

Social Selling Best Practices Guide

One of the greatest opportunities for B2B organizations with the social Web is to find, engage and convert prospective customers well before they're actively ready to buy. The channels, relationships and content available openly across the Web make it easier than ever to build strong, scalable pipelines of near-term and future business. Of course, one of the problems with the social Web is that it's like the biggest, best library in the world—with all of the books on the floor.

This best practices guide focuses on helping you organize, harness and capitalize on the information, buying signals and qualified prospects identifying themselves to you online every single day. With a mix of strategies, tactics and tools, the following pages will give you a head-start towards filling your sales pipeline with more qualified prospects and conversion opportunities.

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How To Pick The Right Social Channels For You

The volume of social media channels available to engage with is exhausting. And they keep coming.

As an individual or a business, there's no way you can keep up with them all. And the good news is, you don't have to.

Take a step back, and answer these two questions:

1. Where are my customers?
2. Where am I most comfortable?

The first question is, by far, the most important. If your customers aren't on Twitter, for example, don't worry about it. But if your customers are on Twitter, you'd better figure it out.

Your social media ROI will increase significantly if your social behavior mirrors those you're trying to influence, engage and sell to.

But it's also important to engage in channels you're comfortable with, at least after an initial getting-to-know-each-other period. If the channel doesn't feel like a good fit,

if it's not something you'll commit to sticking with over the long term, if it's not something you'll be disciplined enough to engage on a regular basis, then think again before you get started, create noise, then abandon the channel (which would be worse than not starting in the first place).

Don't overthink this second question. Answer the customer question first. Let that guide you, let it filter out those you no longer need to think about.

Of the rest, pick one or two that are the least intimidating. Or the most comfortable to you.

You don't need to do everything right away. What's important is to get started, get active, and build momentum and community.

Start there.

The Complete (But Short) Guide to Getting Started On Twitter

Five Common Content Marketing Mistakes

There are countless would-be Twitter users out there. Those who know that their prospects, customers, partners and more are also on Twitter, but who aren't sure how to get started.

Those same would-be Twitter users don't have the time or patience to read through most "How To Twitter" guides. They want something fast, straightforward, but complete. This guide is for them.

Below are seven simple but specific steps to get started with a new Twitter account.

1. Prepare

Before doing anything, make sure an audience you care about is active on Twitter. Do you know how they use it? What information they share about themselves and with each other?

What are your objectives with Twitter? Is it to build your personal brand? To find new business opportunities? To build awareness and thought leadership for your business? A mix of these?

Now think about how your approach, personality and content might combine these two things into the type of

content you create and curate moving forward. Yes, you could get more formal and start with an editorial calendar or similar, but this guide's reader doesn't have time for that. Let's get started.

2. Set Up

Create your Twitter account. Choose a handle that reflects you, what you want to portray to your followers, and what they might be interested in following back. You can include your name, your company name, and/or combine that with something you care about and will tweet a lot about. Twitter will give you some suggestions of alternatives too if the specific handle you want is gone.

Many would-be Twitter users get stuck at this stage. Pick something you're generally OK with and keep moving. You're not going to get 1,000 followers in the next couple days, and you can always go back and change your handle anytime.

Now complete your profile with a photo, short bio and URL. Choose a photo; again, based on the nature of the content you'll likely tweet and what you want your audience to think about you. Formal headshots and casual shots are all fair game. Keep your bio tight, and embed as

many relevant keywords as you can to what you'll cover. Many would-be followers will search Twitter bios for clues that you might be interesting.

Finally, include a URL to your company site, a blog, even your LinkedIn profile page. If a follower wanted to learn more about you or your company, where would you send them first? Use that URL.

3. Getting The Ball Rolling

Don't worry about followers yet. Stay invisible on Twitter, at least for a few days, until you get the hang of the content side. Besides, you'll want a handful of tweets already in your account before you start inviting others, so they not only see you're active but also can gauge the relevance of your content to them.

Now, seriously, start posting stuff. Don't worry about frequency or consistency. Don't worry too much about your voice or a "theme" or anything like that. Just get started. What you naturally tweet in the next few days (or first 20 tweets, whichever comes first) is likely the natural style that best reflects you and will keep you engaged. If a particular style doesn't fit you, and you're forcing it, you won't stick with it.

