

COLUMNS

## 6 tips to stand out in social media

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In the competitive arena of social media, businesses must stand out or risk becoming irrelevant.

Whether you design covered wagons, bake cupcakes or sell rocket parts, there is a niche audience online of people who are interested in and looking for your business.

These people expect to find you in the world of social, and expect you to actually be social. Simply showing up is not enough. You cannot stand on the sideline and expect to win the game.

For most marketers, social media is undervalued and misunderstood. It can be intimidating, ignored and put on the back burner, or it can be a terrific asset allowing you to connect with and learn from your customers. The choice is yours.

Do not stand on the sideline. Jump in the game, and be a VIP in your niche. Here are some pointers:

Be proud. Consumers made the choice to follow your business online, so do not be ashamed to talk about yourself. Share your wins and accomplishments. Let your customers know what you are up to.

Specials, events and new releases are all relevant to who you are and what you do. The key is to balance this kind of promotion with your customer's wants and interests so that it never feels like selling.

Be social. While not trying to over-simplify, it is social media. Have a gigantic snow drift in front of your business? Incredible sunrise on your way into work? Did a local celebrity or official stop by your business? Cute photo of your dog sleeping on a Monday morning? Post it.

Have fun with your customers to break down barriers and strengthen your relationship.

Be relevant. Do not be afraid to chime in on things happening around the world and in the news.

Commenting on what is trending in the news is just smart. When people are talking about it, you should be in the conversation.

Sharing information that is useful can create a value-added feel to those who are following you.

Be visual. This is so very important. We are all visual creatures. A great image will capture your customer's attention, if only for a few seconds.

Even if you do not see a lot of "likes," "loves" or comments, you can know that people saw your post.

Be valuable. Do not be a time-sucker on social media. If your posts are irrelevant, boring and do not stand out, your presence will shrink.

Give your followers a reason to stay and watch for your posts by answering questions, offering tips and sharing some love in your social community.

Be involved. Social media cannot go on autopilot.

Listen to what your customers are saying. Comment back. They love your red velvet cupcakes, but are they sad you only sell them on Friday? Sounds like an opportunity. They love your prices, but you never seem to have enough of a certain model? Gear up and supply the consumer demand.

Social media gives you a direct line to your customers to find new opportunities and grow your business.

STANDING OUT on social media requires both time and effort, but it is a worthwhile pursuit and investment.

If you do not have the time or ability to commit to this yourself, look for a qualified social marketer to support and help you find results. Expect them to apply strategy and experience to create a program tailored to your unique business.

Social media can tell you as much about your business as you will learn about your customer, but you have to be in the game. Get off the sidelines and get in the game.

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