Social Media Presence

In recent columns I have focused on some suggestions for the process of taking your good idea (your new business) to the market place. This can be daunting, so I suggested that you break it down into some key marketing tools to help you successfully brand and promote your business. I gave a list of some of those “must have” suggestions for your marketing tool kit: A brand identity, An elevator pitch, and Promotional tools. In this column I will close these suggestions with the suggestions of a social network, and an experienced mentor.

Does your small business have a social media presence? Although it may seem intimidating, social media can provide many benefits, including direct customer interaction, word-of-mouth marketing and customer service.

➢ **Connecting With Customers.** Through interactive online platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.) social media provides the opportunity to engage with both customers and prospects. It’s a smart way to reach and interact with people outside your traditional network.

➢ **The New Word Of Mouth.** Whether it’s Facebook, Twitter or Pinterest, the concept of sharing is one of the few things that every social platform has in common. Depending on the social media outlet, you can share everything from photos and videos to helpful articles with your audience, who can then share them with theirs.

Example: Emma posts a photo on Facebook of a perfectly manicured lawn she worked on. One of her fans sees the photo and shares it with a friend that they know is looking for a new landscaper. This is a new potential contact for Emma.

➢ **Customer Service.** Social media affords customers the ability to connect directly with businesses like never before. Whether it’s a negative or positive comment, it is an opportunity to build a relationship with current and potential customers.

Example: Emma’s client has ordered tulips for her front yard, but when the client arrives home there are daisies instead. Emma’s client voices her displeasure on Twitter and mentions Emma’s business. Emma sees the comment and immediately responds to the customer to rectify the situation.
The client ends up being happy not only with the outcome, but with how quickly Emma responded. The client in turn shares her positive experience with all of her followers.

This is a quick snapshot of the potential benefits of using social media. Before you jump in, be sure to do your research. Make sure you understand each platform and what it is used for. Also, don’t underestimate the time it will take to do a good job of using this tool. There is nothing wrong with starting with just one platform and growing from there.

Growing a business can be a challenge for even the most savvy business owner. No matter how prepared you are, there are always some obstacles your previous experience hasn’t taught you to expect. That’s where having a trusted advisor to bounce ideas off of can be so helpful.

Whether it’s through SCORE or your own network, seek out veteran business owners who you can talk to about your day-to-day activities and long-term goals. This person may bring a fresh perspective based on their own experience and help reduce your risk of putting resources (time and money) toward things that may not make sense for your business.

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