

GET ASSIST SMALL BUSINESS EBOOK

Small Business Digital Marketing Guide:

Making Meaningful Connections with your Customers and Community



INTRODUCTION

Using digital communication as a tool for local connections is more relevant than ever before. The Internet gives small and micro businesses the ability to be global companies the instant they open their doors, breaking away from the traditional path of entrepreneurship, as noted by a 2011 McKinsey Global Institute report.⁰² “But we should not overlook people—the real beneficiaries of the Internet’s growth,” followed the report. Yes, the Internet has continued to expand borders, but now people are turning back to their neighbors and local communities for meaningful connections.

This trend can be shown through the evolution of post-Thanksgiving holiday shopping. First, there was Black Friday. It all started in 1950s downtown Philadelphia, where surrounding-area suburbanites would swoop in on sales and cause mayhem in department stores the days after Thanksgiving. Fast forward 55 years, and Cyber Monday was born in a Shop.org press release. The popularity of online shopping grew exponentially year after year, and finally became the biggest online shopping day in history in 2013.⁰⁴ Five years after that, Small Business Saturday, the brainchild of American Express, was founded to encourage “people to shop at the small businesses that help write the story of America.”⁰⁵ Holiday shopping has gone full circle, and this example illustrates the wants of today’s consumers. Doing business with local, small providers has become a movement that continues to gain momentum and make an impact on neighborhoods across North America.

But how do small businesses tap into this movement to make meaningful connections with their customers and community? The answer is simple. Small businesses must put time and energy into digital efforts in order to see success and grow their operation. They must be willing to help everyday people do everyday things—online.

“97% OF INTERNET USERS LOOK FOR LOCAL GOODS AND SERVICES ONLINE.”

BIA/KELSEY USER VIEW WAVE VII 2010 CONSUMER TRACKING STUDY⁰³

Marketing is no longer about spewing out advertisements; it’s about creating a community where your brand and customers can have positive experiences. When asked what provides the biggest ROI when building an online presence from scratch, business coach James Schramko responded with “social communities.”²⁷

Brand evangelists are in your community, and this eBook will help you find them.

TELLING YOUR BRAND'S UNIQUELY COMPELLING STORY

For small businesses especially, developing your personal brand is equally as important as developing your company brand. In fact, it's oftentimes one and the same. Strong personal brands attract strong referral networks, so before you even attempt to bring in another customer, create a brand that others want—no, need—to know more about.

Get Personal

To help identify the power of personal brands, let's take a quick look at Walt Disney. Walt's personal brand is as everlasting as the Disney brand itself, and he is one of the most iconic entrepreneurs of all time for good reason. When you think of Walt Disney, powerful words naturally come to mind—Visionary. Optimist. Friend. Sure, the man behind Mickey made building a personal brand look easy, but did you know he did it without even knowing it? For time's sake, let's boil this down to the key takeaway: Be authentic, whatever your personal brand embodies, and you'll be successful.

When brainstorming your personal brand and how you'd like to present it to the public, start by asking yourself these questions:

- What is my personal trademark?
- What is my personal mantra and how does it translate?
- How do others describe me?
- How do I want to be described?
- What makes me different?
- What are core messages I want to express to others?
- What are weaknesses I could work on improving?
- What are my core values?
- What is my purpose?
- Who do I admire?
- What's my five-year plan and what passions are guiding me there?¹⁰

HELPFUL HINT

You should also spend time exploring what your brand 'is not.'

Use the answers to these questions to make connections and identify trends that will lead you to who you want to be. Goals and passions you may have never known existed are likely to emerge!

Show Your Passion

Once you've narrowed down your personal brand into a few definitive statements, you should then decide which quality is the most important to you. This is the quality that you will strongly align yourself with no matter what challenges you come across. From now on you will let nothing stand between you and this quality. You're the new peanut butter and jelly.

Your brand is likely to share similar values to your customers; after all, most small businesses highly value friends, family and community. These shared values, among others, will increase your worth. According to a Corporate executive Board (CeB) study, 64 percent of consumers who said they had a strong relationship with a brand cited shared values as the primary reason.¹² Always let your passions shine through in everything you do.