Keep posting naturally until you feel comfortable with your voice, and the type of content you're posting.

4. Add A Few Followers

Start with people you know well—close friends, family, colleagues. Trusted folks who will not only help promote your early content but also give you feedback if they see something that just doesn't seem like you. Most if not all of these folks will immediately follow you back.

Beyond your close circle, find others in your professional network that are also on Twitter and follow them. LinkedIn has a great tool that makes this fast and easy, particularly among people already in your LinkedIn network.

Eventually, you can use any of a handful of tools to follow others outside of your network who tweet about things of interest to you.

5. Manage Activity and Access

Twitter allows you to create Lists of subsets of your users that have things in common. I, for example, have separate lists for B2B sales and marketing experts, clients, Twitter friends in the Seattle area, etc. I most often watch and interact with these specific lists, even though I follow far more.

Several free tools including HootSuite and Tweetdeck make filtering these lists easy. I stay fairly active on Twitter but do it in about 15 minutes a day

HootSuite and Tweetdeck also make it easy to send new tweets, retweet content from others, respond, schedule new posts in the future, and so on.

6. Find Ongoing Content to Tweet

Look around you, right now, and I bet you find a constant source of content to potentially tweet. This starts with newsletters you read, blogs you read, articles sent to you by colleagues. How about reflections on things you see or that happen to you during the day. Photos and videos. Comments about a game you're watching. Part of your 15 minutes a day can include scanning these sources and finding content that you want to share with others.

7. Start A Daily/Weekly Routine

Eventually, staying active on Twitter will become a habit you don't have to think about. Until then, consider putting something on your calendar 2–3 times a week to ensure you get something up. Try a morning routine that includes a visit to Twitter.com or your HootSuite account.

That's pretty much it. You can make it more complicated. But if you start with that, you won't get started. Good luck, and let me know how it goes!

Nine Tools That Will Help You Sell More Via Social Media

You have to start with a strong understanding of your audience, and an active content plan that speaks to, engages and builds trust and preference with that audience. But once you have that, and it comes time to execute, you need to find and rely on a set of tools that will help you execute faster, more efficiently and more consistently to achieve results.

Here are nine of my favorite tools for helping sales professionals and organizations (big and small) accelerate customer engagement, lead generation and closed business from social media.

HootSuite (Free or Pro)

I prefer HootSuite over TweetDeck, but both work fine (and there are others). HootSuite lets you not only separate and filter groups of social contacts and content you may be following, but allows you to do so via multiple social channels (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and more) all in one place. This really is the hub for engagement, and with a dedicated process you can get in, do your business, and get out—social engagement with minimal time requirement. HootSuite helps make that possible.

TwitHawk

Think of it as Google Alerts for Twitter. Say you want to know anybody says “car broke down” within 50 miles of your city. TwitHawk does that for you. Not only does it push those alerts to you, but is also makes it fast and easy to respond with up to five different offers per search, and throttle those responses out over time so you aren’t spamming the world all at once. Great tool for finding new early buying signals you may have otherwise missed in the social fire hose.

TweetAdder

I don’t recommend using TweetAdder to mass-add followers to your account (which is what the tool was built for). Rather, I like the search and sort functionality TweetAdder offers to find more prospective customers, influencers and more you may want to follow, engage and eventually sell to. For example, you can search for anybody with certain keywords in their bio and more than 1,000 people following them back. Lots of ways to slice and dice the searching, great way to find people headed to a conference you may be attending, and so on.

Dlvr.it

Anytime your RSS feed is updated, Dlvr.it automatically syndicates your new content to the social channels of your choice—Twitter, Facebook, Foursquare, etc. It also separates the tracking links so you can see unique clicks on shortened links by channel. Simple, free tool that saves you time but will accelerate visibility of new content you publish.

Timely.is

If you find a bunch of links worth sharing with your followers all at once (say, by reading through your collection of RSS feeds), the last thing you want to do is post or tweet them all out at once. Timely separates those tweets out over time, sending for example three a day into your Twitter stream with auto-determined timing based on the highest engagement, clicks and retweets from your past Twitter performance. At any given time, I have about a week of great sales, marketing and productivity links queued up and throttled out.

