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Avoid the “All-You-Can-Eat” Social Media Buffet

Identifying Effective Social Media Channels for Your Business

By: Melanie Brenneman

Competitive eating fascinates me. It is not so much the fact that contestants eat so much, but rather the thought that the successful ones put into the process. For example, take [Nathan's Famous July 4 International Hot Dog-Eating Contest](#). The contestants may look like they are cramming hotdogs into their pie holes faster than mustard comes out of a bottle, but they are also soaking the buns in water to make them easier to swallow or using the [Solomon Method](#) to down those weenies faster than the eater beside them.

That is how large corporations handle social media. They have a presence on almost every social media outlet and are trimmed out with a generous number of workers to engage clients around the world. There may be a magnificent amount of material flying about, but this is normally backed by a tight strategy on how each channel operates and what it should accomplish.

But how can smaller companies approach social media? Oftentimes, there is a shortage of labor, and social media lands on the plate of the busy person who happened to mention having a Twitter account in the last meeting. Or there is a lack of understanding of how to use it. Or enthusiasm outweighs strategic vision. How can a company avoid gorging on the entire social media buffet and target social media participation to meet its needs?

The number of social media channels is extensive ([check out this list](#) for an overview), each with its own standards, manners and practices. In order to identify which channels are most effective for your company, take into consideration the following points.

Where is your audience?

In high school, the jocks hung out at the football field and the brainiacs in the classrooms. This relates to social media as well. Attorneys tend to use different social media channels than, for example, an actor would. Start by searching for surveys that cover social media use by profession or industry. Follow up by asking your employees and clients what social media channels they use and trust. And remember to ask them what they use those channels for. For example, do they rely on Facebook for business information or is it used more to share with family and friends?

What do you want to accomplish?

Just like marketing, social media activity has to map to the company's overall strategic goals. Otherwise, you are just eating toward a stomachache and last place. Is your company focused on aggressive growth? Interested in emphasizing its competitive differentiators? Or wanting to amp up its client support? Regardless, anything you share or conversations you start or contribute to must funnel toward the big picture.



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What do you intend to share?

While many social media channels allow the use of multiple forms of communication (text, photos and videos), there are still many that rely on a primary one. For example, Pinterest is driven by photos. YouTube relies on videos. If your company has a limited number of videos and no plans or budget to add to them, YouTube might not be the first logical choice for social media engagement. If your company has an avid writer or thought leader on hand, then something more text-based and flexible, such as a blog, might be a better fit.

What is your bandwidth?

Oftentimes, companies bite off more than they can chew. They might establish a social media presence across several channels and begin with a lively thread of updates, comments and information. Then, the activity slows and finally stops – leaving a branded social media grave marker for your clients and prospects to find. Take a long, brutal look at what resources and dedication you can offer your social media efforts. Reserve a hard number of hours each week that should be given – and can feasibly continue to be given – to social media. If you can only start with Twitter, then do so and do it well! You can build from there when you are ready.

Luckily, social media does not have to be an all-you-can-eat event. Take the time and effort to really dig into your priorities and resources and you will discover bite-sized social media opportunities with effective results for your business.

About the Author

Melanie Brenneman is a senior account manager and social media strategist for Edge Marketing, Inc. An avid marketer, Melanie has more than 13 years of experience meeting the communication needs of small businesses and Fortune 500 corporations alike. In her spare time, she volunteers for the American Marketing Association and Austin Pug Rescue. She prefers leisurely meals to competitive eating.



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