Stay Consistent & Don't Underestimate the Power of Authenticity

In order to be perceived as trustworthy, you need to live your brand every day. And the only way to do that is to keep it real. Get in touch with your best qualities and amplify them out to your audience. Reference your answers to the questions posed above whenever you need to remind yourself of how your identity, personality and character continue to shape your ideal personal brand. Make consistency an integral part of your brand and it will attract customers.

Once you've attracted customers who appreciate your brand and what it stands for, make it your mission to give each and every person the same quality experience. There's no doubt that your personal brand will be tested, but remember consistency is key to cementing your brand in stone. Keep your word every time and deliver on what you promise. When looking to small businesses for services and products, people want the convenience of knowing they have someone in their Rolodex they can count on.

BUILDING A WEBSITE THAT ENHANCES THE DIGITAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Over the span of the next three years, businesses that make use of the Web expect to accelerate growth 40 percent more rapidly than businesses that don't, according to a 2012 Boston Consulting Group report.⁰¹

But did you know that 56 percent of Arizona businesses don't have a website, and 59 percent of Canadian small businesses don't have an online presence?^{24 25}

Where Local Means Business, a resource for all things small business in Canada, notes that small businesses often don't have websites despite being an important part of the economy. These small office/home office businesses include consultants, home daycare providers and drywall installers just to name a few. Because these types of businesses often find value in human connection and word-of-mouth referrals, they may not perceive the same benefits from an online presence that a larger company might.

Creating a helpful, professional website is a simple way to get ahead of the competition. Yes, cuties are totally aloud online. But with new technology emerging daily, how do small business owners ensure their digital experience is a positive one, regardless of device? The answer lies in responsive Web design.

**“THREE OUT OF FOUR SMARTPHONE USERS HAVE CONTACTED
A BUSINESS THEY FOUND ON THEIR SMARTPHONE.”**

GOOGLE/IPSOS 2011 STUDY, “THE MOBILE MOVEMENT: UNDERSTANDING SMARTPHONE USERS”¹¹

Utilize Responsive Web Design

A responsive website intuitively adjusts and reacts to the screen size the site is being viewed on, ensuring content is always easy to read (even for glasses and contact wearers) and subpages are easy to navigate with minimum scrolling and zooming (even for those with extremely large thumbs). On the basic level, responsive websites contain fluid grids and flexible images that move to best fit different devices. Creating a responsive website requires quite a bit of effort up front, but long-term benefits are tremendous and include: increased reach and visibility, enhanced user experiences, time savings and consolidated analytics and reporting—all of these ultimately leading to increased sales.

A responsive website intuitively adjusts and reacts to the screen size the site is being viewed on, ensuring content is always easy to read (even for glasses and contact wearers) and subpages are easy to navigate with minimum scrolling and zooming (even for those with extremely large thumbs). On the basic level, responsive websites contain fluid grids and flexible images that move to best fit different devices. Creating a responsive website requires quite a bit of effort up front, but long-term benefits are tremendous and include: increased reach and visibility, enhanced user experiences, time savings and consolidated analytics and reporting—all of these ultimately leading to increased sales.

Various people and institutions can build responsive websites. Both large firms and freelance developers can build sites from the ground up, but this option is often out of reach for those with smaller budgets, as it takes many rounds of development and design to reach the final product. If you want to do it on your own, plenty of free tutorials exist. Keep in mind, however, that intermediate CSS and HTML knowledge, and access to graphic software is required. If you're up for it, check out Creative Bloq's five-part tutorial for making a responsive website in a week.⁰⁶

But let's be honest. Most entrepreneurs don't have the time or money to allocate to creating detailed responsive websites. For these folks, buying responsive website templates is an appealing option. If you do decide to go this route—and we think you should!—it's important to scope out the competition first. Popular templates are downloaded tens of thousands of times, so avoid these to find one that's more unique to you.

