



Six Essential Social Media Tools for Every Small Business

Win More Clients & Make More Money
without Spending a Penny

By Matt Heinz

*Principal & Chief Marketer
Heinz Marketing LLC
www.heinzmarketing.com*


Passion. Focus. Results.

Introduction

It is very easy to quickly become intimidated by the breadth of social media tools and opportunities available for small businesses across the Web. Every day, it seems, a new idea, product, opportunity or fad comes along that is the new “must have, must use” tool.

The jury’s still out on whether some of those, quite frankly, are worth your time. Yes, they can be fun to play with. Yes, they can sometimes attract a handful of new visitors to your business. But some haven’t yet approached the level of being worth your sustained time & investment in a long-term way.

If you understand your customer – what influences them, how they buy, where they find information to make decisions and purchases – you’re on the path to determining how extensively social media should permeate your marketing strategy.

That said, the tools discussed below are, we believe, increasingly critical to the success of small businesses. They represent access to a wide variety of target customers, and can largely be used with little to no incremental out-of-pocket expenditures. And most importantly, they can be harnessed quickly and have been proven in many contexts to drive new customers and new revenue to your business.

In this special report, we’ll go into more detail on the following opportunities:

- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Online Photos (featuring Flickr)
- Blog Networks
- Online Video (featuring YouTube)
- Twitter

Facebook

Facebook has evolved from what was once a college friend's network to an audience of more than 120 million active users. No matter what your market, a sizeable portion of your current and prospective customers are now on Facebook. That means you likely need to be there too.

Here are three examples of businesses using Facebook to generate sales and new revenue:

- On the company page of RootsGear's, which designs T-shirts with political and social messages, people can look at the firm's designs and see a calendar of upcoming events. The company stokes its group membership of about 1,400 by every few months sending out invitations to join with new Facebook friends collected by cofounder Summit Singh. Singh says the Facebook page drives more traffic to RootsGear's e-commerce site than Google's search engine or MySpace, another social-networking site where it has a presence. And Facebook has helped the year-old company's sales.
- The company page on Facebook of Junnoon, an Indian restaurant in Palo Alto, Calif., includes basic information such as address, hours, prices, photos and coming events, as well as reviews from local newspapers and Zagat. By opting to become a "fan" on the company page, instead of just a Facebook friend, people can make reservations directly from the page and post ratings and reviews.
- Bryce Gruber is the 23-year-old owner of IntenCity Global, a five-person marketing and public-relations firm in New York. She says Facebook works well for her and has brought tangible results. She recently drew more than 300 people to an opening party for a clothing store that she expected would only attract 150 to 200. And the people who learned of the party through Facebook bought several thousand dollars in merchandise. Her approach is to post information and reminders about her events regularly, and upload plenty of party pictures afterward. Each day, she gets 20 to 30 messages on her Wall and keeps that going with quick replies. The effort means she shows up often in her Facebook friends' news feeds, where people are notified of their friend's activities on Facebook.

Need more convincing? Here are several reasons why businesses use Facebook from Mari Smith, a speaker and author on social media & marketing:

- **Find Business Contacts:** Not only are your friends on Facebook, so are your prospects, your customers, your partners... and, of course, your competitors. You need to be on too.
- **Instant Gate Opener:** Facebook members are open to connecting. You can easily begin a dialog with highly successful—even famous—people who were previously otherwise unreachable.
- **Build Relationships:** By engaging in conversations with your prospects and customers, you can better adapt your marketing and business services to meet their needs.
- **Raise Visibility:** By consistently and congruently showing up, posting relevant information, and being a thought leader, you can increase visibility and credibility as the expert in your area.
- **Target Your Niche:** Users volunteer vast amounts of information about themselves that you can readily access. These kinds of demographics, psychographics, and technographics would previously have cost fortunes to access.
- **Get Rapid Top Google Placement:** Pages (for business) and Profiles (for personal) are indexed for optimal search engine positioning.
- **No Cost Marketing:** Aside from paid ads, Facebook is totally free to use and with regular activity you'll end up with more traffic, more subscribers, and more paying clients.

