



35 Things You Should Know About Social Media Networks

What They Are, Why You Should Be Using Them,
and How to Use Them Effectively

35 Things You Should Know About Social Media Networks

The buzz around social media has been growing to a near crescendo. People are blogging, connecting with friends on *Facebook*, posting updates to *Twitter*, and getting *LinkedIn*. Is your business or organization still on the social media sideline, looking to get into the game but unsure of how to proceed, or are you wondering if the business value is there?

In this guide, we will outline 35 of the most important things you need to know about social media networks: what they are, why you'd want to use them, and how to use them effectively. With this information in hand, you'll have the right ammunition to start building your social media presence.



Part One: What Are the Social Media Networks?

To begin, let's take a look at some of the most popular social media networks and tools, with a quick primer on what's good and not-so-good about each of them.

1. Facebook

Facebook is, by numbers alone, the most popular social networking site today, with more than 350 million registered users. It's a site that lets people share updates, photos, videos, articles, and more with "Friends," who they have to approve to be in their network. Businesses and organizations can create "Fan Pages," which other Facebook users can become fans of, just like they do sports teams, musicians, and celebrities.



(Constant Contact's Fan Page is shown here: <http://www.facebook.com/constantcontact>)

What's good about it?

- The user base is huge, and that means many of your customers and constituents are already there.
- It's easy to use.
- Multimedia content can be integrated with your profile.
- You can separate your personal and professional use.

What's not so good about it?

- You have limited ability to customize your Fan Page.
- Fan Pages do not have email alerts; you will have to check to see if there is any activity.
- It's a closed environment — only Facebook users can become fans or friends of your business or organization.



Part One: What Are the Social Media Networks?

2. Twitter

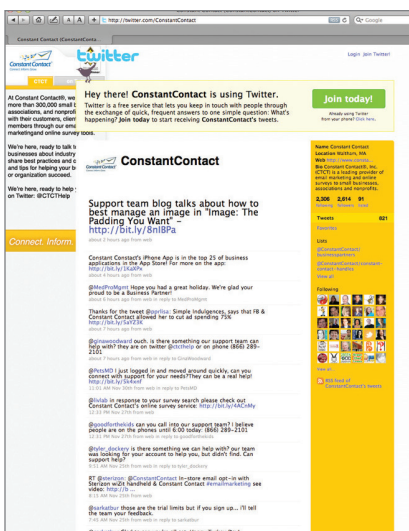
Twitter is a social networking service that allows users to communicate with their “Followers.” It’s open to anyone, so you can follow or be followed by people you know and people you don’t. Users choose a “handle” that is their user name preceded by the @ symbol, and communicate via short messages and updates (called “Tweets”) that have a maximum length of 140 characters. Tweets can be very easily “Retweeted” (RT) and shared with the simple click of a button.

What’s good about it?

- The “Timeline” (or the Twitter feed) is public, which can help to give your business or organization greater exposure in web search results.
- The site is more open than Facebook, so it’s easier to build a community of potential customers you don’t personally know.
- Fans can “follow you” without you having to reciprocate.
- There is a quick way to share links to content.
- Users are very vocal, so if they are happy with your business or organization, they’ll say so.

What’s not so good about it?

- The site is text only — pictures and video are shared through secondary links.
- It’s challenging to say something of significance in only 140 characters.
- Lots of “noise.” With so many identical-looking Tweets, it’s hard to make a single one stand out in the crowd.
- Spammers are increasingly targeting the service.
- Users are very vocal, so if they have a problem with something, they’ll say so.



(Constant Contact’s corporate Twitter handle is @constantcontact, and its page is shown here: <http://www.twitter.com/constantcontact>)



Part One: What Are the Social Media Networks?

3. LinkedIn

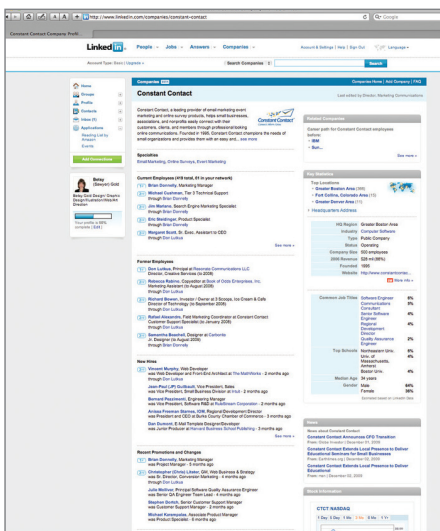
LinkedIn is the more “professional” social network of the Big Three. It lets users create what amounts to an online resume and connect with other peers — be it friends, colleagues, or other business associates — through online networking. Businesses and organizations can also set up profiles on the site; many businesses use it to recruit (and check references) for new hires.