Communicate Through Website Content

The content you place on your website is just as important as the design. Both should work in harmony together to create a unified message that speaks in the voice of your personal brand. Every businesses' website should include an about page, customer testimonials, FAQ page, social share icons, calls to action, contact information and an online shop if you're an eCommerce site. If your business offers different levels of services, make sure the key differences are clear and easy to understand. People spend a substantial amount more of time on websites that are easy to navigate, so keep the navigation clean and uncluttered.

When writing content for your businesses' website, brainstorm what a consumer would want to know, but keep SEO best practices in mind. Convey your message in a concise way that includes relevant keywords; wordy websites bore consumers.

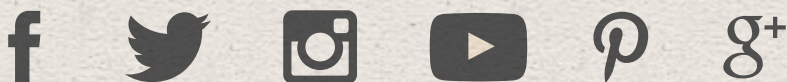
When accessing your site's usability, examine the following things:

- Company logo, phone number and address is prominently placed
- Load-time is reasonable
- The purpose of the site and type of business can be identified in less than five seconds
- Email contact form is easy to see and conveys value to users
- URLs are relevant and user-friendly
- Links are easy to identify
- Main nav is easy to understand and paths to pertinent information are clear
- Imagery is meaningful
- Content is free of errors and font is easy to read

INCREASING VISIBILITY THROUGH A DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

Customer evangelism is of great importance to 86 percent of the most effective marketers, making it a ‘very important’ marketing goal for B2C organizations, according to Content Marketing Institute’s 2015 B2C Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends—North America report.⁰⁹ Other notable goals included customer retention/loyalty, engagement, brand awareness, sales and lead generation—all of which can be improved through an effective digital marketing strategy. Along with this data, the report found that the largest percentages of B2C marketers are currently working on: better converting visitors on website, creating more engaging/higher-quality content, becoming better storytellers, optimizing content and organizing website content. Stay ahead of the pack and inspire action in any industry by utilizing social media, blogging, email marketing and online knowledge sharing. It will be fun, we promise!

GET TO KNOW THE SMALL BUSINESS SOCIAL 6





Facebook

Facebook still reigns supreme, but things are a-changin' and entrepreneurs need to stay informed. Facebook will continue its charge against unpaid promotions most commonly utilized by small businesses in 2015. This evolution has instilled fear in many small business owners, but Dan Levy, Facebook's vice president of small business, told the Wall Street Journal there were more than 1 billion visits to Facebook pages directly in Oct. 2013 and that "having a presence where you can be discovered still has a ton of value."¹⁶

Keep daily interaction light and casual on this platform, but make sure it's informative as well. Everything you type should be succinct and fresh (and proofread before posting!). Facebook is a prime spot for visual content, so show off your photo skills and your content is more likely to get shared. Remember that people reach out often for support through Facebook, so be there to lend a helping hand in a conversational, non-threatening tone.



Twitter

Using Twitter is similar to a salmon swimming upstream in the remote Alaskan wilderness—It's hard work that doesn't always get noticed. But don't sweat it. Create custom hashtags, stay within the 140-character limit, post often and your tweets will be well received. Opportunities to create meaningful, relevant tweets are everywhere, so keep your eyes open and your ears peeled to streams relevant to your industry. No, you may never sleep again.



Instagram

Instagram is the platform where small businesses can really have some fun. Stay true to your brand's voice and purpose, but approach all posts in a happy-go-lucky manner. Creating themes based on different campaigns or product offerings will help you ensure your business refrains from repetitive self-promotion. Photos in Instagram should be aesthetically pleasing above all else, with a 'street' feel—perfect for bonding closely with your community! Instagram users love to see behind-the-scenes photos and sneak peaks of what's to come from your brand so don't be shy.

HELPFUL HINT

Check out Instagram's business blog for in-depth information and inspiration.¹⁷



YouTube

You might not think a video will do well on YouTube if it doesn't include fumbling puppies and kittens or Psy's signature "Gangnam Style" moves, but small businesses can still effectively gain leads via this platform. Providing simple, useful information is just as beneficial to your audience. If you have the capabilities, create a business YouTube channel where you can house visual content and customize your channel with your brand's logo and relevant links. Aim to post videos that include calls to action to keep users engaged with your brand. Keep in mind, even if you're not using the highest-quality equipment, each video still needs to appear professional. There's no need to post on YouTube as often as your other channels, just focus on the quality of the end product. Once you've posted, don't forget to promote your videos on all of your other social platforms!