Building a presence on Facebook is surprisingly easy. It's not too different initially from creating a profile on LinkedIn, but it then provides far more expressive, multi-media and ongoing two-way communication formats that can help you build relationships with current and prospective customers.

Getting started with Facebook typically involved three steps:

Step 1: Create Your Profile

Facebook is about personal relationships; in the Facebook world, these are defined as “friends.”

To get started, build a profile for yourself as a professional (for you, not your business – that step comes next). Update your profile with a photo, your education, credentials, experience, contact information and more.

The more complete your profile, the easier it’ll be for you to connect with other people (and the easier it’ll be for others to find you). Just like with LinkedIn, it’s easy to upload your contact database to see who else is already a Facebook user.

Once your profile is complete, start looking for existing networks to join. There are countless networks related to your local area, possibly business associations, peer groups, etc. Add them to your profile, and it’ll be much easier for others to find you, “friend” you, meet you and, ultimately, do business with you.

Step 2: Create Your Company Page

Creating a company page in Facebook is separate from your personal profile, but equally as important. Think of this as a separate profile where you can promote what you do, your products and services, your special offers to new customers and more. You can also populate these pages with photos, videos, upcoming events, links back to your Web site and more.

Your customers, partners, colleagues and other business associates in your network can become “fans” of your company. This is a great way to stay in touch with that network, share information and advice, and also showcase to new customers that others before them already know about and love your business.

Once your company page is set up, you can promote it via your own Web site, blog and other online media to accelerate the number of fans and friends you have.

Step 3: Join and Create Groups

Another way to network on Facebook is through the use of groups. Groups, unlike pages, are only visible to Facebook members.

Chances are your current and prospective customers already participate in one or more groups. Spend a few minutes looking around the groups on Facebook, and join those that you feel are relevant to you. It’s a great way to meet new people in a casual, passive environment. Many small businesses, for example, report that Facebook groups – especially local ones – are a no-cost way to acquire countless new customers, just by saying hello, sharing some information, and quickly establishing themselves as a trusted resource.

LinkedIn

The Web is now full of great networking and participation tools that help consumers stay in touch with each other, and more effectively network than ever before.

One important such networking tool – especially among tech-savvy buyers seeking recommendations from their friends & peers - is LinkedIn, available for free at www.linkedin.com.

LinkedIn is essentially an online networking tool where individuals share information about themselves, and identify others in their network.

But that's where it gets particularly exciting. LinkedIn is essentially a network of networks. It thrives on the fact that you have a network of friends and business partners, and each of your friends have their *own* network of associates, and on and on.

A quick example: Let's say you have a network of 100 friends and business associates. This includes service providers, your bank representative, other local businesses, your Chamber of Commerce representative, etc. And let's say that each of those folks also has a network of 100 friends and business associates.

Now, directly on LinkedIn, you're networked with as many as 10,000 individuals. And that's just in the first circle of associations.

LinkedIn has become a search engine for people, partners and associates – and for consumers to find local businesses like yours. When I want to find a real estate agent, for example, I may go to LinkedIn and search for “real estate agent” or “Realtor”. The search results will tell me who in my network is also networked with a real estate agent.

And I can assume that, if a friend or associate of mine is already “linked” to that agent, then it must be a good agent.

In this way, LinkedIn operates as a virtual, online recommendation service. And this is exactly where it can be incredibly valuable to you.

You won't want to think of LinkedIn as a means of proactively reaching out to consumers. It doesn't work that way. What it *does* do well is make you far easier to find for those proactively seeking your products or services. And with its ability to both passively and proactively display recommendations from your network, it's also a powerful way to quickly establish trust & credibility with a new customer (more on recommendations later).

“I was called by a gentleman that wanted to invest \$500,000 in an annuity with Mass Mutual. He found me on LinkedIn and we connected to complete this transaction. I never would have imagined the power of this tool to put money in my pocket.”

