

How Brick And Mortar Stores Use Social Media

E-commerce is growing fast, and if you listen to the media, that can only mean one thing – the death of brick and mortar, right? WRONG! Despite the reports that e-commerce is taking over the world, brick and mortar companies seem to be surviving. In fact, statistics suggest that only 28% of small businesses are using the internet to sell their products. The simple truth is that brick and mortar is hanging on, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't be adapting to this digital environment. Online sales are growing, and that's not going to stop in the near future. In 2016, online sales were just 8.1% of all sales in North America. New data, though, shows that the number of people who prefer to shop online is ever increasing, and brick and mortar stores can begin expecting to see a real impact, particularly if they continue resisting the shift to digital.

Shifting to accommodate the digital world, though, doesn't mean you have to sell your products or services online. Instead, simply participating in the world of online interaction can be enough to drive customers to your physical location, and for most, that means getting involved in a couple of different ways with your customers. One of the biggest is with social media. Why social media? An Adweek report found that social media influences 87% of shoppers are influenced by social media. It's critical to online sales, but trying to decide which platform should grab your attention is nothing short of overwhelm. How do you know where to focus your efforts? Understanding what each platform has to offer is a good start to moving forward with your plan.

Before You Even Get Started!

Most business owners don't think about Google when they think about a social media campaign, and for good reason. Their foray into social media began in 2011 with Google Plus, but it simply didn't have the power others offered. In November of 2015, they redesigned the service, but it still couldn't compete. It was finally shut down completely in April of 2019. Google is working on a new social network called Shoelace, but it's still under development, and it may be some time before it catches on. So, while Google isn't a social media platform to consider, it's still an important way to interact with your customers online. Why? It's simple – before you begin really marketing to customers online, you need to claim your **My Business Listing through Google**. It's free, and it's not very difficult. The reason behind this move is simple. If consumers are online with a social media network, they're likely to at least do some searching on a browser as well, and today, consumers make 160 billion searches a month on Google. Of those searches, 36% are local, which means that taking care of your business on Google spells taking care of your business offline. Google is continually adding features aimed at brick and mortar retailers just like you.

Google also offers you some real power when it comes to advertising, but only after you've completed your My Business Listing. Google ads and Facebook ads are the two biggest advertisers on the internet today. Facebook holds 19.6% of the equation while Google sits at 37.2% of the market. An Adwords account is easy to set up, and it offers you some fantastic targeting options. You can target by zip code, a certain place of interest, or even a certain radius

of your location. Further that by different demographics and interest levels, and you have a winning equation.

Let the Social Media Parade Begin

Once you've claimed your Google listing, it's time to start thinking about attracting your customers where they're most likely to live – within the world of social media. Here, there are some big names you may already know that offer you advertising options for your business, but be aware of the fact that there are lots of options. Here are seven of the most important names to know. Not all of them are going to be right for your business, but we've listed both pros and cons of each platform to help you decide which ones you should consider when it comes to time, effort, and money.

#1 - Facebook

The statistics surrounding this platform are pretty clear. There are two billion people on this platform, even after some of their privacy issues in recent months. In fact, 79% of adults in the United States use this platform today. The largest group of Facebook, at 19% of their users, is men ages 25 – 34. That's closely followed by women in the same age category, who make up 13% of Facebook users. The United States boasts 210 million users, the highest percentage of Facebook members comes from India with 300 million users. No matter where you're at, though, Facebook users tend to check the platform regularly. Statistics suggest 74% of their users log in several times a day, and they tend to spend about 35 minutes each day on the site.

What's so great about this platform? One of them is the huge audience potential. No other social network comes close to those numbers. More than that, though, is the fact that Facebook has spent quite a bit of money building out their ability to help you reach your target audience with Pay Per Click ads. This targeting option is huge for brick and mortar businesses. You send your ads to users based on their location, demographics, and profile, and that can mean big things for your company. Hoping to run a sale at one of your locations but not another? You can target potential customers only in that area. You can target users that are within a specific area. In fact, it's even possible to find out how many users saw your ad, then came within a certain distance of your store. It can be a huge help for local stores.

Are there drawbacks? Absolutely. One of the biggest ones is the fact that you need to continually maintain your presence. It takes ongoing posts to keep your page up to day, and it's a routine commitment to interact with customers. Another drawback is the fact that you almost have to engage in their PPC options to get the traffic you want. It's tough to get any kind of organic results on this platform. The other real drawback is that it can be difficult to maintain your reputation when you're on there. Every business has angry customers at some point in time, but if you're on Facebook, they can pretty quickly take over, which could spell real trouble.

#2 – Twitter

Twitter lays claim to 326 million users every single month. 46 percent of Americans who are on Twitter connect with it at least once every single day. 259 million of its users aren't based in

America. The company has 35 offices around the world, and you'll find posts in 33 different languages. Twitter users tend to be adults, and they're usually in urban areas. They also tend to be well educated and have higher incomes than those on other platforms. 69% of those who use Twitter are men while 31% are women.

