

Integrate Social Media Into Your Sales Process

6 Steps to Fill Up Your Sales Funnel

The Sales Process Evolution

For many years it has been well accepted that people buy products from people they know, like and trust. What has changed in recent years is how the purchaser decides which product to purchase, or company to buy from.

The role of the salesman has changed and will continue to do so. Previously the sales process relied on getting to know the prospect in person through networking, word-of-mouth referrals or wining and dining prospects to get to know them and build trust. More recently, the salesman has had more access to systems that have automated the process of selling. Such customer relationship management systems track the sale through the various steps that enable the relationship with the prospect to prosper. The company website consisted mainly of static product and service information, an “About Us” page and contact form.

This is no longer the case. Enter Web 2.0, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, blogs and interactive websites. Nowadays whether you are selling to another business or to consumers, your prospects are checking you out online, either before they contact you or after you have contacted them. What will they find out about your company when they Google your name, product or service? What information is there online about your product and service? Has anyone reviewed your service? Do you know what is being said about you? It is obviously critical that you take steps to monitor your online reputation and engage with your clients and prospects online, so that you project the image you would wish when you are being searched online.



One thing that is certain is no one is predicting a decrease in the current levels of money spent on social media advertising. LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter have been credited with being the driving forces of this advertising spend. Social media advertising can be a great asset in the business world for lead generation, brand recognition and real time market research, but it is important that your campaigns are run in an effective manner. Many companies feel obliged to have a presence on all platforms but they do not take the time to create and maintain a credible presence on them all, so it is important that you create a credible strategy and follow through with it.

Creating the Company Social Voice

Before interacting with the public using social media, your company needs to establish its social voice. This is the language that your company will use when communicating with your audience. Clearly everyone in the company should be projecting the same company image and promoting the same sales messages to your audience. Your social voice will already exist in your sales materials and marketing literature, news releases, website content and email marketing campaigns, but you need to ensure that everyone involved in the process



projects the same professionalism and authority that reflect your company's goals and objectives.

Once the social voice is established you should then create a content marketing strategy that will determine exactly what information will be communicated to your audience, the frequency and how you will respond to feedback received. Content is critical to your social strategy since people will connect and follow those that provide useful and valuable content on a regular basis. Regardless of the channels used to interact with your audience you need to have the content defined and scheduled, that follows your overall objectives, brand and personality.

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Once you have established your company's sales goals for social media, you need to decide which platforms your ideal target audience will be using mostly. Then target them there.

- Are you trying to bring attention to a new product or service?
- Are you trying to attract new customers or establish loyalty with existing ones?
- Are you trying to enhance your brand recognition?

Different companies are using social media for all of these things, so you need to make sure everyone in your sales team understands your company's goals and ambitions and that they tie into your social strategy. This way, everyone is working to the same ends.

Step 1 – Decide Which Social Media Platforms to Target



The sales goals and target audience you defined earlier will help identify which social technologies to use. For example:

- Goal = communicate with customers online
 - Platform = consider using a tool that pushes messages instantly like Facebook or Twitter
- Goal = share articles with customers online
 - Platform = consider creating a company blog

Remember that different demographic groups will be present on different platforms, so this may influence your decision as to which platform to target.

You must remember to build into your strategy the appropriate features and functionalities required to help you achieve your goals. You need to be able to track the effectiveness of the steps you are taking, and monitor and track the social mentions that you receive as a result of your efforts. In any event, the platforms you choose will be the ones that have the highest impact and usage by your target audience in your region. Once you have researched where your audience is browsing, engagement is built through

the sharing of knowledge. This can be in the form of a video, a web page or an online presentation that can be on any social media platform such as YouTube, Flickr, Scribd, SlideShare, LinkedIn, Facebook etc.

Step 2 – Start a Blog and Join in the Conversation



A corporate blog provides a platform for your company’s sales team and leaders to discuss topics of interest with your prospects and customers. A corporate blog can have more than one contributor and by engaging a team approach to this activity, you can ensure a steady stream of good content. At the outset, you should establish the exact target audience that you are writing for. It can help to think in terms of a specific persona or multiple personas that are segments of your marketplace. This can

help to hone down the message and make the content more valuable to your audience. Think of their interests, goals and problems that they would like solved. Then write to address these issues.

