More and more small businesses are finding that social media is a great tool to be included in their marketing program. Yesterday, one of my local CEO contacts commented that “who knows, at some point we may even be finding ways to use that crazy kid program called Instagram”.

Wow! That got me thinking about maybe there already is a use for it? So, I looked for Mike Wolpert, the founder of Social JumpStart and asked that question. Do you see any use for Instagram for small businesses? Here is what I learned.

Mike immediately shared that the new feature on Instagram, is called Direct Messaging. It allows you to send private images and videos to other Instagram users. This is a great tool for deepening relationships with customers through the level of customer service it allows. It allows your small business the chance to provide sneak peeks to loyal followers, send coupons and connect with a new audience.

Here are 5 ways that he shared for a small business to use Instagram Direct as a new part of their social media marketing plan:

1. **Sales/Coupons**
   Reward your top followers with an exclusive coupon. People must follow you to receive this direct message. This could be people who comment/like/repost your content frequently. Send a photo to select followers with a coupon code and a message that says, “Hey [insert name], this is just for you for being such a loyal follower!”

2. **Sneak Peeks**
   Send a group of 15 followers a sneak peek into something new going on with your business. This is great for new products or services. Ask followers to repost the content with a special hashtag to increase the chances of it going viral.

3. **Collect data**
   Allow your customers to initiate the dialog as well. Perhaps a user wants to alert you about a product error. Now, users can send a photo of the problem and direct message it to your business via Instagram. This will allow you to discuss the issue with the user privately to solve the problem. It’s important to note that you must be following the user in order to initiate the dialog.

4. **Host a contest**
   Post a public photo with instructions that the first X amount of people to comment on that photo will receive a direct message from your business with details on how to enter a secret contest. Then ask each of the contestants to submit a photo to be entered to win
a large prize. The person with the best photo is then awarded the prize. You can then repost these photos to various social channels for added content. Your customer will be pleased to be in the spotlight and will share the news with even more friends!

5. **Post an item that you’re trying to sell**
Send a direct message to your fans with a photo of the product, and a link where to buy. If you’re having a sale, be sure to mention that!

The bottom line here is that Mike reminded me to encourage all small businesses to explore different options to find out what works best for your small business. If you are not using social media in your marketing tool box, you may be missing some great opportunities.

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Dean L. Swanson
Southeast Minnesota SCORE
c/o Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce
220 South Broadway, Suite 100
Rochester, MN 55904
[www.seminnesota.score.org](http://www.seminnesota.score.org/)

*Dean is a volunteer SCORE Mentor and District Director of SCORE Minnesota*