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Social Media Series

SIX KEYS TO B2B SOCIAL MEDIA

To communicate effectively with target audiences, businesses must reconsider how they interact online.

by Robin Blakely, American Society of Baking

If you are still holding on to the old notion that social media doesn't work for business-to-business (B2B), you need to take a closer look. There has never been a better time than now to amplify your company's reach, build a bigger audience and create a comprehensive marketing program that can readily compete — and win — in the modern business world.

Here are six keys to help you improve your marketing tactics with the help of social media.

Reframe expectations

Up until now, no one could blame you for taking a wait-and-see attitude about the merits of social media. With good reason, many traditionally minded B2B companies have been reluctant to fully embrace social media because most of their clients just weren't hanging out in places like Twitter or Facebook.

But now, it's time to take another look.

Even if most of your target audience still prefers face-to-face conversations rather than Facebook interactions,

the truth is that social media is steadily making inroads into daily life. Every hour of each day, current and future customers are becoming more familiar with the easy access, casual networking and clickable customer service that is so prevalent in the business-to-consumer (B2C) marketplace.

Social media can no longer be ignored by any company. Yet, becoming more socially savvy does not require an all-or-nothing approach.

Start with a few small steps — choose a social media platform like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn. Then, give your favorite platform a real chance to perform. Set your first big goal on a very simple outcome: Create posts to raise awareness for the digital information you already have on your company website.

For example, on LinkedIn, you might hyperlink to a webinar sign-up page on your company website. When inviting people to sign up, tease them with a few fun facts. On Facebook, hyperlink to a downloadable tip sheet. On Twitter, share short tips one at a time. On Instagram, post a picture of the company's latest award.

Whatever you do, develop a regular routine for sharing, and be persistent. Don't be surprised if you receive more feedback about your posts in person than online. After all, the baking industry is like that. It's normal.

Staff it right

If your company is new to social media, you may struggle at first. It's common to feel awkward and even a little bit unwelcome. As a result, it may seem like an easy an-

To truly get peoples' attention on social media, companies need to create a cohesive strategy.



Social media is not replacing digital media; the two are joining forces.

swer would be to hand off the energy-draining tasks to interns or junior employees.

Don't!

Your company's social media real estate is too valuable to farm out and forget. Staff all parts of your online world with care. It's true that today's junior employees have likely grown up in the heart of the social landscape. Their understanding of the social scene is important. However, by the very nature of being junior employees, they will initially lack the business skills and professional expertise needed to proactively build and protect your company's larger reputation.

Your biggest success may very well be how you handle social media from behind the scenes. The staff who are posting on your company's behalf should deeply understand how social tactics impact your larger marketing plan. They must know your company's culture and voice. They must understand how to effectively recognize, manage and alert you to a potential problem when it threatens to escalate or spiral out of control.

Be strategic

Social media won't work optimally without a clear strategy. Ultimately, success will hinge on making it part of a more comprehensive marketing program. Social media is not replacing digital media; the two are joining forces.

Marry the two. Insist that they dance together.

Let social media like Instagram make some noise, grab attention, raise awareness and make initial connections with your audience. Position digital platforms like your website as the company's all-important hub.

If your social media is going to grab attention and open doors, then make sure your website really is ready to engage visitors and keep them around. Examine the content you are sharing online in both arenas so that the visitor experiences a totally smooth transition.

One venue has to support the other.

Talking up your company on LinkedIn and sending people to your website only works with a cohesive plan that effectively uses pictures and wording to communicate with visitors. Carefully choreograph each step from social to digital.

One of the best ways to succeed is to align your ideas for content with a calendar. Be forward thinking and precise. Plan your posts like a scheduled publication. Act like the program director of a daily news show. Build an editorial calendar that keeps you a step ahead of your audience. Give yourself time to create content that will truly stand out.

That doesn't mean all your social media is pre-

scheduled, but you can prepare content for future important moments. For example, you typically know weeks ahead of time that you are going to a tradeshow. Plan your social media for that event. Make a list of pictures to post so you remember to actually take them and post them when you are busy and on the road. Pre-schedule tweets to remind show participants to visit your booth. Announce the drawing for a gift card that can be won by those who stop by your booth. Share pictures in real time from the floor via your smart phone. Schedule interviews with some of your colleagues on Facebook Live. Post a cell phone video that shares the excitement for those who can't be there.

An editorial calendar that marries social media and digital content gets everyone on the same page with promotions company-wide. Intentional content establishes the internal protocol needed to break down departmental silos and ensures your company's different voices are heard. Your best success stories and finest customer testimonials are typically discovered in the trenches.