A great tool to find the questions that people are asking in your market is Wordtracker Free Keywords at www.freekeywords.wordtracker.com/keyword-questions. Here you simply type in a keyword or short phrase and the tool will identify the questions most frequently asked about that topic. Then orient your blog around those frequently asked questions.

There is no point in creating the best and most informative posts unless you have a decent number of people viewing it, so promoting your content is essential. If you share your content strategically, it will keep your faithful readers coming back for more and sharing it with their contacts, thus growing your audience and expanding your sphere of influence. So keep these points in mind:

- **Make sure the content is worth sharing** – people will only pass on interesting information that is of value to their friends, so make them proud to be associated with your comments.
- **Think about your message** – do not sell your products. No one will pass on a sales pitch. Avoid clichés and make it relevant.
- **Encourage comments** – posts can be interesting, but it is often the comments made by others that are shared. This all confirms that the original post had something to say and that it is involving the audience who feel like sharing it with their own network.
- **Keep on growing your network** – you need to keep adding more people to your network, but try to keep it to those that are interested in what you are saying. The more engaged your audience is the more they will spread your message, which is the objective of the exercise.
- **Thank those that share your content** – this encourages people to share more often and can provide another opportunity for followers to see the original message in case they missed it.
- **Use other social media sites to post extracts from your blog** – post a summary of your original blog on one of the other social networking sites with quality links back to the original post. Then share the link on bookmarking sites such as Digg, StumbleUpon or Delicious. This can be

repeated on other social sites where the summary provided is different each time, especially look for sites or groups that are specific to your target audience.

- **Promote your blog everywhere** – make it really visible on your website, not hidden away. Include your blog link in your email signature file, on invoices and other printed company documents. When you promote it on Twitter, use relevant hashtags that your target audience will be following such as #marketing. Post links on LinkedIn, submit it to bookmark sites, etc.

Step 3 – Create Your Social Media Channels



LinkedIn is one of the main business oriented social media sites with over 100 million users globally with many businesses creating and updating business profiles, yet not getting much in the way of new business through the site. As with all social media sites you need to be very active on the site to gain the visibility necessary for those leads to come in.

- Firstly make sure that the company profile is correct and up-to-date. You can now include details of your company's services and products including images of products and bulleted feature lists. Subsequently, your sales staff members can create individual profiles, or link their existing profiles to this company profile which is where the corporate messages should be delivered from. Make sure they have their names in their profile links so when your prospects search for them they will be visible.
- The next steps are for the team to become active participants, sign up to relevant groups, answer questions, give and receive recommendations, and keep using the update status function, this should all generate some buzz about your company. Use the "viewers of this profile also viewed" feature to see unlinked connections. Join groups where these people are active and get your name known there. Just remember that LinkedIn is a network and not a sales platform, so provide valuable information and become known as an expert in your field - do not sell; instead build relationships.
- Keep an active watch on the network updates on your home page. They can provide valuable information. See who is asking questions and who is answering them. This might provide information about specific situations in certain organizations or indicate a market trend. If you see that a good prospect is connecting to a good contact you can ask for an introduction. Also remember you can send a message to others in the same group as yourself even if they are not direct connections, and this can be useful for introductions.
- Set alerts by saving your searches and having them run automatically for you, in the free account there are three searches that can be saved, which can be run manually or automatically, weekly or monthly as you choose. After you have defined your ideal customer and

experimented with the search function to find them, have the same search run on a regular basis to turn up new opportunities.

- On the company page, there is an optional “offer slot” that can be used to promote special offers to followers of your company. Your products and services tab can be set up to deliver tailored content to specific audience segments. When a visiting members profile indicates that they belong to a particular segment that you have defined, a customized version of your content will be served up. You can define your audience based on 4 criteria function, industry, seniority and geography, so designate different product or services pages that will resonate with different audiences who may be interested in your company.

Also consider using LinkedIn paid advertising which allows you to be very selective about exactly who your ads are shown to and thus enables you to find the perfect audience for your business with highly targeted text advertising. This works in a similar manner to Google Paid Ads but can be more targeted since the audience is signed into LinkedIn.



