

WHITEPAPER

GUIDE TO SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

By: ActiveConversion

Introduction

The spectacular growth of social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter have taken B2B marketing by storm. B2B marketers recognized that they have access to hundreds of millions of people who have registered for and are using social networking sites.

More importantly, within those substantial groups B2B marketers can target their messages and advertising directly to the audience that will be the most receptive to their product or service, using the underlying technology inherent in social networking sites.

Although some people consider social networking sites as synonymous with social media, Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, LinkedIn and hundreds of other social networking sites are significant elements of a phenomenon that also includes more established media like blogging and user-generated content sites like YouTube and Flickr. The common characteristic for all of these media is that information is spread through social interaction.

**B2B marketers can target their messages and advertising
directly to the audience that will be the most receptive
to their product or service**

Social media differs from traditional media in that social media is where many individuals share information with each other rather than one source broadcasting to the masses. In Web 2.0 marketing language, it is many-to-many instead of one-to-many.

Another significant difference is that mobile phones, especially smartphones, are increasingly becoming the device of choice for accessing social media. Now social media users can stay connected from anywhere.

Facebook and Other Sites

The sudden increase in social networking has primarily been driven by Facebook, which overtook MySpace in 2008 to become the world's most popular social network. In 2009, Facebook exceeded more than 350 million active users.

Apart from the focus on the ease of making personal connections, the breathtaking growth of Facebook has been attributed to its simple design, making it highly accessible and easy to use for everyone.

Of particular interest for B2B companies, the Nielsen Company reports that Facebook growth is coming from an older demographic. It cites for example that Facebook's strongest growth is coming from 35-49 year-olds. It is also adding twice as many 50-64-year-olds as opposed to those under 18.

All social networking sites are alike in that they provide a virtual community for people with common interests. Users are exceptionally engaged with the content that their friends create because of its personal relevance and the ease of creating groups of interest.

**Facebook's strongest growth is coming from 35-49 year-olds.
It is also adding twice as many 50-64-year-olds
as opposed to those under 18.**

Other major social media players include MySpace, the most popular social networking site until 2008. Friendster is acknowledged to be the first major social networking site. It remains the most popular social networking site in Asia with over 90 percent of its 115 million registered users coming from that region. Beyond these leading players, there are hundreds of other social networking sites. LinkedIn deserves particular mention for B2B marketers because of its focus on business professionals. As of 2010, LinkedIn had more than 50 million registered users.

Twitter, Blogging and Micro-Blogging

Twitter is a social networking site where its users send and read short messages. Called tweets, these messages are limited to 140 characters in length. Some analysts have termed the activity micro-blogging, since the function is similar to that of a traditional blog. Although most tweets are brief communications on a person-to-person level, small to medium sized businesses are also using it to share news about their products and services.

More tangibly, B2B blogging can be a significant channel for lead generation and subsequent lead nurturing

It may be useful to review the older phenomenon of blogging before examining Twitter and microblogging. Blogging enables B2B companies to connect cost effectively with their customers and potential customers. Successful blogging gains readers who are attracted by the content, whether it's advice, insight or guidance into their business issues and problems. Blogging also tends to humanize an organization, building credibility and enhancing its reputation.

More tangibly, B2B blogging can be a significant channel for lead generation and subsequent lead nurturing with an online marketing automation system. That's because every blog post is a search optimized conduit for hyperlinks that refer readers back to pages on the corporate website. Since readers are already interested in the subject matter, they are tempted to click on these hyperlinks in their quest for further knowledge.

Generating leads with blogs has to be unobtrusive yet compelling. The key is to have calls to action on the blog that will take the reader to a targeted page. Once the reader has landed on the targeted page, an **online marketing automation system** can take over, generating the lead, nurturing it and distributing it to the appropriate person at the appropriate time.

Microblogging has all of the attributes of traditional blogging with some differences in syndication and the format of posts.

Blog readers can navigate to the URL i.e. b2b-marketingblog.activeconversion.com) of the blog or they can have the posts pushed out to their newsreader immediately upon publication using a technology called Really Simple Syndication (RSS).

For SMBs, activities like tweeting real time updates from company or industry events, are popular

With Twitter which has become more popular than RSS, tweets are published on the author's profile page on the Twitter site and delivered to the author's subscribers via Short Message Service (SMS) and other applications. SMS is a standardized communication service for mobile phones. The compatibility with SMS is the reason for the 140 character limitation. Unlike blogging, Twitter authors can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends or allow anyone to read their posts.

Another key difference between blogging and micro-blogging is the frequency of publication. For B2B companies, one blog per week is the norm but one or two tweets a day is generally expected on Twitter. On Twitter, immediacy is a cherished paradigm. For SMBs, activities like tweeting real time updates from company or industry events are popular because of their lack of access to expensive broadcast media such as television.

User-Generated Content

Many bloggers use external sites to host the images and video that are embedded in their blog posts. Some of these sites are online communities in their own right and demonstrate the social interaction characteristic of social networking sites.

User-generated content (UGC), also known as consumer-generated media or user-created content, is any content that is produced by end users. Market research firm eMarketer projects the number of content creators in the US to grow to nearly 115 million by 2013. Content such as text, video, images and other forms of digital media are effectively the core draw for social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter.

Sites like YouTube, the leading video sharing site, allow users to easily upload and share video clips through websites, mobile devices, blogs and email. Businesses leverage YouTube by uploading content such as instructional videos that their customers request, product or service testimonials or interviews with key staff.

