
Social media should drive sales leads not just engagement

If your business is still doing what it did on social media two years ago, you are probably wasting your time. Maryrose Lyons explains why.

Anyone remember the early days of Google? Remember how you could click a link at the bottom of the page and actually submit your site? Yes, it was that easy. Not only that, but you could submit a site and tell Google what kind of keywords you wanted to be ranked on, and *boom* up you went on the search results for those keywords. Happy days. Innocent times.

Nowadays there's an entire industry within digital marketing dedicated to search engine optimisation. Getting sites listed on Google is far more complex than clicking a link, and filling out a form. Times have changed.

However, I like to think we are at a very similar stage in social media marketing's evolution. We will look back at this time, where we can do Facebook Live for free, and Facebook will push the content into a target audience set for you, in the same way that we smile at once being able to submit a site to Google.

Instagram is morphing and changing at such speed. In years to come, we will look back and wonder at how easy it was to become 'famous' using the platform.

If you are new to social media as a business, now is a good time to arrive. Below are three reasons why you haven't missed the boat.

1: You can drive real business leads

The most important point to make is that you can use social media to drive real leads for your business. It's not just about brand building or connecting shoulder-to-shoulder with your customers as has been the case for many years. There are real benefits to be had for businesses with limited time and resources to invest, but who want to get something tangible out of it.

I've been around since the start of it all. Back in the early days of social media (2006-2010), it was all about counting the number of likes and followers. They were the metrics, and all the big brands were rushing to outnumber one another. I played my part at the time helping Tourism Ireland to push through one million followers.

Then it switched to engagement (2010-2015). All of these businesses had grown huge audiences, and now they had to talk to them, so the success was measured by how many likes, comments, and shares they had. The burning question of the time was how to value a Facebook like. Business Insider came out and said \$214.81, so everyone rushed off to try to quantify the value of what they were doing.

Now we are in a more mature phase and one that can bring real value to business owners. Nowadays the key metric is about driving targeted business leads. If you have been advised to measure engagement, that is *so* last week.

Social media has an incredible power to deliver leads for the business. Most of the major platforms now offer lead generation as an advertising objective. They want to help you achieve leads because if you do, you'll come back and spend more. Where I see the real value happen is when I use social media to develop relationships to drive leads, and then take that lead off social media and use my email to shake out the sale.

2. Organic is dead, but this could be a good thing

Another reason why it's a good time to come to social now is that most people are aware that it is 'pay to play'. Organic reach is dead. It's incredibly difficult to try and get good results from social media these days without a budget. You only need small sums for ads and the creative, but without a budget, posting on social media is costing you money, it's using your valuable time. What I find now is that businesses who are coming to social understand that a little bit of budget goes a long way; they don't start asking redundant questions about organic reach and engagement.

Think about it. You can spend as little as €5 to get access to the world's largest collection of humanity online. This is also the most extensive bank of demographic and psychographic data ever known. What kind of business owner wouldn't want access to some of Facebook's 1.86 billion monthly active users; Instagram's 600 million monthly active users; Twitter's 317 million? And the rest. It's about knowing who your audience is, and where they hang out, then reaching them and getting your business in front of them.

Marketing on social media is a reversal of the way we market on Google. Everyone knows what it means 'to Google' something. It's actively looking for something, and the search engine delivers a result.

On the social networks, it's about getting your business in front of the people you know will buy from you. It's about actively searching for your target audience, and enticing them to engage with you via relevant content. One click is all it takes for someone to show themselves to be interested in your content, then you can use the tools provided to lure them in and hook 'em. If you're good at fishing, you'll love social media marketing.

3. Coming to the party now means you can avoid mistakes

Best practice for social media has evolved and coming to the party now means you can avoid some of the mistakes that early adopters might have made. For example, one of the modules in my online social media course is about best practice for engaging with followers who are not happy with you. There is a way to do it that is proven, and that works. Some of your competitors who might have jumped on board early may have experienced what it's like to be hit with negative feedback, and they may have handled it poorly.

Did you know that if there are two pieces of feedback left for you on a review site, for example, TripAdvisor, if one of them is positive and the other is slightly negative, the negative one will yield a better overall result if it is dealt with constructively? Don't be afraid of feedback. It's not a reason to avoid social media.

So, what advantages would a new business coming to social media have over a business that has been doing social media for years?

There has been a profound shift in the types of strategies I'm recommending for social media use, in the last couple of years. A few years ago, the kind of advice I was giving to Irish businesses about their social media strategy was radically different to what I recommend today. Back then, business-to-consumer (B2C) was all about Facebook, and business-to-business (B2B) could overlook that and concentrate on Twitter and LinkedIn. Today that is no longer the case.

Facebook is dominating, and whether you like the 'new big blue' or not, is not important because you cannot avoid Facebook if you are serious about marketing your business online.

Just posting photos and text no longer cuts it anymore. It's got to be about video and movement, and targeting content, not just blasting it out. The advantage for businesses coming to social media today is that they can use the strategies that will work today.

I see some businesses that started social media marketing about three years ago and enjoyed success, now find it tough to change and do things in a very different way i.e. the new way, the right way.

If you are considering coming to social media, now is a very good time to do it, but be sure that you come with a flexible mind, and be open to change - what works for you now may not work for you in twelve months time, but that's okay, social media evolves, people's use of it evolves, the platforms evolve, and tastes evolve. The only constant is change.

Another piece of advice I would give is not to leave this in the hands of 'The Intern' or the 'Marketing Girl' who comes in once a week. Social media is something that needs to be owned by your business. That's what I do. I help businesses develop social media strategies that drive real results.

Written by Maryrose Lyons, the owner of a [social media agency](#) and the founder of the [Learn Social Media Like A Pro](#) online course.