

A social media master class for SMEs

Do you want to know how to use social media for your business? If you run a small business and are not building a community of advocates on social media, then you should be. Here, Samantha Kelly gives her top tips for those who want to start using social media to increase their business profile and spread their message.



Social media is the easiest way to ‘meet your customers face to face’ online and yet many Irish businesses are not involved and are not meeting their customers’ expectations.

Customer engagement and building relationships are the most important aspect of social media marketing, especially on Twitter. However, lots of companies are not doing this.

Be social don’t ‘hard sell’

Social media is ‘social’, it’s not about the hard sell. The secret to success is to build up relationships with others so that they spread the word about your products and services.

Is your company engaging with an audience on social media? Do you know who your followers are? Keep in mind, people will always remember how you made them feel on social media, so be nice, be courteous and be helpful.

First steps

So, how should you start? The first step is to find out where your customers are hanging out. Are they on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn?

If they are teenagers, for example, they will be on Instagram and Snapchat. Aspiring brides, interested in beauty products or wedding ideas, are most likely on Pinterest and Instagram. Middle-

aged golfers are most likely to be on Facebook and Twitter.

Who, what where?

The trick is to find out - who is your target customer? What are they talking about, who are they influenced by, what radio stations do they listen to? Is it RTÉ Radio One or Spin FM?

Once you have established who your customers are, ask people of that age group what social media channels they use.

Ask friends, nieces, nephews, anyone in your immediate circle, or do a simple survey using your email contacts.

Ask customers when they come into your shop what social media platforms they use. Perhaps give them an incentive to enter a draw to win one of your products? Encourage your staff to ask clients about their favourite social media sites when they are dealing with them. Most customers will be happy to chat with you about this topic.

Follow and be followed

So why do we need followers? Followers are a potential army of advocates for your business. If customers like your service or product, they will happily recommend you to others.

For example, if you put up a post on social media that interests them, they will most likely share the post or comment on it. This drives engagement and other followers in their network will see their tweets and see them engaging with you. People, in general, are quite nosy so want to take a look at what others are saying and how you respond. It's like word of mouth online.

Find communities that support SMEs like *#irishbizparty*. Take part in their Twitter chats. If you are a small business owner with a problem, you can often find some great advice from fellow business owners on Twitter.

Useful hashtags for SMEs on Twitter

If you are an SME and want to engage with other SME owners on Twitter, you can do so by using certain hashtags at certain times of the day. Here's a great list from [Zonua](#).

Some examples of SME success

Finally, where can you see some examples of Irish SMEs who broke the mould and led the way using Twitter, Facebook and other social media channels?

An example of a small business owner who uses humour and yet gets his message across is [Paul Dunphy](#). See the screenshot of his wonderful bio on Twitter.

What's *their* secret to success? They engage with their audience regularly, they ask questions, they put photos up of 'behind the scenes' activity. They chat to their customers. They have a person dedicated to their social media channels. They encourage people to send in photos. It's all about interaction.

The power of influence, what does influence mean today?

An influencer is someone who gets a lot of re-tweets or shares and engagements every time they post something on social media. Why are they influential? Because they have built up a social network and nurtured those relationships by sharing other people's articles and commenting positively on various tweets or posts.

People love positivity. Remember you could make someone's day with a quote or a post that brings hope to others. Influencers will post articles or pictures that will immediately be shared and generate engagement. They also concentrate on topics they're an expert in. That could be you! You can become an influencer yourself by leading the way with blog posts or articles that show your knowledge about a particular area. Your goal should be to become the first person that your followers recommend when someone asks for a particular service or product.

Be consistent

When choosing your Twitter handle try to get 'what you do' into your Twitter name or Facebook page name. Be consistent with your branding.

Follow the media

A top tip is to check out the *#Journorequest* hashtag. Journalists often use this hashtag to find stories. You can also follow journalists and assist them when they need a retweet or a share. Engage or comment on what they say and keep it positive, this way you will get their attention. Share their articles and tag them in the tweet or post. They will be happy that you shared it out and they will remember you in a positive light.