Businesses leverage YouTube by uploading content such as instructional videos that their customers request, product or service testimonials or interviews with key staff.

Flickr, the leading image sharing site, was far from the first image hosting site. Instead, it was the first to recognize that organizing content could lead to the creation of online communities. Content is organized by tagging, which allows indexing by keyword. Other users can then retrieve images and videos according to their own interest by searching by keyword. Businesses can upload images of their latest products, events or employees.

Leveraging Social Media

In the longer term, social media can be a key element of thought leadership marketing. Since social media can enhance reputations, thought leaders can further their business goals.

In the short-term, SMBs can leverage social media two main ways:

First, social networking sites offer traditional advertising. Although advertising can be acquired per impression (CPM), B2B marketers are more likely to opt for the more cost-effective pay per click because prospects can be targeted more effectively.

The second way is the one generating the most interest in B2B companies. This is by joining the online conversation to interact with customers and potential customers. By providing advice, insight or guidance into customer's business issues and problems, B2B companies can directly and indirectly generate sales leads that feed their online marketing automation system. Twitter and blogging are the most popular for this, and should be tightly targeted.

Here are some tips to get started quickly and economically:

1

Select a social networking platform that fits your target market. Engage your customers to discover their favorites. Don't attempt to move them to an unfamiliar social networking platform.

2

Try it by setting up an account. The social networking sites are generally free so there is no cost barrier for a trial. But keep it up for at least 3-6 months.

3

Listen to the ongoing conversations about your company and its products. Respond when appropriate, but without being the commercial.

4

Use existing resources like your email database to publicize your social media presence. Or use advertising like Google Adwords to drive new, interested members to it.

5

Create discussions and interest groups to keep members engaged.

6

Ensure the corporate website is the focal point of your social media activities so that you can capture their interest using a modern marketing automation system.

Conclusion

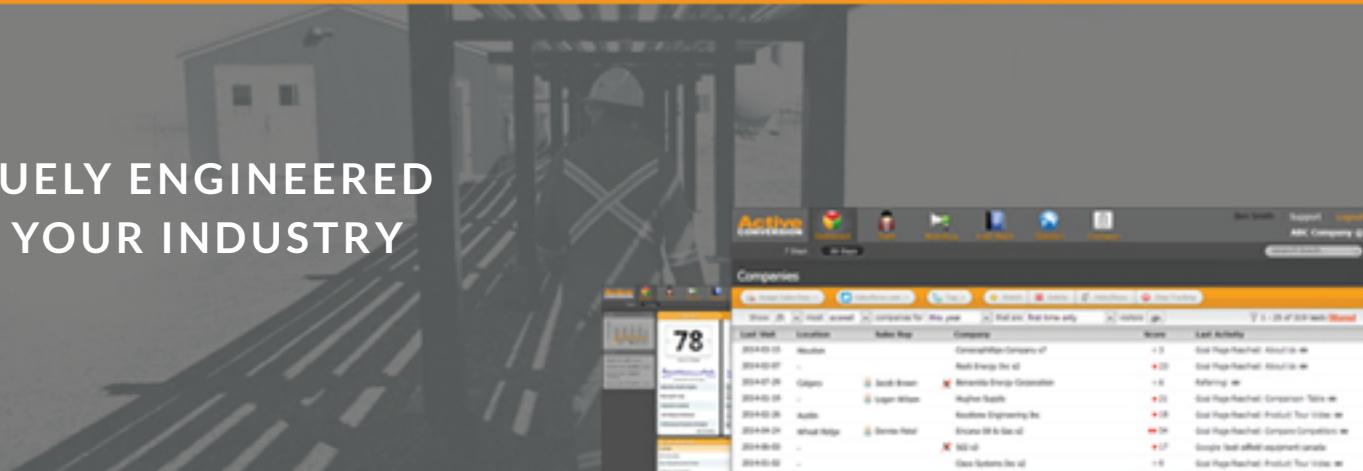
Businesses seek to leverage the phenomenon that members of a community tend to reference each other when making a purchase decision. The spectacular rise of social media presents opportunities for B2B companies to exploit this phenomenon in a cost-effective way without a major outlay in expenses. However, don't expect this to necessarily replace your other marketing – social media may not scale or work fast enough for certain businesses or industries. If your target market doesn't Twitter, or shuns Facebook or LinkedIn, social networking sites may have limited value. Email and blogging may be the way to go in this case.

Social media includes social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter but also includes blogging and User-generated content sites like YouTube and Flickr. The ability to search and be found is interwoven throughout these sites via the content generated by users, which makes social media so powerful. Also, B2B marketers can choose from hundreds of sites based on advertising reach or relevance but should engage their own customers to find out the platforms they prefer.

By developing audiences interested in their offerings, SMBs can realize immediate and long-term benefits. In the long-term they can enhance their reputation. In the short-term social media can be a source of sales leads that can be integrated into a demand generation/lead management system through online marketing automation.

A RESULTS-DRIVEN SALES AND MARKETING SYSTEM

UNIQUELY ENGINEERED
FOR YOUR INDUSTRY



About ActiveConversion

ActiveConversion specializes in developing repeatable online sales and marketing systems for industrial companies. Our technology-based system employs best practices in online marketing and lead generation, and delivers measurable results to our customers. Since 2004, we have completed more than 500 successful projects to help companies succeed online. For more information, visit activeconversion.com or call 1-877-872-2ROI.