The benefits of Twitter are extensive. There's no algorithm. Instead, every follower will certainly see your tweet. The other bonus is that creating a good tweet takes very little time. You only have 140 characters. They can also easily be scheduled in advance. Twitter also makes data tracking easy. More than that, though, Twitter gives you several ways to connect with local customers. You can search through tweets to find the name of your city or even your neighborhood, then follow local customers. Twitter also allows you to add location data to your tweets so that people can see exactly where your business is located. As with Facebook, you can also use location targeting on your ads. Just select the geo locations you'd like to target. Choose from city, metro area, or even postal code.

The drawbacks, though, are just as extensive. While your tweets will appear in their feed, the chances are good they have thousands of other tweets to sift through, as most people have thousands of accounts they follow. Good engagement takes time, and it can lead to negative interactions. While you can post tweets ahead of time, you can't respond to users in the same fashion, so expect to hire a specialist to help you respond.

#3 - YouTube

As with the others in this category, you don't always think social media when you think YouTube, but it certainly belongs on this list. The idea behind social media is a way to network people and make connections, and that defines this platform. People on YouTube are a community, and that makes it an important space to consider. YouTube was the first platform to popularize video based content, and it shows with the number of users worldwide. It topped 1.9 billion in April of 2019. Nearly 80% of all individuals online say they have and use a YouTube account on a regular basis. Content is available in 80 different languages, and 80% of YouTube users come from outside of the United States. Their primary audience is individuals in the 18-44 age group. However, 51% of elderly individuals over the age of 75 who are online are viewing videos on YouTube, so it is possible to reach a number of different age groups. Most users are men, as they tend to spend 44 percent more time on the site each month than women do. They also make up 62% of the users.

There is some real potential with this platform. It's a powerful connection to a worldwide audience. It's easy to use, and you can embed your content on other platforms. It's also easy to create your own channel, and you can place links on your videos to send traffic to various places. You can also purchase ads on YouTube, and there are many different types. Some ads play before a user's chosen video and some play during a video. There are some types of ads users can skip and others that they're forced to watch. No matter what type of ad you purchase, though, you can target them based on location alone, which can be quite helpful for a brick and mortar company.

There are a few drawbacks, too, though. First, it's pretty crowded, so it's easy to lose your customers. You also have to do a bit of work to market your videos, which may involve paying for certain kinds of tags. As with Facebook, you may find negative comments or reviews that actually hurt your rankings and could affect your business. Finally, the nature of this platform is that it's video based, so if you're not willing to produce that kind of content, this isn't the right space for you. That's true even if you plan to pay for your videos to be seen in an ad format, as most of YouTube's ad content is video based, so without a good video, you're out of the game.

#4 - Instagram

This platform has one billion active users each month, and of those, 500 million are active each day. They tend to have more money than those on other platforms, though. 31% of them make more than 75k a year. It has a younger users base, though, than many other platforms, as two out of every three users fall between the ages of 18 and 29. 80% of its users follow at least one brand. Business profiles are regularly visited by users, as more than 200 million of them visit at least one per day, and 66% of those visits come from users who aren't even following that business.

Benefits abound with Instagram. Their images get 23% more engagement than those images posted on Facebook do. Brands also tend to see engagement rates of about 4% of followers, as compared to the .1% engagement rates that Facebook and Twitter see. 75% of Instagram users take action on an ad somewhere along the line. A business of any size can thrive on this platform, and people can purchase directly inside the platform. As with Facebook, you can physically target your customers, but it works a bit differently on this platform. It starts with your profile. You have to add in where you're physically located to help people find you. It's a pretty simple profile to complete, and once you do it correctly, it will even show users where you are on a map and give them directions. Then, as you start posting, be sure to add your locations into your captions. You can also choose to run locally targeted ad campaigns with this platform, just like you can on Facebook. That may help to attract your customers while they're out and about on Instagram Mobile. Choose anyone in a particular location, people who live in a given location, people who have been near a place recently, or people who are traveling near your place of business. You can even further detail target individuals like homeowners, those who are interested in vegan cuisine, or something entirely different. It's an extensive number of options few other social media choices offer.

There are also drawbacks, though. Images matter here. Not only that, but the quality of the images matter. There are numerous studies surrounding the color saturation, hues, and white space, so if you're not into photography, this probably isn't the platform for you. Video and text space is limited here too. You can post a video of just 60 seconds in length, and the ideal caption is only 138 characters length. You can't include clickable links in those captions either. Successful brands tend to post 1.5 times every day. It usually takes 19 hours to get half of a post's engagement, which means it's a long waiting period after you've posted. The ads are also quite costly, which may mean you need a larger budget to participate in their targeted advertisements.

