

5 Ways Using Social Media Can Build Brand Awareness

It's almost taken for granted that today's businesses can improve their brand awareness through participation in social media. However, with the amount of social media tools, strategies, and 'consultants' multiplying exponentially, it has become increasingly easy for corporate social media campaigns to get derailed, or fail to reach their true potential.

This article gives you five simple ways to use social media to build your brand awareness. Together, these strategies constitute a social media approach that will keep you on track, and help you achieve strong results.

Start With a Plan

It's important that each social media campaign be based on a plan. Just like a business plan before launch, or a marketing plan before outreach, clarifying your social media intent helps define your goals, strategies, time input and personal limits. A plan will keep your campaign on track, once you've started. If it's too late for pre-planning, you can always plan retroactively.

Act Normal

Social media, just like any other marketing initiative, is not mystery or magic. There are no secret rules, code words, or special tactics you can use to manufacture better-than-believable results. Any attempt to adopt a certain behavior to do so, will be immediately seen as fake or disingenuous. You'll find that your best return on investment, and the most enjoyment, comes from engaging in social media naturally, just as you and your company would in real life.

Without further ado, here are the 5 ways to use social media to build your brand awareness.

1. Bring Your Brand to Your Customers

The best social media strategies don't rely on your customers finding you, but rather, on you bringing your brand to the places they're already hanging out. While social media can increase search engine rankings for your terms, and allow people to access your information without your effort, the biggest gains come when you seek out the type of conversations you want to have.

Millions of people are gathered on Twitter, Facebook, Linked In, and YouTube, all of which are free tools. If your customers, prospects, and influencers are there, you should be too. Just make sure you're participating, and not broadcasting. Listening should be your most important tool.

After you consistently engage your customers, in the places where they are, you'll integrate your brand into the conversations they're having. In the natural course of those

conversations, your brand will be brought back up, gaining exposure and awareness with previously untapped-groups. This doesn't happen instantaneously, but indeed can with sufficient legwork.

2. Generate Quality Content

Nothing draws attention, and gets passed through networks, more than quality content. Whether you're writing posts on your own blog, writing guest posts on influential blogs within your industry, or writing articles and press releases to be syndicated across the web, the people that read them will remember your name.

Quality content informs and educates your readers, helping you build trust with them, and building your own reputation as a knowledgeable and expert source within the field. Quality content is also passed on from the original source, through a reader's network, to other people they think can benefit from your expertise. The reach of a well-written article, for the time invested, can be nearly limitless.

A blogging platform or online content library can keep your brand fresh. Potential customers will have a reason to continue coming back to your site, and if one article misses the mark with a specific prospect group, the next one might do the trick. Once you establish a consistent publishing routine, your communities will start to gather automatically, and start to add content about your brand on top of what you produce.

3. Be Active on Twitter

The popular social networking site, Twitter, is currently regarded as the premiere online location to build brand awareness. No matter what product you sell, or service you offer, there are probably people on twitter talking about it right now. This presents an opportunity for you to listen, ask questions, offer solutions to their problems, and insert your company into the conversation.

The unpredictable and personal nature of twitter, though it can be seen as confusing at first, offers unique opportunities to build brand awareness. People on twitter are always eager to help, and you never know if the person you just followed will be the one to broadcast your brand identity to their 2,000 contacts. Each reply or direct message you send -- actions you take to communicate solely with one other user -- builds a stronger personal connection, more loyalty, and perhaps a key piece of brand awareness advancement.

Just be sure, before you run off to join the conversation, that you first learn the proper twitter protocols. People who play by the rules are treated like extended family, while those there to broadcast, and not engage, are quickly called out as spammers and outcasts.

4. Connect Customers, Contacts

Connecting your customers to each other, whether on your site (with something like a blog comments section), or outside your site (on Facebook, for example), allows them to have more-vibrant conversations about your product. They may suggest improvements, highlight a new need in your market, or most importantly, speak loudly enough to be heard in other circles, thus spreading your brand without direct input.

Connecting your network contacts to one another -- through a tool like Linked In, for example -- allows you to build trust within your communities. When contacts profit from a connection you made between them, the favor will often get returned. And when two people you setup finally meet to talk, you can bet that they'll spend at least part of the time talking about you.

Forming connections, and fostering them among your communities, fits the *help thy neighbor* spirit of social media. By plugging your network pieces together, and plugging into the exponential growth principle of social media, you allow other people to build your brand awareness for you.

5. Make Yourself Available

If there's one knock on social media, it is that it takes time. Unfortunately, that is truth, and there really is no way around it. To be successful, social media campaigns require engagement and availability, which requires time. You can reduce that time through planning, and directed activity, but you're not well served to try and eliminate it all together.

The activity within social media is often varied and circular. Those who only dip their toes into certain locations and strategies often miss out on opportunities elsewhere. You don't know which point of interaction could lead to valuable brand building opportunities, and all are only made possible by engagement and sincere availability. People respond to genuine effort, and building brand awareness is infinitely easier when targeting a willing audience.

Usually, the higher up a person is in your company, the better the better they'll be acquainted with your brand, and the better equipped they will be to spread brand awareness. However, if your executives have trouble finding time for social media, it's possible to hire out for social media help. Just ensure the person you hire is qualified to run a campaign -- it's not a job for a college intern -- and ensure they're given access to the parts of the company they need.

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Social media can be time-consuming, but provided you establish a focused campaign and learn the proper protocols, you can successfully reach your customers, influencers, and prospects directly, simultaneously forming the self-sustaining communities that build your brand awareness for you. The rewards of implementing these strategies, as you will learn, are many.