SlideShare is the world's largest community for sharing presentations of any type. Content uploaded here spreads virally through blogs and social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. SlideShare also supports documents, PDFs, videos and webinars. Individuals and organizations upload documents to SlideShare to share ideas, conduct research, connect with others, and generate leads for their businesses. Spreading your sales message across multiple web platforms is part of an effective Web 2.0 marketing strategy. With this in mind, you can use SlideShare to help:

- Upload your company presentation to share with new and existing customers
- Publish tutorials about your products to enhance your support services
- Publish newsletters with top tips for your industry
- Share slides from business presentations as a means of reference and promotion
- Develop conversations with other businesses that relate to your industry
- Add insightful comments to enhance other presentations in your niche

To bring an extra dimension to your presentations, SlideShare tools allow you to synchronize audio with your slides. Remember to share your activities on SlideShare with your Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn audiences. Once a presentation is viewed, the “YouTube-esque” user interface provides all the usual methods of sharing content across the web that millions of users are now accustomed to.

Include calls to action on all of your presentation material. SlideShare supports clickable URLs so place the call to action URL at the end of your presentation. You can also capture leads when you execute a LeadShare campaign which is available in the paid version. This increases your presentations exposure

and also collects contact information from those that are interested in finding out more about your presentation. This allows the measurement of your campaign as well as targeting your message to a specific audience and geography. The LeadShare feature is an ideal solution for businesses who want to reach potential customers through their presentations.



YouTube is the second most used search engine in the world and the top video sharing site, so it is critical that any video material you have is uploaded here and used to drive potential clients back to your main website. When it comes to using YouTube to promote your company, here are some ideas on videos you can create and upload to YouTube and also add to your company YouTube channel:

- Existing company web commercials
- Video version of your company blog posts
- Videos on your product / service demos
- Video answering common questions about products or services
- Videos of company events
- Videos of customer testimonials

Every time you post a video, be sure to spread the word by blogging about it, tweeting it, sharing it on your Facebook page and letting your contacts on LinkedIn know all about it as well.



Facebook in a business sense is frequently being used as a marketing channel due to its advertising and segmenting capabilities. Facebook is also a useful tool for promoting your brand and breathing a little life into the business.

- The first place to start is creating a company Fan Page. You can create a unique interactive experience for your users and add various applications to build long term relationships. Use the page to highlight significant events and milestones on the company calendar – supported by high quality corporate images to add a little variety and credibility.
- It's no longer just about the wall. Facebook's meteoric rise in popularity is matched only by the host of plugins and apps flooding the market on a weekly basis. From shopping tabs to hosted support pages, there is a veritable treasure trove of useful material you can use to heighten the customer experience. All of this of course is designed to drive traffic to your main web property.

- Whether you choose to reward great ideas with discounts, or simply want to conduct a little market research, Facebook represents an invaluable platform from which to reach out. Keep your readership engaged by adopting a varied approach, and don't be afraid to experiment. Judge how well you're doing by the level of interaction occurring on the page itself.
- If you're considering paid search advertising via the Internet, then you really should consider Facebook advertising. Whether you're promoting anything from mobile phone deals, the latest Alfa Romeo or a product specific to your locality, Facebook ads let you reach millions of users day and night. Think of Facebook ads as a more refined version of paid search (PPC), or perhaps the logical evolution of PPC. Facebook ads allow you to target a far more precise target audience via an intelligent use of information drawn from user profiles.

However you choose to use Facebook, there is no doubting its value as a unique and dynamic marketing platform – don't be afraid to experiment and, most importantly, listen to feedback.



You need to think about what your customers want to get real measurable value out of Twitter for B2B businesses. Whatever the focus of your Twitter channel, it needs to be meaningful for your target audience if you want to drive new business.

