Social Media Marketing

Small businesses that are considering online marketing strategies will find this booklet useful. This booklet focuses on using social media marketing techniques to advertise your business. You may want to read this booklet in conjunction with other booklets in this series that profile other online marketing strategies. These booklets are entitled: "Increasing Traffic to Your Website Through Search Engine Optimization" and "Successful Online Display Advertising".

What is Social Media Marketing?

Social Media Marketing makes use of social media sites to raise visibility on the Internet and to promote products and services. Social media sites are useful for building social (and business) networks, and for exchanging ideas and knowledge.

Social media networking is part of a trend known as Web 2.0, which refers to changes in the way users and software developers use the Web. It is a more collaborative use of the Web that enhances creativity and knowledge exchange. It is a more interactive and user-driven way to help users participate and collaborate over the Web through open applications and services. It is critical, therefore, that content is accessible to the user; the user should be able to create, share, remix, and repurpose content. Technologies that are accessible and affordable like Ajax (a method of building interactive applications for the Web that processes user requests immediately) and RSS (Really Simple Syndication) support Web 2.0 principles such as "user empowerment."

Social Media Marketing uses podcasts, wikis, blogs, folksonomies, online videos, photo sharing, news sharing, message boards, and posts on social networking sites to reach a large or targeted audience.

"Web 2.0 (or Web 2) is the popular term for advanced Internet technology and applications including blogs, wikis, RSS and social bookmarking. The expression was originally coined by O'Reilly Media and MediaLive International in 2004, following a conference dealing with next-generation Web concepts and issues".

Source: Whatis.com

Social Media Marketing Techniques

Some examples of social media marketing techniques are:

- Joining relevant online communities or social networking sites to help promote your business.

- Adding RSS feeds to your website (RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication that can be used to easily update content).

- Blogging (where you add content to blogs).
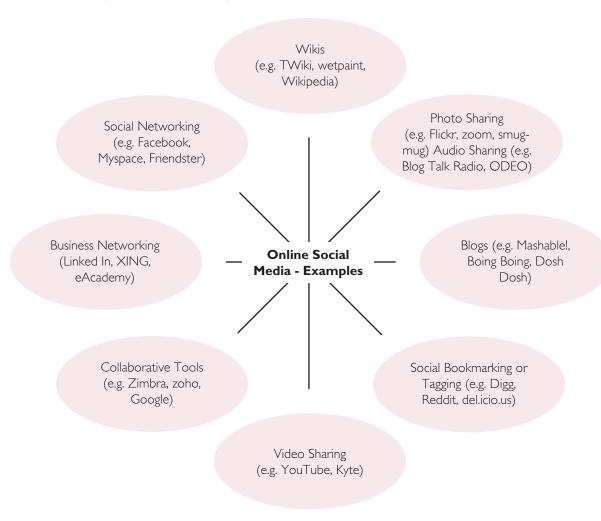
- Creating your own business blog.

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A Caution…

Social media sites are by definition more open than traditional sites, and therefore it is important to remember that as use of the Web continues to grow and evolve with the adoption of Web 2.0 applications, virus outbreaks and other forms of Web-borne threats known as "malware" continue to grow as well.

As such, users must ensure they have adequate web security that protects against Web 2.0 threats, with multi-layered solutions that use an array of analysis techniques (e.g., heuristics, behavioural analysis, anti-virus signatures and network intelligence that can fuel real-time analysis of URLs), including real-time scanning. There are many web security companies specializing in these solutions that can be located on the Internet.

The following graphic highlights the many different types of social media and some corresponding examples.

Figure 1: Examples of Different Types of Social Media

Source: Adapted from http://www.mikekujawski.ca/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/social-starfish2.jpg.

Five Reasons Small Businesses Should Use Social Media to Market Their Businesses

1. You can reach a large number of people in a more spontaneous way without paying large advertising fees.

2. The use of blogs and social and business networking sites can increase traffic to your website from other social media websites. This in turn may increase your Page Rank, resulting in increased traffic from leading search engines.

3. Social media complements other marketing strategies such as a paid advertising campaign.

4. You can build credibility by participating in relevant forums and responding to questions.

5. Social Media sites have information such as user pro-file data, which can be used to target a specific set of users for advertising.

"Social media's primary benefit to your communication strategy is its ability to build relationships and communities between individuals who share interests AND who would not be brought together otherwise except for those interests. If you play the role of bringing people together around a product, service or interest – you increase your credibility, build your brand and may, in time, increase your profitability by creating a loyal following".

