



In addition, Zeldman asserts, "Social media is here to stay. People are involving social media in a large portion of their lives. They're using it to make purchasing decisions. It's very important to be on at least one social media site."

#### WHAT IF MY CUSTOMERS DON'T USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

One of the common excuses small business owners provide when asked why they don't have a social media presence is this: "My customers tell me that they don't use social media." It's a perception shared by many small business owners, particularly those who do business with other businesses or whose clientele can be described as having an older demographic.

According to Zeldman, at least part of that is due to a simple misunderstanding. "There are two different ways in which people can be on social media. When a business owner asks another business owner if they are on social media, their answer may be no because their business doesn't have a presence there, but they still may be using social media to connect with their grandchildren. So, they actually are on social media."

Second, says Zeldman, even if your direct customers aren't on social media, your referral sources may be on there. There are two ways to use media from a business perspective. You can use social media to promote your business directly to develop relationships with consumers, but you can also use social media to develop relationships with complementary, noncompeting businesses that will send you referrals. To do that, you need a strategy.

#### WHICH SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM IS BEST FOR MY BUSINESS?

The first step in that strategy is choosing which social media sites are best for your business. However, before we dig into the pros and cons of different social media platforms, a quick note: All of this advice on social media assumes that your business already has a website. On that website, you should have a blog. To facilitate a blog on your website, O'Neil suggests adding WordPress.

"WordPress is the biggest component for small business. LinkedIn and the other

platforms are important, but WordPress for websites and blog is at the top of the list. I put that even above LinkedIn, and I'm a LinkedIn rockstar," says O'Neil. WordPress is a free and open source blogging tool and a content management system. It is currently the most popular blogging system being used on the web.

Zeldman says that while every business should use at least one form of social

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Twitter is easy to learn, and is the easiest social media platform to manage from a cell phone.

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media, it is not important for every business to use every form of social media.

That's an opinion shared by O'Neil. "I won't say that it's important for a business to have a presence on all of the social media sites, because a B2B business might not need a Facebook presence. I'd put it at the bottom of the list. The question may come up, 'Why not Facebook?' If the answer is, 'We haven't finished LinkedIn, the blog and the website and Twitter yet,' that's a good answer. But, if the answer is, 'We've done all of the other platforms, and I'm just wondering if we should do Facebook,' the answer is, 'Yes, absolutely,'" says O'Neil.

Zeldman, like O'Neil, is a fan of LinkedIn for B2B companies. "If your main focus is B2B consumers, you need to have an active LinkedIn presence. LinkedIn is great because it's very streamlined, very professional and there's no nonsense."

However, says Zeldman, do not overlook the power of Twitter. "There was a study done that showed Twitter actually generated more business-to-business leads than LinkedIn. Now, if you look close at the study, Twitter may have generated more leads, but more of the LinkedIn

leads led to actual sales. Regardless, the point is that Twitter also led to sales and is very good for B2B."

She adds that Twitter is easy to learn, and is the easiest social media platform to manage from a cell phone. In addition, it is a place where many business leaders and CEOs post and share information.

Google+, a newcomer to social media, is another important social media platform to consider. According to Zeldman, "Google is trying to get a slice of the social media pie. If Facebook and Twitter had a baby, it would be Google+. It is not Google's first attempt at social media; their first two attempts failed. However, there is at least one very strong reason to be on Google+. Back in the day, about two years ago," she laughs, "it was relatively easy to get your website to be listed on page one of the Google search engine results. An entire industry grew up around this, and Google did not like it."

In response, says Zeldman, Google completely changed the way they did those rankings because too many people were gaming the system. If your SEO (Search Engine Optimization) looks too perfect right now, you will be penalized for it. Google wants people to be able to trust that the search engine results they get are useful.

"My point is that your activity on Google+ is strongly tied to—and Google denies this, but we know it's true—your ranking on a Google search. So, if you want to be in the number-one position Google search engine results for key words about your business, especially in your local area, it's really important to be active on Google+," says Zeldman.

Commenting on SEO, she adds, "The best SEO advice I could give you right now is to act natural. Do whatever you would normally do to promote your business online, and that will help you more than trying to fake it. That includes writing blog posts with keywords used naturally, not stuffed in, and using social media. Your social media activity, including things like Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube, all count very strongly towards your SEO. They're called social signals. Google picks up those social signals from your activity on social media. The SEO companies are pulling their hair out of their heads because the game has completely changed."