- Target your audience. Think about who the audience is, and where they are on Twitter. Find out who is influential in your field and follow them. Also take a look at who is following them. Then look at the general search tools, use the “browse interests” and “who to follow” tools and read the Twitter blog to keep up with the latest news and tools available. Also check out “The Twitter Guide Book” from Mashable to help you get the best out of Twitter.
- Monitor who you follow and if they follow you back. Track your links with URL shorteners like bit.ly to see what content you are sharing is most popular, and work on improving the results.
- Make sure you are posting quality content. This way, when you follow someone and they check you out, they see interesting information, not just a sales message. You need to establish exactly what your content contains. Is it news, opinion, links to whitepapers, links to webinars or a mixture? You need to be broadcasting as well as conversing.
- Interact with your followers. The best channels build relationships with their followers, so ask and answer questions, monitor what is being said and interact.
- What will be the most useful content for your followers and show your expertise in the best light? Remember you can use your content more than once. You can tweet the same link more than once so long as there is a gap in between, but do not overuse the same content.
- Nurture the relationship you have built. You may have collected some email addresses or telephone numbers from the downloads provided, but do not suddenly switch to sales mode.

Continue providing information to develop the relationship and make sure that any communication sent relates directly to the social media content provided.

- Use a tool such as Socialoomph to schedule your tweets and to share information with different social channels.

By engaging with a target audience, they will follow you back and access your valuable information and content via your tweets. You will have answered their questions and as a result they now have an ongoing relationship with your brand. They are better informed and more knowledgeable about you, in regular contact with you, and will be much more receptive to receiving your sales messages.

Step 4 – Increase the Use of Press Releases

Online marketing is changing the way we think and like it or not, search engine optimization (SEO) is playing a bigger role than ever. The traditional press release now has to work that little bit harder to keep up. Ultimately, the purpose of a press release is to provide information that is of interest to its readers. The following tips will look at the essential things to consider when writing a press release, in order to appeal to the search engines as well as your target audience.

- **Keywords Are Key!** - The importance of keywords must not be underestimated. In simplest terms, a keyword (or key phrase) is a specific word or term used commonly in search engines to find a particular subject, service or product. As such, before you even start writing your press release, you should have a good idea of the keywords or terms you're going to be using.
- **Spread the Word** - There are numerous conflicting arguments when it comes to “keyword spread” or how many times a particular search word or term appears within the body of text on the page. Ask a range of so-called experts and you're likely to end up with a range of answers. The general rule of thumb is that each chosen keyword or term should not exceed around 2 – 3% of the overall word count – thus avoiding saturation and rejection by search bots.
- **Take a Look at Your Layout** - As important as knowing which keywords to use is understanding where to place them. Construct your press release so that it is specific and targeted to the keywords that you are targeting and make the most of your chosen words.
- **References** – Don't forget to reference your quotes and statistics. This lends the work an air of credibility.
- **Consider Your Content** - Try to choose a compelling subject with broad appeal. Put yourself in the reader's shoes – would you take time out to read the release? Of course, this is where an attention-grabbing title comes in, but just as important is the content. Remember, the principal aim of any press release is to draw attention to the company. Company quotes can be as self aggrandising as you want them to be. It's your PR after all! Don't be afraid to sell yourselves.
- **Designed for people, not just search engines** - Never ever sacrifice content for the sake of SEO. This is an all-too common mistake and can be at the detriment of a company's overall image.

Think of it this way – the release will be worth nothing if, having found its way onto the screen, it doesn't hold the reader's attention long enough to drive the message home.

- **Post your PR everywhere** – Make sure it is on your website first. Then publish posts about it on your blog and other social media outlets, all linking back to your website.
- **Syndicate the content** – After sharing the news, pass the message on and encourage your online community to share your PR with their networks. This is where it pays to have interesting topics that people want to read about.

Step 5 – Promote Your Social Media Channels

The world of social media marketing has opened up a new medium for marketers, and one of the strongest pairings is email marketing alongside social media. According to MarketingSherpa, marketers who integrate social media share buttons into their email newsletters saw a 25% boost in reader interaction and a surge in inbound traffic from social media sites.

Integrating social media and email can help you build your brand, acquire new customers, retain existing customers and promote your product and service offerings to a wider audience. By enabling recipients to tag newsletters or promotional emails and share them on the social channels the message is spread virally with minimum investment on your part.

