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Take a look at the strategies helping baking pros stay successfully social for business.

by Robin Blakely, American Society of Baking

For more than a decade, social media has significantly reshaped businesses around the globe — but that said — not very dramatically in the wholesale baking industry. The business-to-business world still prefers doing much of its activities in more traditional ways, including face-to-face, rather than the likes of Facebook. But things are rapidly changing, and now is the time to get involved in the business-to-business “social media evolution.”

While many baking professionals have experience with these networks for personal use, making the jump into using them as business tools might not be so simple. This three-part series is designed to help bakers navigate the social side of business communication.

Focus on freshness

Baked goods that go stale don't sell. The same can be said for social media posts. Bakers are the freshness experts, and that should extend into social feeds. Business is not synonymous with boring; don't be afraid to deliver some exciting content. Like the general public, business professionals prefer posts that are as fresh as the bread they eat. To deliver this, carefully define who your audience really is, and focus on designing content that is especially meaningful to customers.

Find a platform where your audience members like to hang out. For many businesses, LinkedIn is the place to

see and be seen. But it's not the only spot: Facebook and Twitter are also important; YouTube is an easy place to share your company videos; Instagram is the current favorite for younger professionals.

The key here is focus. Don't try to do everything. Pick your platforms wisely by deciding exactly how you'll leverage them to achieve your business goals. An important first step for your brand is to raise awareness around the notion that your company exists. That's right — make sure customers know your bakery is available to help them.

Next, focus on your geography. Prospective customers might not realize — or they might even forget — that your bakery is connected and committed to a particular region. Take Aunt Millie's Bakery, Fort Wayne, IN. It has several locations, and one of the communities the company loves is Milwaukee. In fact, Aunt Millie's says it “loaves” Milwaukee. Yes, loaves. Aunt Millie's has a distinct online personality, and the company is not afraid to show off a “punny” sense of humor. It takes delight in catch phrases like “breakfast in bread” or “let's make the world a breadier place.”

The company has fun, and it shows. Once it honored the Milwaukee skyline with sculptures made out of bread and buns and captured the artistic extravaganza on YouTube. Employees cut all shapes of bread



and formed them into recognizable skyline features like the Milwaukee Museum of Modern Art building. Aunt Millie's also uses the site to showcase a bakery tour that helps the world comprehend that a wholesale bakery kitchen isn't the same as the one at home. The bakery illustrates its point with the image of an elephant dragging giant sacks of ingredients across the screen.

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Let's say you want to show off your history. Take a tip from Lender's Bagels, Mattoon, IL, which developed the first nationally distributed frozen bagels. The company proudly touts, "You've come a long way, bagel!" and digitally shares the brand's history in fresh, funny, eye-appealing format.

Think visually

For bakers and allies, social media provides an opportunity for people to see who you are and understand what you do. Visual recognition is a huge part of that. The more familiar your company becomes online with customers and business partners, the warmer the greeting you will personally receive when meeting face-to-face at tradeshow and other meetings.

Capture memorable moments. This year, the American Society of Baking (ASB) shared photos of the excited reactions of culinary teams from Cornell University, University of Iowa, University of Florida and University of Ohio, as the students learned they were named finalists in ASB's national Product Development Competition. By the time students arrived at BakingTech, held Feb. 26-28 in Chicago, they were familiar to other attendees.

Visual recognition matters. If your company is active online, it becomes more familiar. Colleagues, customers and prospective clients will notice your online activity.

Better yet, post new content. Sharing your passion is the key to success. Passion is especially important if your corner of the baking world requires a more technical mindset.

Businesses that supply equipment and ingredients can leverage social media in myriad ways. You are not restricted to the "like" button or passages of text. Make a toast to the industry by serving up videos, photos, clever articles

and easy-to-grasp infographics. Share real-time updates about awards, breaking news and community involvement.

For example Fred Springer, president of Burford Corp., allowed people to virtually tag along with him to Washington, DC, when his company won the national Freedom Award. Sharing an experience like Mr. Springer's is also an important way to inspire and mentor others who want to dive deeper into this industry.

Be strategic

As with any part of a business, conscious strategy will produce results that are meaningful to success. Things positively change when the team develops a mission for the company's social media channels.

Of course, it's important to realize that all efforts are not the same. Different channels help achieve different business goals. For example, if the goal is to share the more technical aspects of your business with potential clients, think about making information easy to consume.

Technical topics risk being too complicated to engage interest, but the right messaging makes all the difference.

Take a complex issue like hygienic processing. Intralox created a video that illustrates the company's four-point system of research and development, hygienic belts and components, customer support, and continuing education and training. That's weighty content to breeze through in three-and-a-half minutes, but the company coherently connects the dots to the underlying message of safe food production.

You might have different objectives, like networking or establishing your company as a thought leader. For these types of strategies, think of LinkedIn as a viable option as a virtual living rolodex. Look people up and learn about current and past work experience, find mutual acquaintances, ask shared connections to make introductions.

LinkedIn offers different ways to virtually network, such as participating in business groups, where ASB posts information nearly every day.

The right strategy can provide notoriety. Start by exploring the opportunities across LinkedIn. A personal profile is an important asset, so don't skimp; be strategic and use strong, succinct words and a professional photo. Do more than make simple updates in your feed — write articles and embed videos within them. You can also share presentations in the SlideShare area.

One of the most important social media business strategies is simply looking around at what your vendors, customers and consumers are doing online. It changes so rapidly ... be sure to claim your space. •

Editor's Note: This is the first installment of a three-part social media series from ASB. Watch for the next installment in the August issue of Baking & Snack.

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