Source: Small Business Trends. "Why Social Media should be a Key Ingredient in Your Marketing Mix" by Ivana Taylor. http://www.smallbiztrends.com/2008/05/social-media-key-to-marketing-mix.html

Given these key benefits, it appears that there are few downsides to social media marketing. However, in addition to the caution highlighted earlier regarding web security, one of the key limitations of this type of marketing technique is that it takes time to participate on social media sites.

How to Use Social Media Techniques to Your Advantage

Are You Ready to Use Social Media Marketing Techniques?

Review the following checklist to assess whether you are ready to use these marketing techniques.

Checklist: Are You Ready for Social Media Marketing?	Yes	No
Have you assessed your business and marketing needs? Have you prioritized these needs?		
Have you considered whether social media is appropriate for your business? For your target audience? Is your target audience online?		
Have you identified the goals you are trying to accomplish by engaging in social media marketing?		
Have you considered how social media marketing fits with your other marketing strategies – both offline and online?		
Do you have a plan in place to help guide your use of social media marketing? Do you have a timeframe and budget in place? **The plan does not have to be elaborate. You can start small.** For example, you can start your own blog for free using such sites as www.Wordpress.com and www.Blogger.com. Visit some of the social and or business networking sites to see how they work.		

If you have answered "yes" to all these questions and have determined that social media marketing techniques are suited to your business needs then you should begin to learn more about these techniques and how they can be used to your advantage.

Tips for Using Social Media Sites to Promote your Business

1. **Contribute, collaborate, inform, educate but do not sell.** Social Media marketing is different from paid advertising. Rather than taking a sales approach (i.e. directly promoting your product), instead consider how you can help and inform your target audience. For example, try to deliver useful and credible information that will help build your reputation and customer relationships.

2. **Create high quality content.** Whether you are part of a social networking site, have established your own blog, or are contributing to a blog, you need to develop interesting and high quality content. What information will your target audience find helpful?

3. **Start with Small Steps and Build on Your Success.** You can get a feel for how social media sites work by commenting on other blogs, or setting up your own blog. If you have a service based small business you can try "Yahoo! Answers". This website provides a way for you to share your knowledge with people who are looking for that specific information.

4. **Leave your name and URL when you comment on other blogs.** This will help drive traffic to your website, particularly if you have provided useful or interesting information.

Social Media Sites Listed as Effective for Marketing your Business by Seomoz.org

Please note that the usefulness of a social media site to your business will depend upon your industry, your target audience, and product or service.

1. www.facebook.com
2. www.twitter.com
3. www.linkedin.com
4. www.wikipedia.org
5. www.myspace.com
6. www.digg.com
7. www.youtube.com
8. www.StumbleUpon.com
9. www.reddit.com
10. www.yelp.com
11. www.Newsvine.com
12. www.technorati.com
13. www.scribd.com
14. www.techmeme.com
15. www.slideshare.net
16. www.kaboodle.com
17. www.epinions.com
18. www.care2.com
19. www.fark.com

Source: http://www.seomoz.org/article/social-media-marketing-tactics

5. **Consider video and/or photo sharing.** If you are handy with a video camera you may want to consider "how to" videos or tours of your business. These videos can be shared on appropriate social media websites (e.g. YouTube). You can also take photos of your products and share these photos with people who are interested (using for example, Flickr). A word of caution though – avoid aggressive or invasive sales tactics on these websites.

6. **Join online groups or mailing lists that are related to the products and services you offer.** Connect with these groups and offer information and assistance.

7. **Understand how social media websites work.** These sites are all about connecting and collaboration. Adopt a collaborative, helpful approach and be an active contributor. These sites generally have rules against aggressive sales tactics.

More About Blogging

A blog is a website (maintained by an individual or organization) where people post entries of commentary, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse chronological order. Typically, blogs provide comments or opinions on particular topics or themes.

It is easy to set up your own blog. Websites such as www.Wordpress.com and www.Blogger.com all provide you with easy set up services and options for layout and management of your blog. You can also create a blog or a page on an online networking site.

The following table provides a set of tips for using your own blog to promote your business.

You can reap many benefits from having your own blog. You can collect links, provide information and updates to your customers on a regular basis, and provide a means for your customers to interact with you.

Tips for Using Your Own Blog to Promote Your Business
• Create a professional looking blog.
• Keep your blog posts positive and to the point.
• Create useful content for your target audience. Write about your area of business expertise. Provide updates about your business, and your products and services.
• Provide links on your blog to the sales section of your website.
• Make content available in RSS feed to permit syndication of your blog material, making the material available to other websites.
• Think carefully before posting your entry. Is it respectful? Professional?
• Follow sound customer service principles.
• If you have your own blog you can write about upcoming business events and sales.
• Link to other relevant websites and blogs.
• Go to www.technorati.com and claim your blog. This can help ensure that you are indexed in blog search engines.
• Track your progress. Review your web traffic and where your web traffic is coming from (i.e. referring domains).