- Erik Skar, Financial Services Professional

You can check out my own LinkedIn profile as an example:

<http://www.linkedin.com/in/mattheinz>

And check out this link for a great example of a real estate professional building and leveraging a LinkedIn profile:

<http://www.linkedin.com/in/kitsapagent>

“I've gotten lots of live gigs and sent out countless mail orders from folks and businesses finding me here on LinkedIn”

- Dave Maskin, Corporate & Private Event Entertainer

Setting up your own LinkedIn profile is easy, fast and free. Once you're set up, simply invite others to “join” your network. LinkedIn even has pre-written invitations to make this step simple.

The bigger your network, the more people can discover you. And more people in your network can virtually recommend you to their own network – to discover, and use, your business.

To go deeper with LinkedIn, follow these five steps:

Step 1: Join LinkedIn and complete your profile. The more complete your profile, the easier it will be to connect with clients, colleagues and friends (in many cases, they'll search for and discover you). Include details of your career and achievements, samples of the type of products/services you provide, etc.

Step 2: Find contacts who are already on LinkedIn. You can do this by uploading your contact list (from Outlook or Gmail, for example) right into LinkedIn, and invite those contacts as a start. You can also search by company or organization, and find many more people to invite. Try your local Chamber of Commerce, or any other associations you belong to. You'll be surprised how many people are already up there, and who can exponentially increase your own network.

Step 3: Give and solicit recommendations within your network. Writing recommendations is a great way to re-connect with contacts, plus passively solicit recommendations back on your own profile.

Step 4: Pose questions and answer others' questions in the LinkedIn Answers section. This is a good way to make new connections and establish your expertise at the same time. Find a category you're particularly interested or knowledgeable in, and give it a shot. Steven Shimek, a public relations professional, found his current job at Ruder Finn Public Relations via LinkedIn, and further used his investment in LinkedIn Answers to close several new clients, including a \$250,000 contract.

Step 5: Find or create LinkedIn Groups. Groups are a great way to network on a smaller scale with like-minded people. For example, you can find groups that are made up of local businesses, alumni associations or people who are particularly passionate about a particular subject. If you

Online Photos and Flickr

Pictures have the ability to create a strong, emotional reaction with all of us, and often can communicate far more than written words are able to. Pictures can communicate different things to different people, and the right pictures in front of the right audience can be powerful drivers of action.

Consider the power of images and photographs for your business. Consider how powerful these could be not only in communicating more of what your business is about, but also in driving interested and curious consumers to learn more about your business and your listings.

The Internet has accelerated consumer interest in images, and several Web sites have started to aggregate such pictures together – bringing with them heaps of consumers.

The best example of this is a Web site called Flickr.com. It aggregates photos from consumers all over the globe, and allows site visitors to comment and vote on the photos they like the best.

Now, this site isn't a place to directly sell your products & services. But it can be a fun and free way to communicate things about your business that can't be expressed in words, or in more traditional marketing. Sites like Flickr, Picassa from Google, and even Facebook, offer tools where photos can quickly be viewed, commented on, reviewed, and passed along to others. It's a great way to ensure visual images of your business, products and services help tell your story.

Some examples of how Flickr could be used for different businesses:

- **Real Estate:** Add photos of houses you have for sale. People love looking at houses, and your photos will end up with a long string of people commenting on what they like (and don't like) about the house.
- **Bakery:** Add photos of your original cake designs, or photos from an event you have catered. If you've invited customers in for an open house, post photos of kids eating your treats.
- **Pet Store:** Add photos of your customers with their pets. Not only will people love looking at these pictures (especially other pet lovers), but the owners themselves will take the pictures and forward them to their own friends and family
- **Consignment Shop:** Take pictures of new items available at your shop. Consider adding an RSS feed to those photos so customers can "subscribe" to receive notifications when new pictures (new products) are available.

In each case, make sure you post the photos with a short description that includes your Web site address. That way, everyone can come back to your Web site to learn more about you and your business.

Other local bloggers and Web site owners

You're not alone in your quest to drive more business from the Internet. And you're also not alone in providing great online content to a local audience.