A great-looking profile and a great company page with a small network and a few followers doesn't stack up very well against someone who has a bigger network and a lot of followers.



#### SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Once you have chosen the social media platforms that make the most sense for your business, it's time to build your personal profile and the company page—people have profiles, companies have pages.

"It's important that the company looks respectable and ready for business," says O'Neil. "Every small business should look like a medium-sized business on social media. But, the big thing we stress is that you need to have a consistent look and feel across all of the platforms. The way to do that is to create a sort of template of language that you use to optimize and purpose for LinkedIn, Google+, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. It's a core set of words that have been optimized to best describe your brand, the products and services your company offers."

That will take care of the language side of social media. The other side is the visual side, and that's equally compelling.

"If you don't have a picture in your profile, you shouldn't expect anyone to ever call. Beyond that, our technique is to build a core set of graphics components—your logo, your picture, some keywords, some phrases, some objects, some colors—and blend that a certain way for Twitter and a different way for LinkedIn and a different way for Facebook. It's the same objects, they're just on a different-sized canvas, but it's pretty much the same message across platforms. And, it's not very hard to do if you have a graphics person who understands your business. This will often be the person who works on your website or

blog, which is probably WordPress in each case. If you approach it that way, it's really powerful, and it's not very hard. There are templates out there, we have templates, for how to create the right size for these platforms and devices," says O'Neil.

He adds that it's important to consider the device your customers may be using. Most likely, they're using a computer or a tablet. However, they may also be using a smartphone. "It's important to have the same look and feel across the different devices. When people are using a tablet or a smartphone, their needs are probably different than if they were sitting at a desk. People tend to do research from their desk and do things that are mobile from their devices. So, to give you an example of what we're doing; we're moving towards a user interface on our website that looks like an iOS interface. Our next generation website looks like an iPhone on an iPhone, a tablet on a tablet and a website on a regular computer."

Another bit of strategy, says O'Neil, has to do with the photo. When someone does a search on LinkedIn using a keyword such as trophies or awards, your company and personal profile will pop up with other company pages and personal profiles.

"For the most part, you're on the screen with a bunch of other people competing for the click. Someone searched for trophies, and they found you and a bunch of other people. Your picture is the first thing they see. Now, I learned a great trick from a guy named Jamie Turner. He puts a little red box around his picture, and it springs

from the page. It's called the Turner Box. But, it really helps you spring out from the page. Red is a color that people pay attention to. The picture really is important, and the big trend now is to have a beautiful smiling face, with a blurred background. Using that technique, I get compliments on my LinkedIn photo every couple of days," says O'Neil.

#### A UNIFORM MESSAGE

Creating a uniform message extends beyond the business owner's personal profile and the company's page. All of the company's employees should be on the same page as well.

"It's important for the external facing people to be on LinkedIn and to look consistent between them. The way you do that is to create a LinkedIn profile template. Our clients hire us to do this, and we create a skeleton of a LinkedIn profile that has company-optimized language in certain areas and instructions for how employees can take this text that has been approved by the company and put it in the right places in their LinkedIn profiles. We put the company's URLs into the profile as well so that all of the employees are directing people to the company website. And the most important thing is that all of your employees need to show up on the company page when someone goes there. When that doesn't happen, you don't get credit for all of your employees, and they're not driving traffic to the company page like they should. These are the little things that smaller companies miss," says O'Neil.

O'Neil notes that with this kind of approach, your employees become your brand ambassadors. "When the company gives the employees a little help, they're more inclined to go the rest of the way. It requires a lot less effort from them to do their part."

Company employees will also help build a larger network says O'Neil, "Having an audience of one isn't what anyone is looking for. A great-looking profile and a great company page with a small network and a few followers doesn't stack up very well against someone who has a bigger network and a lot of followers. Beyond the first step of building the profile and building the company page, the next step is to build your network. Who should I connect to and how? What should I say? What's in it for them? How are they identified? What's the process? That's a big deal."

O'Neil suggest that companies look at their existing clients, making sure to connect with all of them. Then, take the words that they seem to be using to describe themselves and use them to search to find

some more folks like them. When you invite someone from corporate client B, and you've already done business with corporate client A, you can show that to them, and they may be more receptive, knowing that you already know their industry.

"You leverage the stuff you already have to make sure you work within the confines of the low-hanging fruit, which are the competitors of the people you're already working with. That's the lowest-hanging fruit. Then, you look for related industries. If they're selling French fries, ask yourself, 'What goes well with French fries?' Those are simple things for your readers to do," says O'Neil.