What’s good about it?

- The “six-degrees” nature of the site allows you to reach out to people through already existing connections.
- Profiles are straightforward and connections can be easily made.
- Not a lot of “noise” and clutter.
- Allows for Question and Answer inquiries with a professional slant.

What’s not so good about it?

- It’s the smallest of the Big Three social networks, though its population is growing.
- It’s a more stodgy environment, which doesn’t convey fun.
- Job seekers are more active on the site than those already employed.
- People use the site for purely professional purposes, so marketing messages are not always welcome.



(Constant Contact’s LinkedIn page is here:
<http://www.linkedin.com/companies/constant-contact>)



Part One: What Are the Social Media Networks?



4. MySpace

MySpace was one of the first social networking sites to rocket to popularity. Today, the site is populated mainly by younger users; the majority are under the age of 35, according to Quantcast.

What's good about it?

- Pages are highly customizable.
- It's great for sharing or promoting music.

What's not so good about it?

- The user base is shrinking.
- Many pages are amateurish and poorly designed.

5. Blogs

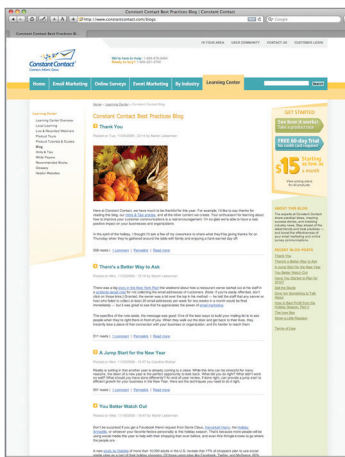
A blog, by definition, is simply a content publishing tool that displays your posts in chronological order, with the most recent on top and earlier ones below. Your content can be whatever you wish: opinions, education, news, product reviews, etc.

What's good about them?

- They provide an easy way to manage articles and content.
- Each new post adds a new web page and increases your web presence — and helps your search engine optimization.
- Blogs can serve as an archive for your newsletter content.

What's not so good about them?

- Blogs must be updated somewhat regularly to derive value.
- They take more time than Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn, etc. to keep current.
- Templates through free services can be limiting.
- Employing an advanced design requires some knowledge of HTML and CSS.



(Constant Contact's blog can be found here:
<http://www.constantcontact.com/blogs>)



Part Two: Why Are Social Media Networks Worth Using?

Alright, now you know the basics about which social media networks are which, and what's notable about them. Here are some quick reasons why you should dip your foot into the social media waters comfortably.

- 6. They're free.** Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and MySpace all offer free accounts. You can even blog for free with services like Wordpress.com and Google's Blogger.com. Some — like LinkedIn — do offer paid accounts with more features that are targeted at more advanced users, but for the purposes of getting started, there's no upfront cost for most of the social networking sites.
- 7. They're popular.** Facebook alone has more than 350 million users. To put that in perspective: That's more than the population of the entire United States. Chances are good that many of your customers or the people you want to reach are on at least one of the social media networks.
- 8. They're not just for college kids.** One major stereotype associated with many forms of social media: They're only for young folks. This is not true at all. In fact, comScore reported that usage of Facebook by users 18–24 actually *went down* each month during the third quarter of 2009. According to Facebook, its fastest growing demographic is users over the age of 35. And, the Pew Internet & American Life Project says the median age of a Twitter user is 31. That same Pew survey says 40 is the median age of LinkedIn users.
- 9. They allow you to be personal and professional.** On Facebook, you can have two identities: one for you and one for your business or organization. Facebook offers an option known as “Fan Pages,” which are different from the standard “Friend” connections, and allows you to message just to “Fans,” keeping any personal information about you separate and contained to your profile.

Part Two: Why Are Social Media Networks Worth Using?

- 10. They can tell a lot about you.** Profiles on these sites can help boost awareness about your business as they can contain pertinent information about your products and services. Think of them as dynamic yellow pages for the digital age. Much of your activity and profiles on social media sites can be made “public,” meaning they can be indexed by search engines — one more way to make sure your business comes up as the answer when someone is searching for a solution to their problem.
- 11. They extend you, your brand, and your relationship with your customers.** The goal of marketing is to stay in front of your customers and to remain top of mind with them. You use email marketing to reach their inboxes, and now you can use social media to extend that reach into other interactive areas of the web where your customers gather. People who use social media look for other likeminded folks and businesses. Make sure they find you by having a presence on the appropriate networks for your business.
- 12. They’re two-way communications channels.** Twitter and Facebook in particular are great vehicles for having a “conversation” (albeit a public one) with your customers. You can see what they’re saying about you and respond, and vice versa.