It's important to make sure that other local Web site operators (both publishers and fellow businesses) know about *your* business, and can link their audience back to you.

For example, as you network with other local businesses in your area, find out which of them have their own Web sites, blogs and podcasts. Ask them what it would take to include a link to your Web site and business from their Web initiative. Many may volunteer to put one up for free. Others may ask for a link in exchange, which would be easy to do.

As you work with other local business Web sites, consider a referral program. What would you be willing to pay another local business for sending you a new customer? Would you give them a finder's fee? A percentage of the new customers' first transaction? The more you make that referral worth the business' while, the more links and traffic they'll send you.

And then there's local bloggers. Many city governments, agencies, and even individual consumers operate blogs that simply promote goings-on in the local area. For example, in Kirkland, Washington, we have www.kirklandviews.com. They write about all kinds of Kirkland news, and often feature local businesses in their blog as well. Their readership among Kirkland residents is high and growing. And they *love* to meet new business owners serving other Kirkland residents.

Do some online searches to find the local bloggers in your area, then call and introduce yourself and your business. Develop a relationship with the bloggers, and think about what other information you could feed them for their blog (in addition to news about your business). It will directly increase the chances that they will regularly feature your business as well, and drive even more traffic (and customers!) back to you.

Blogging Comments

Whether or not you already have your own blog, it's important to stay active in other related blogs through direct comments.

Find conversations going on elsewhere that you have an opinion on, and make a comment. This can be on blogs directly related to your business (local or otherwise), or it can simply be on blogs that happen to mention things you care about.

Most blogs ask for (and some require) a Web site when posting a comment, which is a great way to drive traffic back to your own Web site or blog.

Better yet, embed a link to a specific article or piece of content on your own Web site or blog that furthers the point you're making in the other blog's comments section.

This works particularly well when you're paying close attention to some of the most well-read blogs in your area. Take the KirklandViews.com example. It's one of the most well-read blogs in the Kirkland area, primarily read by Kirkland residents and other small businesses.

In addition to building a relationship with the bloggers themselves, stay active in their comments section. Bloggers love to have others comment on what they've written about, and it's a great way to 1) drive traffic back to your own site, and 2) further a relationship you may have with that blogger, which will only mean more mentions and links down the road.

Online Video and YouTube

Think of this as the “next step up” from the Flickr idea.

If your business, your listings, your brand essence, or even your customers and their stories/successes can be communicated effectively in written format and in photos, they can certainly be communicated in video format as well.

Video lets you tell a more complete story, and often capture more of the emotion, passion and excitement your customers have when experiencing your products. It can bring your products and services to life, and help more completely communicate how happy your customers are to have done business with you (now and in the future).

Many Internet experts believe that video is the future of the Web, and that the proliferation of broadband Internet connections means that more and more consumers will be watching video online as a core part of their Internet experience.

What’s more, capturing and publishing video to the Web is easier than ever before.

Digital video cameras are extremely cost-effective these days, and can typically be found either in the big box stores or online for just a couple hundred bucks.

Then, by using YouTube and other online video publishing services, you can bring your videos to a whole new audience. You can even use YouTube to host videos that are linked directly on your own Web site or blog.

What might you want to video? Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Capture a video of your open house. Interview customers, film customers interacting with you, touring your storefront, etc. Post the video on YouTube and send a copy to everyone who attended. They’ll love it, will send it to their friends and family, etc.
- Film a “how-to” video. What are you good at? What can you teach others how to do? What advice can you offer (and demonstrate!) that will show you’re an expert, and bring you more business? Get creative, and put it on video!
- Give your customers a video tour of the neighborhood and perhaps even other businesses. Film areas of interest – businesses, parks, community centers, etc. Post it on your Web site and on YouTube to help others get more familiar with the area – and why they’d want to shop there.

The possibilities are endless.

Want to take it a step further? Ask your customers to film videos for you! If you’re having an open house, ask customers to bring their own videos to film their experience. Especially if your open house has a special opportunity for kids to partake, it’ll create a natural opportunity for parents to bring out their video cameras.

