags are they already following? When you know this, you can add your product into the mix.

One of the most popular tools for engaging users on Instagram is the “stories” feature, which allows businesses to post current, in-the-moment content—and add countdowns, polls, and quizzes to encourage engagement. Twenty percent of Instagram stories get a DM from viewers.⁹ These stories are the key to curating organic engagement on Instagram. The next generation of consumers wants to feel a personal connection to their products, which means interacting with them through your stories is an important best practice for generating success.

Because Instagram is founded on visual appeal, if your product or service is not conducive to fun, vibrant imagery, this might not be the best platform for you. When you are investing in social media, it is important to know what your audience wants and meet them where they are. Instagram is used primarily by women, according to Pew Research Center.¹⁰ Additionally, the bulk of Instagram users fall between the ages of 18 and 34.¹¹ If you are targeting this type of audience, the Instagram platform is ideal for garnering engagement—but it is important to set up a well-researched strategy, instead of blindly reaching out to users. Because a single social media platform will not be effective by itself, develop an integrated plan to maximize audience engagement.

Twitter

In recent months, Twitter's number of active monthly users has dropped drastically, and the company began 2019 with its lowest user count in two years.¹² While Twitter still holds value for businesses that need to maintain a constant line of open communication with customers, general tweets from your business will likely go unseen unless you can produce an exorbitant amount of content. However, while Twitter does not offer much value in advertising to the masses, it can go a long way in maintaining a positive user experience through company updates and customer service.

If you can maintain customers' satisfaction by interacting with them on this platform, you will be poised for future success. Eighty-five percent of small and mid-size business Twitter users say providing good customer service is one of the top reasons they feel they need to be on Twitter.¹³ According to entrepreneur Neil Patel, investing in a customer service strategy on Twitter can provide long-term growth for your business.¹⁴ If your audience is on Twitter, meet them there to show them you care about them. A recent study suggests that Twitter users tend to be younger, with the median age being 40.¹⁵ Before you invest in a strategy, consider where your audience spends their time.

Ultimately, while Twitter's usefulness has changed over the past decade, it still has the potential to be leveraged for building branding and credibility. It is not necessarily the ad spend that matters on Twitter, but rather the time companies are willing to devote to it.

Snapchat

Since 45% of Snapchat's users are 18-24 years old, and 71% are under 34, Snapchat can be tempting for businesses trying to appeal to younger generations—but Snapchat's stocks have consistently dropped over the past three years, and ad-buyers are not seeing a return on their investments like they have on Facebook and Instagram.¹⁶ For business owners, Snapchat is a risk—but it does offer potential for success.

Engaging audiences through Snapchat can power brand awareness. One quick way to reach your target market is to invest in a sponsored filter or lens on Snapchat. These sponsored filters are seen by an estimated 16 million people every day—and businesses have used this popularity to their advantage.¹⁷ For example, during Super Bowl 50, Gatorade simulated the tradition of the winning coach getting a bucket of Gatorade dumped on his head by sponsoring a filter where users could film themselves getting a Gatorade shower, too. This filter ended up getting more than 165 million views, and it increased purchase intent by eight percent.¹⁸

Snapchat appeals to the younger generation of consumers by engaging followers imaginatively, but an ad strategy on Snapchat should only be approached when you've carefully weighed the pros and cons.

YouTube

With the rising popularity of video in marketing, YouTube is a platform businesses cannot afford to overlook. Since millions of people visit YouTube every day, it creates a unique opportunity to reach your audience.

To capitalize on YouTube on a corporate level, it is important to set up a YouTube channel for business. This gives access to specific analytics such as view counts, average watch times, and interaction rates across videos. It also provides important information on viewer demographics, which helps businesses adjust their messaging accordingly to fit their targets.

Before starting on a video for YouTube, make a plan. Outline a script or storyboard. What do you want your audience to learn? What is the action step they should take after watching your video? If you're setting up a short tutorial, be sure to include a CTA at the end leading to your website—and the marketing funnel.

YouTube's value is supplementary to a long-term strategy. While businesses might not see conversions or sales directly related to YouTube content, pieces such as webinars, explanation videos, and customer testimonials serve to build brand credibility and provide a firsthand look into a company's product or service.

Pinterest

Unlike many other social media platforms, Pinterest is not a place for controversy and debate. Instead, it is a place where people go to find and store ideas for their future selves—and make purchases. More than any other platform, it is a shopper's destination. In fact, 59% of Millennials have discovered products on Pinterest, and 90% of weekly users visit Pinterest to make purchase decisions.¹⁹ Essentially, Pinterest has become an online visual shopping list—which works to a B2C company's advantage.

Creating Pinterest boards and pinning images of products, optimized with hashtags and keywords, can attract new customers and drive more traffic back to a website. First, though, make sure you use the right content for Pinterest. For example, if you have time-sensitive information or want to promote a flash sale, then a pin probably isn't the best way to do it. Pinterest is ideal for catching customers' attention and increasing brand awareness, but it is not a good platform for last-minute deals. Your audience should be able to find what they're looking for on your website, so link your pins to pages that either won't change or will be easy to update.

To find success on Pinterest, you should also spend time researching the most popular keywords your audience uses. How do they search for products, and how can you optimize your products to fit their searches? Knowing your audience is key for developing a strategy that will engage them consistently and encourage loyalty to your brand.

The Future of Social Media

As this new decade begins, it is clear that companies must adapt to the changing goals of social media communication, combining organic reach with promotional content. Depending on a business' product, service, audience, and objectives, the right social media platform—and the right tactics—will continue evolving. Stay ahead of the trends by developing a comprehensive social media strategy that implements the right platforms at the right time.

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Email: info@212mediastudios.com

Phone: 574-269-0720

Web: www.212mediastudios.com

A full-service marketing agency