

## Making the Most of Social Media

A Beginner's Guide to Social Media from FirstFound

If you've read a newspaper, watched the television or surfed the internet recently, then you'll have heard the following terms over and over again; *social media, Twitter, Facebook...*

But what is all the fuss about? What is social media? Why should your business be using it? And how can your business use these websites to attract new customers, sell your products and form lasting relationships that will help you succeed in the online marketplace?

This guide will take you through everything you need to know; from understanding what social media is and why you should be using it, to setting up your own accounts and creating a successful social media campaign.

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## What is Social Media?

Social media is a term for a collection of websites that allow users to share information, opinions and content quickly and easily. These websites make up one of the fastest growing sections of the internet, with millions of users logging on to a social media site at least once a day.

There are three broad types of social media sites:

### *Social networking sites:*

These sites focus on building social relationships between users, allowing them to communicate with their friends and share information. The most popular social networking sites worldwide are currently Facebook and Twitter.

### *Location-based sites:*

Location-based sites are online "games" which reward customers by visiting certain businesses or locations. The most popular location-based site is currently FourSquare.

### *Social sharing sites:*

Also known as social bookmarking and social news sites, social sharing websites are specialised pages that exist solely to allow users to submit and vote on news stories, articles and images. The most popular social networking sites are Digg, Delicious and Reddit.

Of these three types, the first two are the ones that provide the best opportunities for businesses. There are also other specialist sites which don't fit into these categories. One example is YouTube which exists solely to share video content, but these sites are best used only in special circumstances.

If you're serious about a social media campaign, then you'll need to get to grips with Twitter, Facebook and (if you're a bricks and mortar business) FourSquare.

## **Twitter**

<http://twitter.com>

Twitter describes itself as a "rich source of instant information". It's an extremely simple website where users communicate with each other in bursts of 140 characters or less. It's primarily used to discuss news, gossip and to promote services.

Due to the space constraints of Twitter, and the relative lack of features on the homepage, using Twitter to its full potential requires the use of a URL shortener and Twitter client.

Getting to grips with these aspects will be covered fully in the "setting up accounts" section.

## **Facebook**

<http://www.facebook.com>

Facebook is the most popular social networking site in the world, and is currently battling it out with Google for the crown of the world's most used website. Facebook is a self-contained hub where users can display personal information, photographs and updates, join groups and communities, set up "fan pages" and communicate with each other both publically and privately. For business purposes, the most important feature that Facebook offers is the "Fan page" functionality, although some businesses do choose to maintain a company profile page.

Both of these will be discussed and explained in the "setting up accounts" section.

## **FourSquare**

<http://www.foursquare.com>

Foursquare is a tool to help users explore their city. It provides information on local businesses and allows users to keep track of their visits, leave feedback and battle it out to become the "Mayor" – a title to the user who visits a single business the most times in one week.

Registering your business is a simple and quick process, and once this is done you can offer incentives called "specials" to regular customers.

This process will be covered in the "setting up accounts" section.

## Why Should I Use Social Media?

Because your prospective clients are.

Your clients are using social media sites, and they're using them to talk about your business. They're using them to research brands and purchases, and they're using them to decide what to put into the search engines.

It's not crucial for you to be using social media, but if you're using it and using it correctly, it's going to open up a number of opportunities for you.

### Connecting with clients

As we mentioned above, social media websites are fast becoming the most visited sites on the web.

Social media lets you join in the conversations that your clients are having, to find out if they have any needs or concerns that your products or services can address. If a prospective client updates their Facebook status to let the world know they're having a baby, you'll know to tell them about your range of prams.

### Increasing brand awareness

If you buy a billboard advert on a busy road, you know that people will drive past, notice it, and remember your brand. Social media lets you do that for free. If you have a reasonably active Twitter account, a popular Facebook page, or people are logging their visits on FourSquare, people are going to remember your business.

And if they remember your business, then they'll be more likely to click on your listing in the search engines, or walk into your store on the high street.