You could even consider doing a contest for customers to create and submit videos. Some examples could include:

- Ask some of your most loyal customers to film a commercial for you. Tell them to try a 30-second commercial about your business, why they love working with you, why they’d recommend you to others, etc. Every one of those videos could be posted on YouTube to promote your business.
- Ask customers to submit a video explaining why they love living in your community. You’ll get back a treasure trove of videos not only from happy customers, but also from people showcasing (in testimonial format!) why others should come live there (by buying a house through you.)

Again, get creative with this one. The possibilities with video are numerous, exciting and extremely powerful tools to drive more awareness and interest back to your business.

Twitter

Think of Twitter as miniature blogging. You only have 140 characters to say what you're going to say (not including a URL to additional content you can embed in your post).

Twitter has exploded in the past year in popularity, but the jury's still out on how useful it can be for business overall. Yes, several businesses and organizations have found practical, revenue-producing applications for Twitter. For example:

- Amazon.com uses Twitter to tell fans about special prices and deals
- Next Level Church in North Carolina encourages visitors to Twitter during the sermon, to help share the church's message and get new visitors & members

For your business, think of Twitter as a shorter attention span communication channel that could have even greater reach than your Web site and blog, and on a more frequent basis.

Want to see some great examples of small businesses using Twitter today? Check out these "feeds":

<http://twitter.com/tcar>

<http://twitter.com/RobertaMurphy>

Want to see more? Go to Twitter.com and search for terms that relate to what you do – real estate, bakeries, accountants, etc. You'll get a real-time feel for what people are writing about.

The role and usage of Twitter for small businesses is changing so fast, that by the time you're reading this a whole new set of ideas will have become mainstream. To help you keep up, please visit the link below for a set of Twitter "how-to" guides specific to small business. You'll find some great stuff there, that we'll continue to update as we find more gems.

<http://heinzmarketing.com/matt-on-marketing/blog/twitter-for-small-business>

About Matt Heinz

Matt brings more than 12 years of marketing, business development and sales experience from a variety of organizations, vertical industries and company sizes. His career has focused on delivering measurable results for his employers and clients in the way of greater sales, revenue growth, product success and customer loyalty.

Matt has held various positions at companies such as Microsoft, Weber Shandwick, Boeing, The Seattle Mariners, Market Leader and Verdiem. In 2007, Matt began Heinz Marketing to help clients focus their business on market and customer opportunities, then execute a plan to scale revenue and customer growth.

Matt lives in Kirkland, Washington with his wife, daughter, and a menagerie of animals (a dog, two cats, and six chickens).

Read more from Matt at his blog, www.mattonmarketingblog.com. Follow Matt on Twitter at www.twitter.com/heinzmarketing.

About Heinz Marketing

Heinz Marketing is a marketing agency focused on helping its clients quickly and consistently grow customers and revenue. It does this by helping to create market clarity and deep customer insight, then developing and executing a custom go-to-market strategy that quickly and cost-effectively helps scale growth and revenue from both new and existing customers.

Heinz Marketing prioritizes three things for each client:

- **Passion:** Your business becomes our business. We make your objectives our own, and are passionate about finding and executing the strategies that will help you achieve your goals.
- **Focus:** Quality over quantity. We will find and focus on strategies that make an impact and drive growth. We will help you get more done with less - maximizing your investment for the highest possible return.
- **Results:** Nothing matters unless you're selling product, growing revenue and making customers happy. Everything we do is measured not on activity, but on results for your business.

Founded in 2007, Heinz Marketing has helped dozens of organizations with their sales, marketing and go-to-market strategies, including:

- Microsoft
- PayScale
- Verdiem Corp
- Market Leader
- River Forest Financial
- ABC Legal Services
- Moose Construction
- Jones Advertising
- Katie Esser Architects
- National Baseball Hall of Fame
- The Vernon Company
- Kirkland Downtown Association

To learn more, please visit www.heinzmarketing.com or email matt@heinzmarketing.com.