UnTweeps

To keep your Klout scores high and your follower list clean, you should occasionally unfollow anyone who’s gone socially dark. UnTweeps helps you do that by sorting your followers by those who haven’t posted in XX days. Fast and easy. Do it once a month.

TextExpander and ActiveWords

If you find yourself typing the same things often as a response to followers or requests via social media, consider an auto-entry tool that fills in a full set of text for you with just a short keyword or key combination. ActiveWords is my favorite, but works only on Windows. TextExpander has less functionality, but works on the Mac. Both will save you a ton of time.

Email Alerts

Those who stand out in the social world not only publish but respond. One of the best ways to filter your followers is to sign up for email alerts that highlight news, profile updates and more from your primary accounts. You can get daily alerts from sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, Focus, Quora, Gist and more. Set up an email rule to put them all in a special folder that you look at once a day, and take action on what looks good.

Morning Coffee

This is a FireFox plug-in that, when you press the embedded browser button, opens up a series of pre-determined browser tabs. You can designate some sites to come up every day, or only workdays, or only Tuesdays. But if you’re in the habit of checking certain sites once a day, want to be reminded to send birthday notes on Facebook each morning, give K+ to new people, Morning Coffee is a quick and easy way to remember and execute.

OK, that’s my list. What’s missing? What tools are part of your regular social arsenal to help you engage and sell better?

Five Ways To Find More Sales Leads On Twitter

Twitter will never be confused with a direct response channel, but it's still a proven and measurable tool for finding, engaging and closing more prospects. That goes for small business and enterprise sales, as well as a broad spectrum of industries.

Below are five specific tips to start finding more sales via Twitter. You don't need thousands of followers. And if you're just getting started today, every one of these tips still applies.

1. Follow Your Prospects

Create private lists of your prospects in Twitter, and follow them via segmented columns in HootSuite. You can actually add prospects to a Twitter list without actually following them, if you want to stay more "stealth" until you're ready to reach out and engage. But knowing what your prospects are thinking and saying will help you get to know them better, learn quickly what their priorities are, and give you plenty of opportunities to engage at the beginning of their buying cycle.

2. Follow Your Partners

I've found that fellow service providers and complimentary businesses working with the same target audience often share needs, questions, look for help with existing projects and more directly via Twitter. And even if they aren't, they're working with your prospective customers every day. The more these partners see and interact with you on Twitter, the more likely they'll remember you when those customers and prospects have a need you can fill.

3. Curate Customer-Centric Content

One of the quickest way to attract prospects to you via Twitter is to read everything they wish they had time to read, and filter the best content into your Twitter feed. You don't have to originate content to attract a following on the social web—it's good enough (and sometimes better) to curate the best content from a variety of sources so that your prospects begin to trust that you're, effectively, doing their reading for them.

4. Listen for Buying Signals

What are some of the things your prospective customers experience before they need what you're selling? These buying signals are from people who aren't yet ready to buy, but are about ready to start looking for solutions to a problem or pain. If you know your customer targets well enough, you can specifically search for those keywords and phrases from prospects on Twitter and other social channels. HootSuite, Twithawk and a variety of online (and usually free) tools can help you with that.

5. Watch And Use Hashtags

Hashtags, especially those tied to associations or events, are a great way to follow conversations and find prospects who already self-associate with a group, a cause, an interest or a need. It's a great way to engage in those real-time conversations and help your message reach new prospects directly. It's particularly important when using hashtags to add value, and don't directly sell. But if you engage in the conversation naturally, new prospects will be drawn in to learn more.

Keep An Active Social Media Presence In 15 Minutes A Day

Eight minutes in the morning. Seven minutes in the afternoon. That's all you need.

Yes, you can spend significantly more time in your social channels—chatting with friends, meeting new people, and learning new things. But you can also stay active and reap the benefits of online networking and engagement with just 15 minutes a day of your time.

The trick is to use that time more efficiently, and focus your activity in three places: 1) create, 2) curate, and 3) engage.

Create

Add new value to the social Web. This includes posting links to your new blog posts, updates on your product strategy or life, or other recently-discovered or uncovered nuggets of information that your network will find interesting. I recommend setting these up to stagger out or go out automatically. For example, use [dlvr.it](#) to automatically syndicate new blog posts from your RSS feed to a designated set of social channels (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, even Foursquare).