### Reputation management

If people are talking about your business, you'll want to listen. If people are talking about your business to their friends, chances are they'll be having at least some of those conversations online. If you've got the right accounts in place, then it's a fair bet that some of those clients might even want to have those conversations with you directly.

Social media gives you the opportunity to monitor and join in with those conversations. To learn from negative feedback, and to bask in the positives.

### Social Media & SEO

Search engines don't follow social media links. Now that's out of the way, we can discuss the positive benefits social media can have on your SEO campaign.

Firstly, a Facebook fan page or Twitter account can rank under your business' name. When combined with the brand awareness we discussed above, that can lead to more traffic.

Secondly, the search engines are bringing in "real time search". So if you're Tweeting about a product while someone's searching for it, you might well see the benefits for yourself.

## How do I use Social Media?

Now you know what social media is and why you should be using it, it's time to look at how to set up your own social media campaigns. Because of their mass appeal, social media sites have been set up in a user friendly way, so getting started is simple. But first you need to know the answers to two questions. Who should be maintaining your social media accounts, and which social media sites should you be using?

### **Assigning the task**

Unlike SEO, social media isn't something that should be left to the "experts". Because this is such a new field, there are very few genuine social media experts out there, although thousands of marketers self-identify as "gurus". And the genuine experts are so rare, that you'll be paying a high price for their services.

Also, the reason that social media attracts people is the personal nature. They don't want to converse on Twitter with someone who only knows what your marketing material says. They want to discuss their issues and needs with someone who knows your business inside out.

For these reasons, it's best to choose someone from inside your own company to handle your accounts, although they should be free to seek advice and support from wherever they can find it.

### **Identifying which sites to use**

As we mentioned above, there are dozens of social media sites out there for you to use. A good starting point is to begin with the most popular sites, Facebook and Twitter. These will form the cornerstone of your campaign. If you operate a bricks and mortar business, then you'll need to add FourSquare to the list.

After that, it's a matter of finding sites which dovetail with your products and services.

A photographer might find use in Flickr, a photo sharing website, whereas an online magazine might be able to turn their top stories into hot topics on Digg. The best way to work out which sites you should be using is to see what other businesses are doing on the sites you're considering.

## **Setting up accounts**

As we've established, the three sites that the majority of businesses use will be Twitter, Facebook and Foursquare. This section will take you through setting up those accounts.

### *Facebook*

With Facebook, you'll need two things; an account and a fan page.

If you already have a personal account with Facebook, you can skip this step and go straight to the fan page.

If not, fill in the details on the Facebook homepage. With your name, address, email, password, gender and date of birth and click "sign up". Facebook's automated sign-up procedure will then take you through the rest of the steps.

Once you have set up your account, it's time to set up your new company fan page. In the left hand toolbar of the Facebook website, you'll see an option for "Ads and Pages". Select this, and then select "create a page".

The on-page instructions will then take you through the steps of setting up a page for your business. Once this is completed, you will be prompted to invite any friends, either from your Facebook friends list, or via email.

Congratulations. You now have your own company Facebook page. This can be used to share information and offers with your fans, and to collect feedback using your "Wall". We will discuss ideas for using Facebook in the next section.

### *FourSquare*

To get started on FourSquare, you will need to set up a FourSquare login profile. This can be done by following the on-screen instructions. Once this is done, you need to visit <http://foursquare.com/businesses/>

On this page, start by searching for your business. You may need to refine your search by location in order to get the correct match. If your business is already listed, select the "Are you the manager of this business" option, and follow the on-screen instructions.

If you can't find your business, you will be prompted to "add a venue".

Once you've added the business' details, you will be prompted to confirm that you are the owner, and then guided through adding a special offer for FourSquare users. We will discuss potential specials in the next section.

## *Twitter*

Twitter is the simplest social media site to use, but the hardest to manage effectively. Unusually, most of your interactions on Twitter will come through third party applications.