Syndication of Website Content

Web syndication is a form of syndication in which a section of a website is made available for other sites to use. Most commonly, web syndication refers to making web feeds available to other websites, using "web feed" programs, such as RSS (Really Simple Syndication) and Atom, which provide the means to deliver content over the web. Web feed programs can check the content for changes and updates in order to provide users with a summary of the website's recently added content (e.g. updates, latest news, most recent blog or forum posts).

If your business regularly updates its website content or operates a blog you should consider syndication.

Benefits and Limitations of Syndication

Some of the benefits of using web feeds for syndication include:

• It is a low cost and efficient way to deliver your content to subscribers, customers, and partners.

• Quick content indexing.

• Increased traffic to your website.

• Your website content is published on other websites.

• Increased market reach.

A potential limitation of syndication is that content authors can lose control over how their content is presented.

How to Syndicate Your Web Feeds

You can syndicate your own website content or subscribe to syndicated content from other popular websites. A website owner can create a special file such as an RSS file along with a link to it, and this creates a "web feed."

If you are thinking about web feed syndication, consider whether you should set up a **Creative Commons License**. Your distributed content will then be sourced to the content creator and allow for backlinking to the original content. In any case, you should ensure your original content contains a link back to the original content.

If you want to subscribe to Web Feeds…

Once you have subscribed to a feed, an aggregator can check for new content for you to review. Aggregator features are frequently built into portal sites (such as My Yahoo! and iGoogle), modern Web browsers and email programs.

Source: www.Wikipedia.org.

Leveraging Social and Business Networking Sites

Social networking sites provide a means of sharing information, and maintaining and establishing contacts and connections.

Social networks connect people at low cost; this can be beneficial for small businesses looking to expand their contacts and customer reach and increase their online presence and visibility.

Most social networking sites do not charge fees for membership. However, many of these sites do sell direct advertising space.

Examples of Social Networking Sites

• www.facebook.com

• www.twitter.com

• www.linkedin.com (a website to link with other business professionals)

• www.xing.com (situated outside North America. Embraces cross-cultural networking)

Please review the following table for other tips to leverage the use of social networking sites for marketing.

Tips for Leveraging Social Networking Sites
• Interaction and information sharing are key features of these sites. Do not use blatant or aggressive marketing techniques. Do not spam – do not send messages in bulk. Communicate to individual users.
• Create a profile about yourself and your products or services in an unobtrusive way. Include links to your website. Make your profile keyword rich with keywords from your topic. Remember you need to use a soft sell approach.
• Your signature should include your name, website URL, tagline or short mission statement, and other contact information.
• Find quality connections. Think about your target audience and the types of people you want to connect with. Social networking sites often allow you to search for connections by age, gender, geographic location, interests and so on. When you find a new connection, look for additional connections in his or her network.
• Once you have found potential connections ask them to become part of your network. You can do this by: sending a friend-request, posting relevant and interesting comments on their pages, returning comments on your page with relevant ones on the commenter's page, and when contacting someone, sending a private message and leaving a comment on her or his page.
• Make sure other possible connections can find you. Make your page appealing.
• Update the content on your page regularly.
• Set time aside to respond to other people's comments.

Source: Adapted from - http://www.websitemarketingplan.com/online/socialnetworking2.htm

Using Social Bookmarking

Social bookmarking refers to saving web links to websites that you want to remember. You can save these bookmarks for yourself or share them with others.

There are specific social bookmarking websites where users bookmark many sites and then tag them with many descriptive words. This allows other people to search by those terms to find those pages. Most social bookmark sites encourage users to organize their bookmarks with informal tags. These sites usually include information about the number of users who have bookmarked certain websites. The sites also typically offer web feeds for their lists of bookmarks. If you subscribe to this feed you are updated as to new bookmarks.

In terms of its potential for marketing, the more often a web page is submitted and tagged, the more traffic that website will likely receive. People are more likely to visit a website that has been saved as a bookmark by others.

Examples of Popular Social Bookmarking Websites

• www.Digg.com

• www.StumbleUpon.com

• www.Reddit.com

If you want to participant on a social bookmarking site, you will need to register as a user.

Source: www.about.com. http://homebusiness.about.com/od/internetmarketing/a/social_bookmark.htm

Tips for Using Social Bookmarking for Promotion

- Select a social bookmarking site you think is best suited to your target audience.

- If you are submitting content to a social bookmarking site – consider if it will be interesting and useful.

- Tag your website or blog.

- Encourage your website visitors to add your website to their social bookmarks.

