

21st-Century Marketing

The Art of the Social Sale



There will never be a cute puppy video that doesn't make people swoon and Pinterest fails are guaranteed laughs, but passing around political memes and chatting with your long-lost BFF from high school isn't all social media is good for. Not anymore, and really, not for a long time. Social selling is making or breaking businesses faster than you can exit out of an IM. Think about it: once upon a time we flicked our fingers through ink-smudged cards shoved into a Rolodex; today, we flick our finger on our iPhone screens and we have access to almost anyone almost anywhere in the world.

Our circles are constantly expanding, and that means our list of potential sales leads is growing in a similarly exponential way. It's enough to make you drunk on power, but with great power comes – you guessed it – great responsibility. How you harness social media's capacity for connection will greatly affect whether or not you succeed.

No pressure.



Set Yourself Up for Success

It may be cliché, but first impressions really do matter. The only thing that's changed about that in the last hundred years is context: instead of donning a suit to go door to door selling vacuums, we set up our social media profiles to present the very best versions of ourselves. We're talking a hundred selfies to nail the pose and lighting, we're fluffing up our employment history (and excising the positions we'd rather not relive), and craftily posting blogs from sites that makes us seem smart. It's a trumped up resume on steroids, and it works.

So what does that mean for brands? You have to set up yourself up for success by recreating your real-world brand in virtual reality.

- ▶ **Snap Up Your Handle on Every Channel:** Even if you don't feel like you're ready for Snapchat or Pinterest, you'll want to get an account under your brand name before somebody else does. Try to get the same handle on every platform (lots of internet-savvy people will just type in the @DomainWebsite address to reach a company's Twitter page, for example), but if that isn't possible at least use similar variations.
- ▶ **Aim for Brand Consistency:** Wherever and whenever possible, adopt the same logo, color scheme, fonts, and other visual elements for your social media accounts that you're already using for your website, business cards, and so on.
- ▶ **Give Yourself a Killer Bio:** Your social bio is really your first pitch. The keywords you use (and we're talking emotional/powerful words, not SEO stuff – although that's a factor too, believe it or not), your tone, and how you describe yourself will indicate to your audience how you want to be viewed. Echo your brand's core characteristics.
- ▶ **Develop a Branded Hashtag:** Help people join in the conversation by giving them a unique-to-you hashtag they can put on their posts. Anyone who searches the hashtag will find a "paper" trail that showcases the entirety of everything anyone using that hashtag has ever said about you on that platform.

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Use Social Media to Convert Leads Quickly

Much like milk and mascara, sales leads have an expiration date. Unlike grocery store items, the expiration date on sales leads isn't printed out for your convenience. All we know is that the longer you wait, the more time your potential customers have to second guess their decisions and explore other options – that's why so many companies are using push notifications to nudge people who abandon their virtual shopping carts or forget to confirm their site registration.

You can use social media to quickly turn leads into sales opportunities and close deals even faster than you might in a traditional real-world setting. Here's how:

UNDERSTAND YOUR CUSTOMER:

Where is the customer in your sales funnel? Is this a brand new connection or someone who has been following your brand for a while? Have they left comments before? Do they follow you on multiple sites? Have they subscribed to your email list or downloaded your ebook? A consumer's reading habits and history of interactive gives you an idea of how interested they are, what specifically they're interested in, and how you might go about forging a connection.

BE PRESENT:

When consumers reach out to you, respond like your life depends on it because your bottom line certainly does. **As much as 50 percent of all sales go to the vendor that responded first.** If you can't sign into social media every day or if you don't want your sales staff to be the designated Twitter checker (although you really should start viewing social selling as an integral part of your teams' job description), put a dedicated social media manager in place who can do the initial review of leads and pass them on.



PRIORITIZE YOUR TIME:

No matter how good a brand ambassador you are or how great your products are, some customers just aren't going to be interested. The tricky part is that not all customers who aren't interested will indicate their lack of interest. In fact, many will hint at the exact opposite, feigning enthusiasm because they don't want to be rude, they just feel like chatting, they like you as a person and don't want to disappoint you, or, more often than not, because they want the free ebook, video, or consultation you offered as a reward for sitting through your pitch. If you want to convert faster and hit your sales quote, you'll have to weed out the duds (harsh but necessary) and focus your energy on the most promising leads.



Ask questions – It's easy for someone who's only lukewarm about your brand to sit and listen, but when you ask questions their tone and response time will clearly indicate their true interest level.

Gate your content – If someone is willing to provide an email or phone number in return for accessing a key piece of content, they're more likely to have a genuine interest in whatever you're selling.

BE PERSISTENT (BUT DON'T PESTER):

A staggering 80 percent of sales require a surprising five follow-ups. You can't simply make your case and assume the other person will happily seal the deal. Send emails or call offering to answer any new questions they may have, remind them about key features of the product they were most interested in, offer them a value-added gift like a year's worth of on-call support or overnight shipping – these are all ways you can reconnect without seeming pushy or overbearing.

HAND OUT PROMO CODES:

Everybody loves a discount. Hand out a limited-time offer that has to be redeemed sooner rather than later and gather the info of everyone who redeems it. You get to generate more leads and they feel like they got a great deal. If you don't offer promo codes, try offering valuable content they can take advantage of.

MAKE IT EASY:

Customers don't want to work hard to give away the money they already worked hard for. Their patronage is a gift, so do everything in your power to make it easy for them to bestow it on you. Optimize your website and your social profiles for mobile devices, embed links in your CTA, publish your phone number on your social profile, and pin posts on the top of your Facebook or Twitter profile to keep important information – include contact details – at the ready.

Connect Using Awesome Customer Service

Customers spend as much as 40 percent more with companies that respond to customer service requests made on social media. You wouldn't lock your front door during business hours to let your phone ring on and on without answering, so why do companies leave customer comments and social media posts just festering, unanswered and unacknowledged, for days or even months on end? Some are never answered and it just begs the question, "What the heck are you thinking?!"

Nearly 290 million complaints made on social media every year go unanswered, and that's just in the United States. Each one of that almost 290 million represents a lost opportunity to cement a relationship, change someone's mind, grow as a company, get better at what you do, and yes, even make a sale. Treat each customer like they're the ones making your car payment this month. They're the ones deciding whether you get to keep your job title, go on that dream vacation, or hit the annual sales goal you've been chasing for years.

Welcome and respond to feedback. Reach out and touch base with past customers just because you can. When possible, retweet their posts and share their blogs. Ask thoughtful questions instead of just giving answers. Design promotions that reward current customers not just new ones. Better yet, launch a rewards program – 87 percent of consumers say they want one.

Still think social media is just for flame wars and videos starring Chewbacca masks? We didn't think so.