Pinterest's newest DIY Promoted Pins tool was made for small businesses. With this tool you can promote individual pins on a cost-per-click basis. Currently in testing phases with companies such as Vineyard Vines, Nicole Miller and Shutterfly. Another cool feature on Pinterest useful for hyperlocal marketing is Pinterest's map feature. With this feature you can create a community board and add various places around town to the map.

But what should you even pin on Pinterest? Visually appealing and helpful pins are the most popular. Think well-designed cleaning checklists and images from your wedding photography blog posts. Women make more than 80 percent of all consumer purchasing decisions, according to the Wall Street Journal, and women also make up 80 percent of total pinners, according to Search Engine Watch. We're sure this is not a coincidence; Neglect this platform and you'll lose out on significant sale opportunities.^{14 15}



With undeniable SEO benefits built in, Google+ cannot be ignored. Nobody puts Baby in the corner.

“ONE IN FIVE SEARCHES IS LOCAL, WHICH MEANS SOMEONE IS LOOKING FOR A PRODUCT OR SERVICE NEARBY.”

GOOGLE 2010 USER DATA²⁹

Small businesses can take advantage of Google's tools to claw their way to the top of local search results. Simply set up a Google+ page and your business will be found via search, maps and Google+ Local. Optimize your page by including relevant keywords and links on your About Page, posting often and using hashtags. Maintain your page with special offers and discounts, pictures, special event announcements and relevant news updates.

Follow the Google+ Your Business page to stay up-to-date on the latest and greatest and join Google+ Communities that align with your company. Seriously, the possibilities with Google are endless, so take advantage of everything you can.¹⁸

Give Blogging Your Best Shot

No business builds a successful digital brand without the implementation of a blog. Not only does it turn you into a thought leader in your industry, but it also gives you yet another opportunity to bring your local community online. According to Duct Tape Marketing, Google, Amazon, Facebook, Virgin, Skype and many other of the world's most recognizable brands focus on improving and building their own communities over traditional advertising.⁰⁷ Sure, becoming a blogger can seem daunting, but the returns likely plentiful.

“MARKETERS WHO HAVE PRIORITIZED BLOGGING ARE 13X MORE LIKELY TO ENJOY POSITIVE ROI.”

HUBSPOT 2014 STATE OF INBOUND REPORT⁰⁸

Before you start posting to your blog, sit down and create a content calendar. Regurgitating your businesses' offerings and sales won't cut it. Come up with posts in advance centered around common customer questions and concerns, industry happenings, helpful tutorials, expert interviews, customer testimonials and anything else your audience may want to read. Creating a content calendar will also help you post regularly. In the beginning, aim for a posting frequency you know you can maintain, and make it a priority to hit that goal. Additionally, you should learn how to maximize your posts for SEO purposes and always include high-quality imagery.

HELPFUL HINT

Don't forget to share your blog posts on your social media profiles to maximize exposure!

Dive into Email Marketing

Small and midsize businesses are now dedicating the largest segment of their marketing budgets to email campaigns, according to email marketing provider iContact.²¹ This fact is not really a surprise, however, as email marketing is a low-cost option that provides powerful and lasting results when done right. Businesses of all sizes can use email marketing to reach targeted audiences and convert them into lovers of their brand.

CONTINUED

INCREASING VISIBILITY THROUGH A DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

Email marketing allows entrepreneurs to get to know their subscribers on a more intimate level, and give them information based on their current relationship. For example, promotional campaigns can be sent to customers who haven't purchased any goods or services in a certain amount of time, while lead-nurturing emails can be sent to potential clients to keep your brand at the forefront of their minds. Whether your contact is in the awareness, research, comparison or purchasing stage, provide them with strategic information based on where they are in their buyer's journey to help take them one step closer to becoming a customer.

