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Social SUCCESS

Online networking is now the new normal – and yet so many people still struggle with what to do. **Zoë Davis** explores the wonderful world of connecting on the web.

Speaking for Business Chicks in February 2014, Zoë Foster-Blake commented that social media is the marketing equivalent of having “endless mouths to feed”. As one of Australia’s first social-media mavens – she was blogging before most of us even knew what a blog was – she would know a thing or two about being selective. She says, “Choose a few social-media platforms and pour your efforts into those, otherwise your entire day will be spent updating and posting.”

Much has been written about the power of social media (good and bad), the benefits to business and the damage to our ‘real’ lives, and yet, for most businesses, social media remains a mystery. At a recent Business Chicks Networking Night, an up-and-coming jewellery designer commented, “I’m not ready for social media yet. I want to get my brand just right and then I’ll launch.”

The head of digital at digital-strategy agency Avalde Digital, Melanie Lindquist, says that this attitude is normal for both new and established businesses. “There is a fear of the unknown and social media is developing so fast, it can be difficult to keep abreast of the opportunities it can create.”

And therein lies the problem. From confusion lies a fear of social media and, more so, the fear of making a mistake. Read any marketing site and you’ll encounter daily reminders of how social media can turn bad for a brand. Customer complaints going viral, hate campaigns clogging newsfeeds and posts misinterpreted – the potential for disruption to your brand can seem overwhelming.

LIVE AND TRANSPARENT

Gina Lednyak is founder and managing director of L&A Social Media, a social-media strategy and implementation agency. She says all her clients worry about the same thing. “Social media is live, incredibly transparent and hard to censor. It’s easy to imagine an endless array of potential complaints or crises. Yet for 99.9% of businesses, the engagement and comments will be positive! Because it’s an opt-in form of marketing, you only communicate with those who want to hear from you – the true fans and supporters of your business.”

Furthering the argument that social media can help rather than hinder, Gina believes that it is essential for any business with minimal resources. She recommends choosing an initial platform and doing that well. “It is much more beneficial to manage one social network extremely well than it is to manage three poorly,” she says. “Once a strong community around a business is built, that community can be used for a wide array of business functions. This includes developing brand advocates – community members that are incredibly passionate about your business, and who can spread that message to their personal communities.” On the other side of the scale, Scoop Social’s Mardi Barnes says the key to successfully navigating social media in larger businesses is to align the HR and marketing departments to support the company vision. Mardi says by



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LET'S CONNECT

defining the company vision, ensuring that employees are aligned and then training a core group of employees - referred to as 'social champions' - to engage with external audiences means you get "less spin and greater integrity". She says, "Social media is a reality of our business and personal environments these days. For businesses with highly engaged workforces, social media is a gift, as their good news will undoubtedly be spread and gather its own momentum."

SO MANY CHOICES

So you've conquered your fear, you've gotten your resources together and now you need to choose your platform. And once again, confusion reigns. "Social media should be considered as another tool in the marketing and business mix and treated with respect. Ask the relevant questions, such as where are my target customers, what do they want and what social media are they using?" says Melanie. She believes that, like any strategy, a business must research and write a social-media plan as well as define measurements. "Social media is changing fast, so regular review and mapping results to your KPIs is critical to ensuring you are not wasting time, money and causing harm to your brand." Selection of the right platform is critical. "Whatever the social environment, businesses will flourish if their content is valuable," says Mardi. "The key is for content to be spread to the fan base's followers, so you need to ensure your content is worthy of being shared." To cut through the confusion, we asked our experts to define how to use the most popular platforms:

PINTEREST

If you've got a tangible product, get pinning! "Pinterest is optimal for brands that take beautiful photos of their product and sell online, allowing brands to link an image straight to purchase," says Gina. "If the target demographic of a business is female, and specifically mums, Pinterest is an absolute necessity: 80% of users are female, and 50% of them are mums." Melanie adds that Pinterest is perfect for fashion, food and lifestyle products, but dogs and cats are also big. Perhaps a helpful tip to get attention ... add a cute animal?

LINKEDIN

If you are in the business of selling to other businesses, LinkedIn offers great potential. For those who are starting out, it offers a professional way to make business connections that could lead to enduring relationships. Gina says employers should encourage their staff to use LinkedIn to promote their business. "Here they will be able to make contacts, get referrals and build up their professional profile so that when businesses search key words that relate to what their business does, they will show up at the top of the LinkedIn search bar."

INSTAGRAM

Gina says: "Whether the business is a consumer brand, an author with



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recipes or a wedding photographer, Instagram is the place to tell your story through images. Although Instagram's demographic is spreading out to all ages, it is still seen as a youthful space for a younger demographic and will make a business seem on the beat." Mardi agrees: "Food brands thrive on photo-driven platforms like Instagram. It can be used to entice their followers to download the recipe or buy the recipe book."

The other huge benefit of Instagram is the ability to hashtag, which makes it hugely shareable. "Most of

our clients use this as a tool to allow consumers to upload images with #hashtag, comment and like and then link to their other accounts," says Melanie.

YOUTUBE

"Images and written words can give a little glimpse into a brand's story, but a video can create an authentic, interpersonal connection between consumer and brand, and is an easy way to shift a customer into a brand advocate," Gina says. YouTube is perfect for hosting shareable content that can be easily linked to other social accounts and shared by your followers. Mardi adds: "YouTube should not be ignored; it is the number one for SEO. All businesses can benefit from YouTube - from welcome introductions placed on websites, to introducing new products, showcasing existing stock, to highlighting events and a behind-the-scenes look at staff involvement."

TWITTER

In the space of just 140 characters, a brand can create a voice via their newsfeed, which Mardi says is a fantastic place for service-based businesses to exist. Gina agrees, saying that businesses where an individual is the "voice" do exceptionally well. "Twitter is highly beneficial for business owners to use, especially if the person is the business. For example, an author, public speaker, athlete, yoga teacher or owner of a local shop. People want to connect with other people on Twitter, even if that account is a brand."

FACEBOOK

With over 11.6 million Australians actively using Facebook, it is arguably the most important of all the platforms. Our experts all agree that Facebook is for everyone, appealing to services, retail, brands and a broad demographic. Gina believes: "If you have a business, no matter how small, you need to be on Facebook. Even if you aren't selling your product online, now when potential customers Google a type of business to connect with they generally look to see if they have a Facebook page so that they can read reviews or find proof that what they have found is a legitimate business." ❖

{ MARDI BARNES (@SCOOPSOCIAL), GINA LEDNYAK (@GINALEDNYAK) AND MELANIE LINDQUIST (@MELLINDQUIST) ARE ALL PREMIUM MEMBERS OF BUSINESS CHICKS. REQUEST THEIR BUSINESS CARDS AND CONNECT WITH THEM AT BUSINESSCHICKS.COM.AU }



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