- There are many syndication tools that can increase the chances of your messages being shared
- Tweets and posts about your email message across your social networks encourages fans to repost on their social channels, thus reaching a much wider audience
- Social network discussion threads can provide ideas for future offers or product development
- You can extend your mailing list virally
- Try seeding new ideas within the social media sites and monitoring the community's reaction. This feedback can help with product development and to spread the word

RSS feeds allow you to stream content both to your website as well as from it. It is a convenient and easy way to share and publish content that is updated regularly. Through RSS your audience can subscribe to receive all of your updates in one place and can browse your latest blog headlines in order to decide which ones they want to read. Thus by incorporating a RSS feed you will enable a convenient and manageable channel for your readers to keep up to date with your latest news. You should publish your RSS feed to RSS directories which will provide an added boost to your readership, and also generate a lot of new back links to your website, which will help to improve your site rankings.

Do not forget to incorporate your social channels on all correspondence including invoices, receipts, email signature files, business cards, etc. Ask your customers to review your products and services on a social site by adding a simple URL to an invoice with the invitation to submit their feedback. This type of customer feedback is now having more of an impact on search rankings. You could also consider adding

a customer feedback module to your website and syndicating the reviews to the search engines, and review sites.

Step 6 – Measure Your Success and Adjust Your Strategy

In order to adequately measure your success with social media, you need to ensure that you have tracking mechanisms that will determine which campaigns are generating the best return on your investment. You need to establish your base line, which is the current performance, and then set objectives for improvements in the key metrics you decide are important to your business. Set the goals in line with the objectives of your social media campaign since what gets measured gets done.

These are some of the metrics you might consider using, you should also show the trends on some of these metrics:

- Ratio of comments to blog posts
- Ratio of tweets to re-tweets
- Growth of followers on various platforms
- Growth of RSS feed subscribers
- Number of free content downloads
- Number of positive comments
- Number of negative comments
- Number of contact form submissions
- Traffic back to main web site from each channel
- Incoming links to your main web site
- Ratio of social media connections who convert to sales
- Amount of average sale on social media channels

There may be social sites specific to your industry, so monitor your progress there as well and take action to improve performance on the platforms that you are engaged with. Once you see a positive pattern in the use of the tool, push hard to improve it and leverage the results as much as you can. Keep an eye on your competition and push to take advantage of new methods before others do.

Measurement Tools and Resources

Even with Google analytics on your main site, you do not have all of the tools necessary to get started tracking analytics relative to social media. Some additional tool suggestions are:

- **Klout:** The Klout score is the measurement of your overall online influence. Look up your Klout score to find your influence level, measure your true reach and user style <http://bit.ly/k1XHIR>
- **Bit.ly:** Offers URL redirection service with real-time link tracking. This will track information like number of clicks, traffic sources, and even at what time clicks occur <http://bit.ly>

- **Social Mention:** A great social media search engine, this tool will track mentions of your company, brand or any specific phrase and also provides feedback on overall sentiment of those mentions <http://bit.ly/jkaboC>
- **Addictomatic:** This is a news aggregator but can also be used to monitor social media. You just need to put in the name of a topic which could be a business name, keyword or person and you'll receive the latest feeds about that certain topic <http://bit.ly/jXFPbz>
- **HowSociable:** This provides a simple way for you to begin measuring your brand's visibility on the social web <http://bit.ly/lqiTQc>

Conclusion

As we have seen, there are many social media tools available to assist with engaging prospects and nurturing until they become clients. The important factor is that your sales team create those all important conversations with their audience. They need to be seen as industry experts who engage with their audience directly and provide valuable information about their industry. Once they start to build the relationship, they can solve problems, and identify opportunities for their customers to improve their situation by using your products and services.

To ensure you do achieve results with your social media strategy, it is important to remember that you should not just focus on one aspect of social marketing. Rather you need to create a strategy that involves a number of initiatives using the different platforms to create a greater impact. You need to listen to what is being said in return and think about how you will answer any negative comments that might appear from time to time. Online reputations are now critical in people's decision making process, so have your team create a content marketing strategy using social media that will project the positive company image you would desire.

About the Author



David Duncan has been an Internet marketing consultant with WSI since 2004. He is the Area Representative for WSI in the South East UK and a member of the company's Education Committee. David works with business owners to help them make the most of Internet technology to generate more sales leads, to improve their online credibility and brand reputation, and to improve communication with their clients and prospects. He has over 40 years experience in using IT to help businesses solve their problems. For the last 8 years, he has worked with more than 200 small and medium sized companies to improve their digital marketing results.



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