- Network with other social bookmarkers and work with each other to promote each other's sites.

Overview of Internet Marketing Strategies

While **social media marketing** (or social media optimization) is the focus of this booklet, it is important to consider a range of Internet marketing strategies as described below:

Type of Internet Marketing Strategy	Description
Search Engine Optimization	Search engine optimization (SEO) involves designing, writing, and coding a website in a way that helps to improve the volume and quality of traffic to your website from search engines via a high page rank in the natural search results (in contrast to paid advertisements posted with the search engine results). Generally, the earlier a website shows up in the search results, the more users will visit that site. Search Engine Optimization can involve a number of techniques to increase website traffic (e.g. article submissions to other websites that contain your business's website address, link swaps, etc.). For more information see the booklet entitled "Increasing Traffic to Your Website Through Search Engine Optimization Techniques".
Affiliate Marketing	A business contracts with other individuals or companies ("affiliates") who market the company's products for a commission (on sales or leads). Affiliate marketing overlaps with other Internet marketing methods because affiliates can use a variety of marketing strategies. Those methods include SEO, paid search engine marketing, email marketing and display advertising. A common type of affiliate marketing occurs where a Web advertiser or merchant recruits webmasters to place the merchant's banner ads or buttons on their own Website. Webmasters will receive a referral fee or commission from sales when the customer has clicked the affiliate link.
Online Display Advertising	Use of the Internet as an advertising medium where paid promotional messages appear on other websites and search engine results pages. These promotional messages are paid for by the businesses or are exchanged between websites. For more information see the booklet entitled "Successful Online Display Advertising".

Glossary

Ajax (Asynchronous JavaScript and XML): A method of building interactive applications for the Web. It is used to process user requests immediately. Ajax allows content on Web pages to update immediately when a user performs an action.

Avatar: Graphic representation of a person online. Can be an icon or photo, but it seems to be mainly used for cartoon/computer animated persons. You can create an avatar for yourself at various places online, like http://avatars.yahoo.com (you will need a yahoo account). Some people try to make their avatars look like themselves, and others go for idealized/stylized visions.

Backlinks: Incoming links to a web-site or web page.

Blog (Weblog): A place online where you can easily insert words or photos. You type into a box and submit the entry immediately to the website URL. Other people can find your blog by that URL. Each individual "post" usually has its own URL. You can comment on other people's blog posts, and they can comment on yours.

Blogger: One who blogs.

Blogging: The act of posting your content or graphics to your blog.

Creative Commons Licenses: Enable copyright holders to grant some or all of their rights to the public while retaining others through a variety of licensing and contract schemes, including dedication to the public domain or open content licensing terms. Essentially, these licenses allow creators to easily communicate which rights they reserve, and which rights they waive for the benefit of other creators. The intention is to avoid the problems current copyright laws create for the sharing of information.

Eclipse: An ongoing project in support of an open source integrated development environment. Eclipse provides a framework and a basic platform (called the Eclipse Platform) that allows a company to build an integrated development environment from plug-in software components provided by Eclipse members.

Internet bookmarks: Web page locations that a website user has stored, so that they can be accessed easily at a later time.

Podcasting: Like blogging, but with audio clips. You record yourself talking, or an interview or a reading of a book, and put it in a place where others can access the sound file.

RSS (Really Simple Syndication): A technology that distributes a website's information (whatever it might be, e.g.. articles, special offers, product reviews, resource announcements) by syndicating it across the Internet (also see Web Syndication).

Screencasting: A video of your screen activity (e.g. to show people in real time where to click, what to type) that can be posted for others to use.

Social Bookmarking: Allows you to put your bookmarks online (through a social bookmarking website) and share the bookmarks with others. Web users can also tag bookmarks to classify them. They can rate or comment on bookmarks and share this information with others.

Social Networking: Broad term for a many-to-many approach to online interactions. Social networking makes for greater collaborative work online. In social networking, users can have an effect on their online environment, shaping it to fit their needs and sharing their ideas with others.

Social Tagging: When you "tag" something, you assign keywords to it to help you find it again. You can tag a photo or text it with some keywords. Later, you can search through your tags to find what you want. Other users of a social media site can find what you have tagged by using the same keywords.

Tags: Keywords or terms that categorise website content and enable you to find all the links related to the same tag in the future. A collection of tags is referred to as a folksonomy.

Vlogging: Video blogging.

Web Syndication: A form of syndication in which website material is made available to multiple other sites via a web feed (a data format used for providing users with frequently updated content).

This booklet is part of a series on advanced e-business topics which supplements an introductory handbook *How You Can Profit from E-Business*. For more information on those publications, visit the Ministry website at www.ontario.ca/ebusiness.

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