Curate

Add links to content you find elsewhere on the Web. Attribute it back to the originator, either via a retweet or by adding “via @theirname” at the end of your short post. If you choose to find and publish multiple such curated articles at once, use a service such as [timely.is](#) to automatically publish and throttle this content throughout the day, based on the # of daily posts you specify as well as a determination (by [timely's](#) algorithms) of when exactly each day your posts are most likely to get noticed, read, retweeted, discussed, etc.

Engage

Scan through the posts of others in your network, and respond where appropriate. If they write back and you don't get to their comment until the next morning or later that afternoon, it's not a big deal. Better to stay engaged in a few hours than spend chunks of your entire day checking and checking (and not getting real work done).

With practice, I bet you can get this done in 15 minutes a day.

Four Keys To Building (Or Improving) Your Online Presence

Ask most people how to build out or improve your online presence and they'll immediately get tactical. They'll tell you you absolutely must be on Twitter. Or that you have to build your site a certain way. Or write everything with SEO in mind.

And they might be right. But before you can execute, you have to put your entire online presence and strategy in context. The best online strategies (for enterprise organizations as well as small businesses) focus on the following four key areas:

Customers

Everything you do is for them. You need to know who they are, who you're targeting and prioritizing, where they hang out, who they hang out with, and so on. The more you understand this customer or prospective customer audience, the more their behavior will tell you where to be, how to write and how to interact.

Content

In a variety of formats—written, audio, video, and driven by your customer's preferences—content is the engine that will drive performance, engagement and action with your customers and prospects online. You need to translate your customer's needs and pain points into advice, recommendations, best practices and other content specifically focused on helping your customers succeed.

Community

Marketing will never be a one-way street ever again. To quickly earn trust and credibility, you need to comment, connect, engage and otherwise interact with your customer and prospect community. Even if you're not engaging 24/7, at minimum make it very easy to engage with you, or respond to something you've published. Better yet, find other places online where your customers are participating and join in right with them, not as a seller but as a peer.

Call To Action

Never leave your customers or prospects with a dead end. Put yourself in their shoes—what would they need next? What additional article would be valuable as a follow-up to what they just read? What additional information will they likely want to request after educating themselves? Include and measure calls to action throughout your online presence.

By having a plan that includes each of the above four components, you can get tactical and execute with confidence that you're engaging the right people in the right places with the right content, with an end game in mind.

Six Ways To Drive More Sales From LinkedIn

I get asked about this a lot. Here are six quick tips (mostly relevant to B2B sellers) for building relationships and finding prospects on LinkedIn.

1. Read The Daily Digest Every Day

First of all, make sure you get it delivered every day (not everyone has this turned on, and it's prone to hit your spam filter if you're not careful). Then take the time to read it. I guarantee you'll find someone you care about, who you haven't talked to in awhile, has an update. Great excuse to reach back out. You'll also find prospects who just released something, or just changed something in their profile. Great excuse to send a note of congratulations, offer a new contextual suggestion, etc. Be the guy or gal who reaches out first, and takes notice of the little things. People appreciate that.

2. Join And Participate In Groups

Groups on LinkedIn aren't for selling. But there's a group for everything up there. It's a long tail of interests to mine for ideas, customer pain points, and prospects who are early in the buying cycle. Instead of selling, use this opportunity to create value. Answer questions. Post interesting and relevant articles. Start to generate visibility and awareness for yourself and your organization in the group as a trusted resource of information.

3. Keep Your Profile Up To Date

Describe your expertise. Use benefit and outcome-oriented keywords and statements to describe your company and what you do. Feature recommendations (more on that later). Add modules to auto-integrate content from your blog, Slideshare account, Twitter feed and more. Make your profile content-rich and relevant. The more relevant,

the more people will be attracted to you (and find you in searches). And the more updates (without going overboard), the more often you'll show up in the Daily Digest emails for others.

4. Ask And Answer Questions

The best way to maximize eyeballs and impact from LinkedIn Answers is to ask the questions instead of just answering. What kind of questions should you field? Look at your consultative selling questions for inspiration. What questions relate to your prospect's current priorities? Or likely problems and pain points? What questions can you ask that attract prospective customers and get them already talking about what they're doing and what they need?