Inbound marketing software and Web-based applications can be as simple or complex as you'd like, but for most small businesses the final decision comes down to price. There are many free and inexpensive software solutions out there that still offer budding businesses a full toolkit.

“30% OF EMAIL REVENUE IS THE RESULT OF TARGETING TO SPECIFIC SEGMENTS.”

DMA'S 2013 NATIONAL CLIENT EMAIL REPORT²³

When creating email campaigns, inbound marketing software provider HubSpot suggests all emails should be three things: educational and helpful, timely and customized and consistent in language and message.

But email campaigns should never just be sent out while put your feet up in the lounge, crack open a beer and hope for the best. Services like MailChimp allow you to track advanced analytics daily. Through this service you can see the click-thru rate, open rate, bounce rate and the number of people who have unsubscribed for each email. You can even see which links in the email were clicked in via click maps, so you can further judge what your subscribers are interested in (we're hoping they're still interested in you as this relationship is getting pretty serious!).

CONTINUED

INCREASING VISIBILITY THROUGH A DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

Email campaigns consist greatly of trial and error, so experiment with your subject lines, imagery, formatting, offers and even send times until you find what works for you. But just like your website, your emails should ALWAYS be mobile-friendly, as 80.8 percent of users report reading email on mobile devices.²²

HELPFUL HINT

“Secrets” is the most clicked lead nurturing subject in the world, according to HubSpot. A little mystery ain’t never hurt nobody.²²

Share Your Knowledge Online

Quora

Quora is an online database of knowledge filled with questions that range from practical to thought-provoking, and answers from those with first-hand experience. Entrepreneurs can use Quora to increase brand presence in the space and gather potential leads. Quora questions and answers also rank well in Google search results, because people are naturally inclined to type questions they have directly into the search bar.

Using Quora is simple. For example, if you provide lawn care services, you could answer this question “What are the dangers of failing to adequately winterize your lawn care equipment?” Sign up for Quora and follow relevant industry topics. Monitor these feeds and master the art of knowledge sharing. Dispensing knowledge on topics you’re educated and excited about doesn’t feel like work, making this strategy one of the easiest to stick to.

Google Helpouts

Google Helpouts is similar to Quora in ideology, but integrates video conferencing capabilities. Entrepreneurs can offer services in art and music, computers and electronics, cooking, education and careers, fashion and beauty, fitness and nutrition, health and home and garden categories. Businesses can also charge for their Helpouts, or offer free services. Helpouts has thought of it all, and gives helpers all the resources they need to build their brand. With Helpouts you can share your listings online or in postcards, reach out to the community, update your own website, participate in paid advertising and more.¹⁹

Google's tips for successful sessions include:

- Listings that show availability perform better, so keep your schedule up to date and offer instant Helpouts when you're online.
- Be punctual and show up on time.
- Reply to time requests as quickly as possible.
- Use the Helpouts G+ page to keep in touch with customers and stay top-of-mind.
- Be patient in finding new customers. Don't forget to promote your Helpouts to raise awareness.

BUILDING BRAND LOYALTY

Ask for Feedback

They say you never know unless you ask, so don't shy away from asking your customers what they really think of your brand, your products and your services! In order for your business to see success, you need to be willing to take some constructive feedback. Online reviews are powerful bits of information when they're used to your advantage.

“TODAY’S CUSTOMERS EXPECT A DIFFERENT TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP WITH COMPANIES, AND CUSTOMERS WILL REWARD BRANDS THAT CREATE FRIENDLY WAYS FOR THEM TO ENGAGE—SO THEY CAN GET FASTER ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS, PROVIDE CONSUMER FEEDBACK OR GATHER INFORMATION TO MAKE PURCHASE DECISIONS.”

GET SATISFACTION, POPULAR CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM

Reach out to your customers through your social networks, emails, phone calls and online surveys. Ask your best customers to post reviews online, because potential customers who research the brand will be greatly swayed by these reviews in their decision-making process.