That's good advice for network building. From there, you'll want to do some content marketing. To do that, O'Neil suggests, "Discuss with your existing clients what kind of content they'd be interested in. What kind of stuff gets their attention? What do they look at? What blogs do they read, and what looks good to them? Then, model some things after that or things that go well with that."

## POST, SHARE, MINGLE

Many small businesses taking part in social media claim that they do not achieve a return on their investment. They are on LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook; they've posted videos on YouTube, but those efforts aren't turning into leads or sales.

Zeldman says that this is often the result of using social media without a strategy. "When people say they tried social media and it didn't work, I ask them what their strategy was. They often don't have one. One of the symptoms of not having a strategy is not posting frequently enough. Another problem with not having a strategy is that they think of social media as a newspaper where they can just post ads and promote their business. Many business owners come to my seminars and say, 'I just want to learn to use Facebook so that I can post that I'm having a sale.' That doesn't work. Here's the thing: people are not on social media to receive your sales pitches."

Zeldman adds that being successful with social media marketing, or any form of internet marketing, involves a combina-

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tion of technology, psychology and strategy. The reason why they're on the social media site might be different for every site. For example, says Zeldman, if they're on Facebook, they're probably there to connect with their friends and family and to keep up to date on the things that are important to them. Every business wants to figure out how they can become important to those consumers. Doing so requires getting into the mind of the target customer, figuring out what's important to them related to your business and developing a strategy around that.

How is that done? "I love to quote Facebook expert Amy Porterfield. She says that 80% of your posts should be inspiring, empowering, entertaining or educational to your target customer."

Here's the idea: If you went to a social event sponsored by the local chamber of commerce—an event full of potential customers for your business—you wouldn't simply walk up to people and launch into a sales pitch. You would start with some sort of conversational ice breaker, perhaps commenting about the weather,

the local sports team or perhaps giving a compliment about a nice piece of jewelry they're wearing. It's the same idea with social media.

Zeldman says, "The ice breaker is creating posts that give value to the target customer. The advice I give to business owners in my seminar is to brainstorm three to five topics that are related to what you have to offer."

For example, let's suppose you are selling embroidered baby blankets to mothers who just had a baby. Of course, you are going to do a post about the blankets. That's one. But those same mothers are likely interested in other baby topics. Make your other posts about swaddling techniques, how to calm an upset infant and the best way to warm a bottle.

"Use those ideas to create posts that are inspiring, empowering, educational or entertaining. If you're doing that 80% of the time, then 20% of the time, you can use your posts to promote a product or service, and people will give you feedback and they will support you," says Zeldman.

Zeldman notes that no matter what

social media site you're on when you want to maintain an account, you're always doing one of three things: You're posting your own content, sharing other people's content, or mingling, starting and jumping into conversations.

## GENERAL MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES

One of the issues many have with websites and social media is that they require maintenance—something tough to fit in to an already hectic schedule. However, it's not as labor intensive as many people think.

"Let's assume that you've got it built, because there's a building process that precedes all of this, and then you get into the ongoing management," says O'Neil. "On LinkedIn, 15 minutes in the morning, 15 minutes midday and 15 minutes at the end of the day, whether that's in the 5:00pm hour because it's the end of the workday or it's at night before you go to bed. Clear out your inboxes, and in the morning see what came in. You wouldn't want to wait to find out at noon or at night that someone contacted you wanting to

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Your real goal is to make a connection with the person behind the computer.



see what you offer and you don't see it until the next day only to find out they've already talked to other people."

While noting that her advice differs from one situation to another, Zeldman says there are some general guidelines to follow as to how frequently social media should be updated. "On LinkedIn, you don't want to do more than one or two updates a day. LinkedIn is much more subdued. On Facebook, ideally, two-to-five times a day. On Twitter, you can do much more. More Tweets are acceptable; it's part of the culture. You can Tweet eight to 10 times a day, and no one will bat an

eye as long you're giving good value and tweeting good stuff." She adds that there are tools that allow people to pre-schedule their posts. You can write out a lot of posts and schedule them to post automatically at different times.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS

With these ideas, it's not as if anyone has reinvented the wheel. It's more about

coming up with a very efficient and streamlined approach, a uniform message, whether it's the verbiage or images, that gets everyone on the same page and maximizes everyone's effort.

"I tell people over and over again that whether it's LinkedIn, Facebook or Twitter, it's just a tool. Your real goal is to make a connection with the person behind the computer. It's just a communication tool." **A&E**

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