5. Give Recommendations

What goes around comes around. Make a habit of giving people who deserve it a recommendation on LinkedIn and you're likely to get a few back too. This is a great way to "do good" for those in your network without asking for or expecting anything in return. But believe me, it will be appreciated and remembered.

6. Ask For Specific Referrals And Introductions

Most companies and salespeople ask their contacts generally for referrals. But your response rate will go up significantly if you ask for specific referrals. Browse through the network of those you want to get help from, and if your relationship is strong enough, ask for introductions to the 1-3 people you specifically want to meet. The more specific you are, the easier it is for someone to comply.

What would you add (or subtract) from this list?

How Top Salespeople Are Using Social Media

Most sales organizations treat social media as a threat, a distraction from selling time, and a set of sites that should be blocked inside the corporate firewall.

But many of today's most successful salespeople are using social media strategically to build deeper relationships with prospects and referral partners, find new prospects earlier in their buying process, and accelerating their own path towards credibility and trust with prospects they don't even yet know.

Here are five specific ways top salespeople are using social media today to find and close more business.

1. Getting New Introductions From Their Existing Network

It's so easy, on sites from LinkedIn to Facebook and more, to see who your existing "friends" and connections already know. On LinkedIn, for example, you can quickly search for contacts you want to meet based on which of them are already connected to people in your existing network.

This is one of the best ways to get referrals and introductions, not by asking your network to "keep you in mind" but, instead, periodically asking for specific introductions. By getting specific, your conversion rate goes up and you're talking to the people you specifically want to meet and sell to.

2. Getting New Introductions From Others In Your Organization

Your existing organization—the sales team, yes, but I'm thinking the rest of the company too—is a gold mine of potential introductions. Especially founders, long-time employees and others who have spent a long time in your industry. They know people, people know them, and they're more likely to help you make connections and new introductions.

There are some interesting new tools that facilitate this by creating what is essentially an internal version of LinkedIn, but you can manage that yourself by simply using filters on your primary LinkedIn account to search your colleague's networks for new prospects.

3. Watch For Buying Signals Across The Social Web

One of the greatest opportunities for salespeople via social media is to see into the buying cycle far earlier than we've typically had access to. Before social media, we could

deepen our understanding of the buyer and use outbound marketing to connect with a particular need, try and find resonance with a buying signal, etc. But that, at best, was a fishing expedition most of the time.

Now, if you know the buying signals and pain/problem keywords your prospects typically exhibit before they're ready to buy, you can watch for those discussions and keywords across the social Web. Do a couple keyword searches on Twitter, for example, and you'll be surprised how many people, in real-time, are talking about their existing challenges, their frustrations with competitive products and more.

4. Build Deeper, Early Relationships With New Prospects

Here's exactly how you do it (at least with Twitter, but other social channels can likely be done in a similar fashion). Build a list of the prospects in your territory or market. Companies and the individuals who work there. With the help of an admin or an outsourcing service like eLance, go and collect the Twitter handles of each company and as many of the individuals as you can find.

Using your own Twitter account, follow those companies and individuals. Then, using a tool such as HootSuite, set up a separate column where you can specifically watch activity from those prospects. This makes it easier and faster to engage with them on a regular basis. Answer their questions. Share a resource. Retweet their articles. In other words, use their attention to this social channel to build value by interacting where they are already spending their time and looking for information.

5. Directly Share Information, Become An Expert, And Generate A Following

You are an expert. You understand your market, your customer's problems, and the information they need to be more successful. You read the trade publications and regularly (possibly daily) find articles that your prospects and customers should read.

Through your own social channels, you can become a go-to resource for current and prospective customers. If you're filtering information that's specifically interesting to them, they'll gravitate towards you. And when they follow you and their peers see that as well, you'll increase access and introductions to even more new prospects.

More Information About Us



About Matt Heinz

Matt Heinz is the Founder and President of Heinz Marketing Inc. Matt brings more than 12 years of marketing, business development and sales experience from a variety of organizations, vertical industries and company sizes. His career has focused on delivering measurable results for his employers and clients in the way of greater sales, revenue growth, product success and customer loyalty.

About Heinz Marketing

Heinz Marketing is a Seattle marketing agency focused on sales acceleration. Heinz Marketing helps clients achieve sustained sales success by growing revenue from existing customers and cost effectively identifying and winning new customers.

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