Be inclusive, get visual

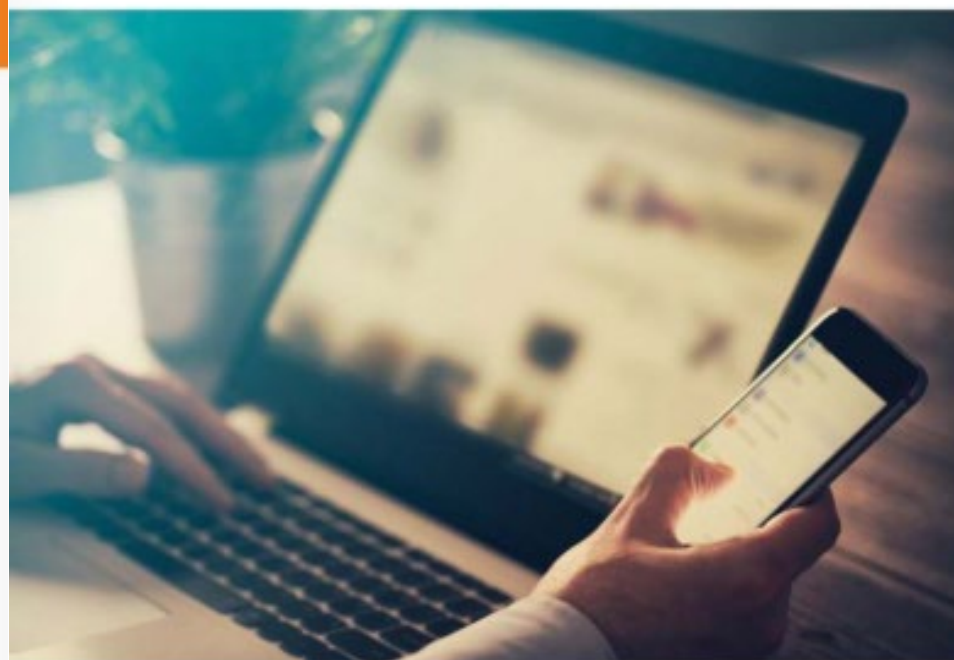
Consider the many ways you can help your audience understand what you do through social media posts.

According to "The Workforce Gap in US Commercial Baking: Trends, Challenges & Solutions" report commissioned last year by the American Society of Baking and the American Bakers Association, the wholesale baking industry faces a severe shortage of skilled employees. That means industry information that was once considered basic knowledge is changing. Be mindful of industry jargon and abbreviations that can cause confusion in social media posts. Across the baking world, now is a good time to check if the old jargon you routinely use remains relatable to the majority of your targets.

Social media can help educate buyers about your services simply and visually.

Share company achievements on social media in clear and informative posts. Introduce your products, services and staff through casual snapshots and carefully planned photo shoots. When visiting clients or giving presentations, take photos to document the moment.

Infographics can also help tell stories. These easy illustrations allow audiences to consume big bites of information in just one glance — perfect for social media. SlideShare presentations on LinkedIn are wonderful tools to answer questions and help multiple decision-



Social media can help educate buyers about your services simply and visually.

makers understand the expert solutions that you can provide. Use them and continue to promote them with other social media posts that help people find them again and again.

Think mobile

The smart phone in the palm of your hand has more power than the local TV station had in its newsroom. Imagine the truth in that. Realize that accessing social media platforms on mobile devices is an exciting opportunity for any company.

However, once again, your social media outreach should match your digital media capacity. Make sure the company website can be accessed and used on mobile devices. If a website is not mobile-friendly, it will reflect poorly on the brand.

Do something now

Think about strategic goals, objectives, strategies and tactics. Great marketing tools are meant to be used to speed up your sales cycle.

So, ask yourself: Who are you really tar-

Aligning social media and digital content across all platforms creates a consistency and familiarity with a brand.
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getting with your social media? What do you really want to have happen?

For most B2Bs, a huge share of your target market is likely found on LinkedIn. It serves as a giant 24-hour networking event, and your profile acts as your virtual business card. Go there. See people. Be seen by people. Post comments. Like and share content.

Remember, not every social media platform is right for your business. Know who you want to reach. Go where your target market is.

With a strong plan in place, some creative ideas identified and the right team ready, you can make a lasting difference for yourself, your company and the people you serve. •

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

Baking & Snack