Using tools like Twitter Search (<http://search.twitter.com>), you can quickly see any mentions of your business, organization, product, or service. Taking Twitter Search a step further, you can look up key terms related to your business and find out what people are saying about them. With Twitter, you don’t have to be following someone or connected to them to respond. So if you see something relevant come up in the search results, you can easily (and quickly) respond by mentioning the person’s handle (i.e., his or her username preceded by the @ symbol) in your Tweet.

On Facebook, particularly if you have a Fan Page, make sure to log in to the service often to check for comments and posts. Unlike with a standard Facebook account, there’s no option for receiving email alerts every time something new is posted to your Fan Page. You have to log in and check for new posts.

Part Two: Why Are Social Media Networks Worth Using?

13. They're everywhere. You don't have to be at your computer to post to any of the major social media networks. For instance, you can post to your Twitter feed via a simple text message. If you have a Smartphone like an iPhone, Blackberry, or Windows Mobile device, there are applications that let you update your social networking sites on the road.

You can go beyond text too: Your mobile phone's camera can be used to capture images and video, which can be uploaded to your blog and social media accounts, giving customers a richer (and real-time) media experience. Many of the popular blog platforms also allow posting from a mobile device.

14. They can be intertwined. Social media sites are not silos of information. You can easily share content between networks. Your Twitter post can also feed your Facebook page and LinkedIn account. Likewise, your blog posts can be automatically fed to Facebook every time you post one. But, make sure not to overwhelm one account with updates from the other. If you have a blog, make sure your posts include links to the services you use — this helps expose your post to a wider audience and helps to increase your presence when people search for you on a search engine.



Providing network links to your other social media accounts when your post increases online visibility.

Part Three: How Can You Use Social Media Effectively?

More good news is that most social media services are easy to use and don't require a lot of Web savvy. If you can build a high quality newsletter, you should have no trouble getting around social media networks and blogging platforms.

As you make your first forays into social media, here are some tips to keep in mind on how to use the services intelligently.

15. Have a reason for being there. Don't just get on the social media bandwagon because everyone else is doing it. Identify a reason for being there first: Is it to more fully engage with customers? Is it to identify and respond to customer service issues? Is it to promote your business and any sales/specials you may be offering? Is it to share your expertise? Is it to give your business or organization more of a public persona? Perhaps it's a combination of these. Whatever your reasons for getting involved in social media, develop a strategy and stick to it.

16. Set goals for success. As with any business-related undertaking, you want to have key goals to measure success. Your goal could be something simple like garnering a certain number of fans or followers. Or you could use analytics tools (here's one example: <http://mashable.com/2009/10/27/social-media-roi/>) to more accurately measure how social media is impacting your business.



Mashable is the world's largest blog largely focused on social media news.



Part Three: How Can You Use Social Media Effectively?

- 17. Choose the site(s) that work best for you.** As a small business owner or the manager of a nonprofit, you don't have the time or the resources to be everywhere. If you're not the writer type or you own a business where educational material aimed at the customer is scant, a blog might not be of much use to you, for example. Create the social media presence that works best for your business or organization. Need some help figuring out what that would be? Ask your customers what sites they're already using, and then join them there.
- 18. Start small.** If you're new to social media, you don't want to bite off more than you can chew. Pick one site and put a stake in the ground. Once you're comfortable there, you can build your presence or expand to other sites.
- 19. Make your presence known.** Don't just sit around and wait for people to find you on social media sites. In your email campaigns, announce that you have Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or other accounts, and explain to customers why they'd want to join your networks (for example, "You'll be the first to find out about upcoming sales or events"). If you start a blog, use some content from it in your newsletter and provide a link. And, put a link to your Facebook page and Twitter feed in your regular email signature.
- 20. Have a separate personal and professional account.** Unless your name is your brand, it's a good idea to have separate accounts for personal and business use. This keeps your personal, non-business thoughts and opinions separate from your business persona.
- 21. Stay involved.** Once you get your profiles set up and Fan Page(s) created, you're done, right? Not so fast. Successful social media users are consistently (some constantly) involved in their networks. Make sure you're offering fresh content and responding to those who talk to or about you.
- 22. Keep your expectations in check.** Your Follower, Fan, and Friend counts will not skyrocket the second you sign up. Take the time to cultivate relationships with people and organically grow your social media circle. (It's much like growing your email marketing lists.)

Part Three: How Can You Use Social Media Effectively?

