

Social Media for Downtown

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

“Social media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue...and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.” (Wikipedia.com)

Social media can be used to communicate, collaborate, educate and entertain. It has transformed from an unprofessional and informal form of communication to one of the most effective tools for advertising, marketing and professional networking available. Social media is available for anyone and everyone, but it's important to know what will work for your *Main Street*.

THREE RULES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

1. It's about enabling conversations among your audience or market
2. You can't control conversations with social media, but you can influence them
3. Influence is the basis on which all economically viable relationships are built

TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can be categorized into three uses: publishing, sharing and networking.

PUBLISHING

There are several tools to get your ideas, news, pictures, etc. out to your audience. Blogging and micro-blogging are the most common ways to share thoughts, whether professional or personal. Blogs can appear as part of a website or as a completely separate entity shared on one of these common sites: [Wordpress](#), [Blogger](#) and [tumblr](#). Micro-blogging is a way to share quick, concise information more frequently. Common micro-blogging sites include [Twitter](#) and [Yammer](#).

There are also several ways to publish pictures and videos. Sharing these can help promote or report a specific product, service or event. Common sites are [flickr](#), [YouTube](#), and [Vimeo](#).

Other popular, more generic publishing sites include [Wikipedia](#), [Google docs](#), and [Skype](#).

SHARING

Many publishing sites also have sharing tools, so that you can keep your finds organized and share them with others. Popular sharing sites include [delicious](#), [Google Bookmarks](#), [Stumbleupon](#), and [Pinterest](#).

NETWORKING

Networking takes both publishing and sharing and extends it to a broader group of people. A network can consist of an intimate group of friends, customers, clients, etc. or extend beyond to a broader audience. Popular networking sites include [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [foursquare](#), and [myspace](#).

NON-PROFIT AND GOVERNMENT USES

Social media is a particularly valuable resource for local governments and non-profits, because it is generally free to use. Since it has become an accepted form of communication in the professional realm, these two groups have found numerous applications for day-to-day usage.

Non-profits can use it to:

- ◆ Fundraise,
- ◆ Promote special events,
- ◆ Build local support for a cause,
- ◆ Recruit volunteers, and
- ◆ Keep in touch with membership

Local governments can use it to connect with their citizenry by updating them on:

- ◆ Road construction or closures,
- ◆ Utility outages or repairs,
- ◆ Weather updates,
- ◆ Special events, and
- ◆ Local news

It is extremely important for these two groups to know their target audience so they can choose the proper form/ type of social media. The most commonly used tools tend to be Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn.

SMALL BUSINESS USE

For many of the same reasons as local governments and non profits, small businesses have found social media to be an increasingly valuable tool. While many forms offer advanced services for a fee, their basic features remain free to small business.

RETAIL

Retail businesses can utilize all three forms of social media (publishing, sharing and networking). Publishing tools such as blogs and micro-blogs allow retail businesses to share information about new items in-stock, special events and sales to their followers. Retail businesses can also use them to share their expertise on a certain topic or product they sell.

Sharing sites, such as Pinterest, allow the business and customer to organize their favorite brands, stores or ideas and share them with a broader group, which leads to networking sites. Businesses can utilize networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, foursquare, etc. to reach their current customers and potential customers. Networking sites allow the customer to interact with the business as well as share the business with the rest of their personal network. The internet now runs through people, therefore in order to successfully advertise online, businesses must interact and connect to their customers.

SERVICE

Service businesses can utilize social media in many of the same ways as retail businesses. However, they may find certain sites more valuable than others. Service businesses may not need to update their clients on a daily basis, therefore avenues like Twitter and Yammer may not be well-suited for them. While some service businesses may see limited need for social media, it is still important that they have a presence. A more in-depth form of social media such as Facebook or LinkedIn which allows the business to share its KSA's and examples of services is more relevant.

Social Media is not a “one size fits all” form of communication. That's why it is important to understand your target audience and fully engage in your social media applications. If used properly it can be a valuable tool for your organization or business.