

## Small-Business Internet Marketing: Why Be Social?

In many ways the internet functions as a level playing field for businesses. It essentially makes it possible for small-business internet marketing efforts to stand toe-to-toe with big brands and their big-budget online marketing tactics.

But as digital marketer [Jayme Pretzloff](#) explains, "simply having a Facebook presence or Twitter account doesn't necessarily mean you're going to be successful facing off against behemoth brands." Pretzloff is the Online Marketing Director for [Minneapolis-based Wixon Jewelers](#) and writes for a number of marketing associations.

"Like other marketing tactics," he says, "small-business internet marketing takes strategy, and understanding the benefits of the various social media platforms is essential. You want to know how these tools can help before you use them."

So what are the benefits of social media in a small-business internet marketing plan?

While your own business goals, resources and "business personality" will largely dictate the specifics, there are two basic benefits you need to know — beyond the obvious cost savings — as you jump into the social media fray:

### **Improved search ranking (a.k.a. "getting your site found")**

One major advantage of using social media as part of a small-business internet marketing plan is that it helps you build an overall "presence" on the web, giving you a way to stand out against all the other content out there.

"Online consumers are savvy, and they believe that the best companies are the ones that are displayed first in the search results," says [Kate McFarlin of Demand Media](#). "In their minds, this makes these companies more legitimate than the ones that appear after page three."

And while only the search engines (Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.) know the nitty-gritty details of how one page can rank higher than another, there are some fundamentals shared amongst each search algorithm (the math and science driving search results).

Pretzloff says, "each time you interact with your audience, the search engines 'get to know you' as a subject matter expert on your business category." So as more people like and share your content, you're more likely to have your company's website show up in the search results.

### **Better customer relationships**

It seems obvious, but it's important to remember that people run businesses, and social media helps make that point in spades. You're not just a faceless brand, even when you're online. You're a person, just as your customers and all their friends are.

The point here is that social media helps your business's personality shine in a way that other marketing channels cannot. Your customers can't have a conversation with your newspaper ads, but they can communicate with you via your Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and YouTube accounts.

"And because you're having these conversations 'in public,' potential customers benefit and get to know you as well," says Pretzloff.

So [make sure to create your own social media strategy](#), with long-term goals in mind. Be ready to discuss almost any topic in social spaces, from the good things like contests and coupons, to the not-so-good things, like customer complaints. Having a plan in place helps you shape your customer communications.

### **But it takes work**

Knowing the two primary benefits of social media — improved search rankings and better customer relationships — is the easy part. Once you understand the potential upside, it's also important to understand the paradox of social media and small-business internet marketing in general: publishing content and interacting with customers is relatively easy and takes very little time, but the benefits are slow to arrive.

While this isn't an easy process, that doesn't mean you shouldn't try. Pretzloff offers three pointers for those setting off on the social media journey for the first time:

1. **It takes content.** As Pretzloff says, "The cost savings you get with a free social media presence — your time is the trade-off for that." Clearly, small-business internet marketing, like other channels, takes a willingness to invest some time into the effort.
2. **Content has a shelf life.** Everything you post is theoretically on the web forever. The trouble is, its usefulness is temporary. That's why it's important to post consistently and post often. Says Pretzloff, "Even your perfect post, tweet or pin won't be on the top of news feeds forever."
3. **Don't try for perfect. Just try.** As in other areas of running your business, you're going to make mistakes. You're going to run into a customer or two bent on being loud and cantankerous online. You'll write a post that you love but gets little more than a yawn from your audience, but as Pretzloff says, it's important to "learn as you go, continue to engage your audience, and stay focused on the longer-term benefits."

And maybe the best small-business internet marketing advice is to have fun with it. If you're not having fun, chances are your clients aren't either.