To get started on Twitter, You need to specify your full name, username, password and email. For business purposes, you should use the name of your business for both. For example, FirstFound have the "full name" of "FirstFound UK – SEO", and the username of "firstfound". This allows interested parties to find the account easily once they know the name of the business.

Once this has been set up, you can either use the Twitter site itself to manage your account, or use a third party application.

If you use the Twitter site, you will need to make use of a URL shortener to save space when sharing links. You're limited to 140 characters on Twitter, so posting a link of 60 or so characters can severely limit what you want to say. A link shortener such as <http://bit.ly> gets around that by compressing your links.

To use Bit.ly, simply input the address you'd like shortened and click "shorten".

This will render long links, such as <http://www.firstfound-blog.co.uk/social-media-advice-businesses/> into shorter links, such as <http://bit.ly/aOQKgb>

If you choose not to use the Twitter website, the easiest third party application to use is Hootsuite. This features an automatic URL shortener, a function which allows you to schedule Tweets, and a variety of other messaging functions.

Hootsuite can be found at <http://hootsuite.com>

Once your Twitter account is set up, you will need to look for followers. We will discuss finding the right people to follow, and how to appeal to them with Twitter in the next section.

## **Running a Social Media Campaign**

By now, you'll know what social media is, how your business can benefit from using it, and will hopefully be in possession of a few social media accounts.

What you need now is a strategy. We will outline the general strengths of the three social media sites we have discussed, and then detail an example campaign which you can use as a basis for your business.

### **The strengths of Facebook, Twitter & FourSquare**

#### *Facebook – The Hub*

Facebook's strength is that it can act as a hub for your campaign. The majority of your current clients may well be on Facebook, so you can use any client email list you have to invite them to your page. If they accept, this will be displayed to their friends, instantly creating some interest in your brand. Once you have this user base set up, your Facebook hub will serve two main purposes:

Firstly, you can use it to link out to all your other social media sites, tying your campaign together. You can use it to publicise your FourSquare specials, advertise any Twitter offers, and reproduce any offline marketing that you're carrying out, driving traffic to your online shop.

Secondly, the "Wall" of your page will act as a message board for your clients. They will share feedback on your products, services and offers which provide fantastic market research.

#### *Twitter – The Communications Centre*

While you will need to make regular Facebook updates and listen to what your clients are saying there, Twitter is set up specifically to allow you to communicate with your target audience. Finding people to "follow" on Twitter is easy. You can search by name or email address to add people from your Facebook hub, or use a Twitter directory to find clients in your area. For example, <http://wefollow.com> allows you to search for users by geographical area and interests.

Following people on Twitter is a one-way process, but the majority of people you add should follow you in return. However, there is a tried and tested offer which will increase your follower count in return for a small prize. Simply send the following message out: "Win a free [product] – simply follow @[username] and ReTweet this message to enter".

In order to win your gift, Twitter users will need to follow you and pass on (ReTweet) your message to their followers, increasing your audience exponentially.

Once you've built up a follower base, your Twitter feed will serve two main purposes.

Firstly, you can use Twitter's inbuilt search function to monitor people talking about your brands, products or areas. This allows you to respond to requests for information and discuss feedback in real time.

Secondly, you can use Twitter to broadcast. You can promote your products and special offers through Twitter – and if your clients are interested they will pass on the offer to their friends, creating instant word of mouth and driving traffic.

#### *FourSquare – The Incentive*

If you're in a business that needs customers to come to you, then FourSquare is tailor-made for you. It offers incentives for two types of users, and will result in increased footfall for your business when promoted through your other social media accounts.

Firstly, you can appeal to FourSquare "Gamers". As the site started off as a game where people needed to find new locations and venues to score points, there are users who are always on the lookout for somewhere new. By listing your business on FourSquare, you automatically appeal to this group, who may not otherwise have visited your premises.