- 23. Involve your friends and family.** There's nothing wrong with telling people you already know to join your Fan Page or to follow you on Twitter. After all, there's strength in numbers. Would you join a club if no one else belonged to it? If potential customers see that you're already popular, they'll want to join in the fun, if only to see what they're missing. And, your friends and family can help spread the word too, which will help you grow your Fan base and Followers list organically.
- 24. Keep up with your industry.** It's important to know what others in your industry are doing and saying on social media sites. Become their Friends on Facebook, follow their Twitter feeds, and read their blogs. Just don't feel compelled to say "me too" and do something just because similar businesses are doing it. Staying consistent with your brand and staying true to your social media strategy will allow you to maintain a unique social media presence.
- 25. Reuse your great content.** When you add one or more social media networks or a blog to your marketing mix, you do not necessarily have to come up with exclusive content for each network. Reuse articles from your newsletters to prime the social media pump. In turn, your blog's content can be used to feed your email newsletter and social network channels.
- 26. Answer questions.** When you interact with customers and members, do they tend to ask the same questions repeatedly? Why not share those questions — and the answers — on your social media page? You can also use the site(s) as a forum, and ask people to ask their most common questions about your business or organization.
- 27. Do more than make sales pitches.** Like the content in your email newsletters, it's important to provide your audience with useful information, not just a constant stream of direct sales pitches. Customers who read your blog, follow you on Twitter, and are fans of your Facebook page are not connecting with you for a 24/7 sales pitch. Yes, they would love to get an exclusive deal, but they don't want you to sell, sell, sell all the time. Use your knowledge and expertise to educate customers via email, a blog, and through social networks, not just to promote your products or services.

Part Three: How Can You Use Social Media Effectively?

- 28. Show some personality.** Social media networks are a chance for you to loosen up in the eyes of your customers and members. Is the local team playing a big game? Why not post a message of support? Did your staff recently celebrate a holiday? Why not share photos? Don't fake it, though. Social media users can tell if something is less than genuine.
- 29. Adhere to the "Teacher, Preacher, Boss" rule.** Everyone's heard a story of someone getting fired for an inappropriate post made on a social network. Always err on the side of discretion. In other words, don't post anything you wouldn't want your teacher, your preacher, or your boss to see. You wouldn't want to offend customers and steer them away from your business or organization.
- 30. Make it exclusive.** A great way to add to your social media presence is to offer exclusive benefits for those in your networks. For example, you can share a special code that's good for a discount if the customer tells the cashier or uses it on your website. Or post a special Facebook-only sale. You can also host a special event just for those who follow you on Twitter (called a "Tweet-up"). Anything that makes your network the place to be.
- 31. Look out for the competition.** One surefire way to see if a given social network is right for reaching your customers is to see what the competition is doing. Seek them out to find what types of things they are doing with their social media presence.
- 32. Share and share alike.** One of the greatest reasons to get on a social media network is to share information. Make sure you're encouraging your Fans, Friends, and Followers to repost or re-Tweet your content. Likewise, if you see something that you think would be worth sharing with your audience — an article, video, photo, or quote — repost it on your Facebook or Twitter page. This applies to positive customer feedback too. Don't be afraid to repost great things a customer has said. Just make sure to also say "thank you" publicly.

Part Three: How Can You Use Social Media Effectively?

33. Make it a part of your email marketing campaign. You can very easily add an email signup box to many of the social media sites, which will give your Fans, Friends, and Followers the chance to get even more involved with your business or organization. Post links to your newsletter content on your social media networks, which will expand the reach of your content and perhaps even encourage others to join your mailing list. You can further involve your audience by including selected comments in a future issue of your newsletter.

34. Budget your time. At the beginning, most social networks seem like a drain on time with little return. While it's possible to waste a tremendous amount of time on one or more of these sites, being smart and sticking to your goals will prevent you from getting lost in the social media weeds.

35. Have a thick skin. Be prepared to take some criticism of your business, organization, product, or service when participating in social media. How well you respond to those not-always-positive things says a lot about your business. Don't ignore complaints — respond in a friendly manner asking how you can help rectify the problem, or better yet, fix the situation and let people know publicly. If you nurture complaints the proper way, and respond quickly, your fans (i.e.: your best customers) will start to defend you.

By reading this guide, you already have some inclination that social networking can help your marketing effort. Go ahead and sign up for a couple social networking accounts. Play around to see what kind of connections can be made, and how easy it is to share multiple forms of content and interact with customers and prospects.

Social media should go hand-in-hand with email marketing when it comes to your marketing strategy. Today's consumers want to be part of a conversation with the people and organizations they do business with, and traditional one-way marketing does not offer chances for this sought-after two-way communication.

Opening up your business or organization to social media and sharing content, personality, and more will create a tighter bond with your customers and members, and ensure your business or organization stays top of mind with them when your products or service is needed.