Respond to Feedback (and Learning Along the Way)

Most quick-tip literature available focuses on dealing with negative feedback (which is an art form you should no doubt master) but what about the good?! Happy customers make up a select audience ripe for nurturing into evangelists. Make it standard policy to reply to every piece of feedback—good or bad—you receive. Don't just dole out canned responses; personalize each one. Use their first name, and make it very clear they are dealing with a real, live person who cares. Thirty-eight percent of customers say personalization plays a vital role in a happy customer experience, according to a 2009 Genesys Global Survey.²⁰ And if you do get stumped by a negative post, address the problem within 24 hours, respond with tact by extending a public apology and suggest you speak further through a personal email or phone call.

HELPFUL HINT

Don't ever try to buy reviews! Crowd-sourced review site Yelp issues embarrassing consumer alert warnings when they catch a business attempting to deceive consumers.²⁸

CONCLUSION

Small business owners and entrepreneurs have many things in common, but the most common thread is how busy they are. However, they may not always be busy with the most valuable customers. Making efforts to go digital in a competitive local marketplace not only shows the community you're a quality professional, but also helps them make everyday purchasing decisions.

Entrepreneurs should embrace the digital age, as it has lowered barriers and allows them to compete with larger brands. "New market entrants often scale up rapidly at lower cost than legacy players can, and returns may grow rapidly as more customers join the network," according to a McKinsey&Company report titled Strategic Principles for Competing in the Digital Age.²⁶

Make the most of your micro team and stretch your budget through digital initiatives. Focus on your local angle and become an asset to the people surrounding you. Small businesses have an advantage against larger corporations when their community backs them up online.

SOURCES

- 01 <https://www.bcg.com/documents/file100409.pdf>
- 02 http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/high_tech_telecoms_internet/the_great_transformer
- 03 <http://www.biakelsey.com/Company/Press-Releases/100310-Nearly-All-Consumers-Now-Use-Online-Media-to-Shop-Locally.asp>
- 04 <http://www.techtimes.com/articles/21240/20141201/cyber-monday-history.htm>
- 05 <https://www.americanexpress.com/us/content/small-business/shop-small/about/>
- 06 <http://www.creativebloq.com/css3/build-responsive-site-week-designing-responsively-part-1-4122850>
- 07 <http://www.ducttapemarketing.com/blog/2012/12/13/successful-small-business-brand/>
- 08 <http://offers.hubspot.com/2014-state-of-inbound>
- 09 http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/2015_B2C_Research.pdf
- 10 <http://www.pwc.com/us/en/careers/campus/assets/img/programs/personal-brand-workbook.pdf>
- 11 http://www.gstatic.com/ads/research/en/2011_TheMobileMovement.pdf
- 12 <http://www.helpscout.net/customer-loyalty/>
- 13 <http://www.quicksprout.com/the-complete-guide-to-building-your-personal-brand/>
- 14 <http://online.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703521304576278964279316994>
- 15 <http://searchenginewatch.com/sew/study/2344068/4-statistics-about-pinterest-users-you-need-to-know-study>
- 16 <http://online.wsj.com/articles/new-facebook-rules-will-sting-entrepreneurs-1417133694>
- 17 <http://blog.business.instagram.com/>
- 18 <https://plus.google.com/+GoogleBusiness/posts>
- 19 <https://helpouts.google.com/pwelcome?authuser=0>
- 20 <http://www.helpscout.net/75-customer-service-facts-quotes-statistics/>
- 21 <http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/4488-email-marketing-guide.html>
- 22 <http://www.hubspot.com/marketing-statistics>
- 23 http://www.alchemyworx.com/2013/research/dma_client_email_study_2013.pdf
- 24 <http://www.gybo.com/arizona>
- 25 <http://wherelocalmeansbusiness.ca/canadian-small-businesses-lagging-online-presence/>
- 26 http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/strategy/strategic_principles_for_competing_in_the_digital_age
- 27 <http://www.quicksprout.com/the-complete-guide-to-building-your-personal-brand-chapter-3/>
- 28 <http://officialblog.yelp.com/2013/12/paid-reviews-dont-have-a-place-on-yelp.html>
- 29 <https://plus.google.com/+GoogleBusiness/posts/gJij786tzLv>