Secondly, you can appeal to your regulars – and turn occasional visitors into regulars. By offering an incentive to the "Mayor" of your business (the FourSquare user who has visited you the most in the past week), you give customers a reason to visit you repeatedly. As bargain hunters are always seeking to usurp the current "Mayor", this may well result in a number of people visiting you on a regular basis in an attempt to win the coveted "Mayorship".

#### **Linking it all together**

By now, you should have a general idea of how to use our three cornerstone sites to create word of mouth buzz about your site, bring your brand to a wider audience and drive traffic to both your online shop and your actual premises. In the following section, we will outline an example social media campaign that explains how to tie this all together.

### **Example Campaign: Café**

In this example, we'll be outlining a campaign for a city centre café in Manchester, which specialises in offering breakfast and lunch on the go for local office workers.

Sites used:

Facebook

Twitter

FourSquare

Potential issues:

No email addresses – the café doesn't undertake any email transactions with customers, and as such may not have a mailing list.

### **The Campaign**

#### *Attracting initial interest*

Facebook

A Facebook fan page is set up, and the café management invite all staff members and friends. This will bring the site to the attention of new customers as they will be notified when their friends (staff members and friends of the management) join the page.

Twitter

A Twitter account is set up, and a search is done on <http://wefollow.com> for people who list themselves as in Manchester. Local business accounts are also added.

FourSquare

A listing is added to FourSquare to attract any users in the area.

Offline

A single line is added to menu and specials boards: "Add us on Facebook and Twitter to take advantage of our great offers!"

#### *Enticing new customers and increasing footfall*

Now that the three social network sites have a base level of interested users, it's time to turn those users into regular customers.

Facebook

Along with publicising offers on the other two sites, Facebook is used to promote two regular offers:

- 1) Free coffee for our Xth fan – "Our 50<sup>th</sup>/100<sup>th</sup>/150<sup>th</sup> fan will win two free cups of coffee! Invite your friends, and if they're the lucky one, they might share their freebies with you!"
- 2) Free sandwich for the Xth customer – "The fifth person to buy a bacon sandwich this Friday will get a sausage sandwich free!"

The first offer will increase interest on Facebook, meaning more people will be exposed to the second offer. The second offer will increase footfall as people make a purchase hoping they'll be the lucky winner.

#### Twitter:

Along with publicising offers on the other two sites, Twitter is used to promote one monthly offer, using the formula we discussed above - *"Win a free ham and cheese sandwich - simply follow @[username] and ReTweet this message to enter"*

The management also regularly monitor Twitter for key combinations such as "eat + Manchester" - that way if someone Tweets that they're "Looking for somewhere to eat lunch in Manchester", the café can be suggested.

This increases awareness of the business, resulting in higher footfall, and the Twitter account, resulting in more exposure.

#### FourSquare:

FourSquare is used solely for one offer, which requires that the winner is a regular visitor: *"Mayoral Monday! Whoever is Mayor on Monday gets 50% off a sandwich, drink and snack"* - the offer is also publicised on the specials board to increase interest.

This results in increased footfall as customers visit more regularly in order to become the "Mayor". By selecting Monday as the prize day, it also appeals to local workers who shop in the city centre at weekends as they try to overtake their midweek-only opponents.

#### *Market research*

Finally, social media is used to keep the existing customers happy. Our café regularly asks Twitter and Facebook users if there's a particular sandwich combination they want to see, or if there's any feedback they have on the service.

The resulting information can be used to expand the product range, and improve customer services.

The management keep an eye on this social media campaign, noting which offers people respond to best, and adjust the campaign accordingly. They then sit back, relax, and watch as people return time and time again for a cup of coffee and a bacon sandwich.

## **Contact Information**

This free beginners guide to Social Media was put together by FirstFound, the UK's leading search engine consultants.

You can find us on Twitter and Facebook, or visit us at <http://www.firstfound.co.uk>

For more information on social media, please visit the social media advice section of our blog: <http://www.firstfound-blog.co.uk/social-media-advice-businesses/>

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