#5 - LinkedIn

There are 630 million LinkedIn users on the platform, and of those, 303 million of them are active on a monthly basis. 177 million of those are from the United States, which leaves 70% of their users outside of the States. This platform is also male dominated; 57% of its users are men. This is a younger platform. 87 million Millennials are in LinkedIn. They tend to be college graduates, and they tend to earn more than \$75,000 a year. It was designed and remains a B2B platform, though.

There are several benefits. It means some solid networking opportunities. It's also the only social site where you can get organic views on a huge level without paying for ads or boosting your posts. People tend not to be very negative on this platform, because they're all fairly professional. The other platforms mentioned to this point offer ad targeting with regard to location, and this one does too. You can target them both based on geographic location and IP addresses. They even offer helpful audience templates so you can further narrow things down by company size, an individual's role in the company, and much more.

The drawbacks are pretty extensive. If you're not a B2B marketer, this likely isn't the platform for you. Even if you are, there are some drawbacks. Setting up your profile the first time can be seriously intensive. You already have to have a personal profile, and you need to be an intermediate user. Too much content on this platform tends to turn users off. You also can't reach younger people on this platform. Status updates are limited to 600 characters each, and you can't get too personal.

#6 - Pinterest

Pinterest, too, falls under the category of social media. It's easy to follow others and really connect with users, and this platform is no slouch when it comes to active users. 250 million people log in every single month. 77.4 million of those people are in America. It targets individuals outside of the United States too, though. Traffic from America, Brazil, India, Turkey, and Russia round out their top five account sign-ups. One study found that between 2017 and 2018, Pinterest added more users in the United States than either one of the big choices in the world of social media – Facebook and Twitter. Pinterest users are primarily women, but that's a huge group for them. Reports suggest 83% of all American women find themselves on the platform itself or influenced by it thanks to a Google Image Search. Men, though, aren't out of the equation. Half of all of the accounts created in 2018 were men. Users tend to be between 18 and 49, so the younger your target audience, the better.

The benefits of this platform are numerous. It's easy to get traffic from external sites thanks to Google Image searches. Moreover, people can follow your individual boards instead of everything you post. Conversion rates on Pinterest are usually higher than they are on other platforms, and people usually spend about 2.5 times more with each conversion than they do on other platforms. There are a number of different ways to target your advertising on the platform, including by location. Choose from metro area or even postal code here. The default location will always be your business' country, but you can change that if you wish.

As fantastic as those benefits are, though, there are some drawbacks. You have pretty specific image requirements to upload, and if you're not sharing content you've made, there are a number

of different legal issues to consider. More than that, though, it's tough to automate this one, so that means an additional time commitment. You also have to share between five and twenty pins a day to really get noticed in this space. It's also important to note that their demographic targeting options for paid advertising aren't quite as robust as other platforms.

#7 - Is Social Media The Only Way To Interact Online? Nope, Consider SMS Texting, Too!

If you're thinking of going digital with your brick and mortar business, there's no reason not to consider SMS texting as an extremely effective way of reaching out. First, understand just how powerful mobile devices are in society today. Research shows that 92% of the population in the United States owns a mobile device that can actually get these messages. It is the most important channel if you're targeting 18 – 34 year olds. It's also important for nearly every consumer, as most studies show that consumers are more likely to open a text message than they are any other form of communication. In fact, 83% of Millennials open a message within 90 seconds of delivery. These numbers aren't static, either. The number of individuals with a phone capable of getting these messages is only growing, and as of 2007, 91% of owners were keeping them nearby at all times. That study was redone just a few years ago, and the study found that they were the single most important device in customers' lives. In fact, 62% of people check them for new messages right after they wake up.

So, are there benefits that don't exist in other spaces thanks to this kind of power?

Unquestionably. A person's phone is the most intimate way to reach them today. In multiple studies, SMS marketing has been shown to have a serious impact on brand awareness. One study went as far as to show that SMS marketing produced engagement rates up to 8 times as high as email marketing did. A full 48% of customers said they'd prefer loyalty messages and coupons to come through SMS marketing. Costs are also low when compared with purchasing ads on many of the platforms mentioned. As with every other platform, you can target users by location, which can be a huge help to brick and mortar companies.

The disadvantages in this space aren't huge. You don't have a lot of space to get your message across, but that's true for many of these ways to engage your customers. People must opt-in before you can text them. People are also getting a bit more wary of SMS messaging because of the fraud in this space, but by following e-commerce legislation and regulations, you'll be clearly recognizable to your contacts.

Learning how to reach out to your customers, even if you're not ready for online sales, can be tough. After all, just choosing a platform can be difficult. There are several things to take into account, but best one is the story behind your customers. Where are they and what platforms and options do they care about most? How can you best reach them? No matter which space you choose, though, don't forget to choose at least a few, as you can't afford to ignore the power of being online any longer.