

How social marketing can help your business



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Linking In to business success

Some people dismiss social media as a fad; a distraction from the real task of running a business. They look at networking sites like LinkedIn or Facebook, or micro-blogging tools like Twitter; they look at some of the inane comments that dominate ('Can't believe Joe won X Factor! LOL' or 'Heading to the gym to burn those abs ☺') and write them off as unsuitable for business.

But if you think about it, I'm sure we all have some pretty pointless conversations on the telephone, but that doesn't mean the telephone doesn't cut it as a valuable (essential?) business tool.

It's the same with social media – it's the media that we should focus on, not the message. If the person you're connecting with is a relevant business contact or a potential customer, it doesn't matter if you're talking to them on LinkedIn, the telephone, or down a piece of string, the value is in the connection itself.

That doesn't mean that everyone will be using LinkedIn or Twitter to do business in five years' time, or even that they will still exist in the same form. But they do represent a new way of communicating that will become increasingly important as more people join in and feed this emerging network of social media communications.

Why has social media become so popular?

Short attention span – today's culture and society is characterised by short attention spans. Some see it as a way of coping with the constant barrage of information we all face – 24-hr news, sound bites and spin, torrents of emails, endless variety of TV and radio channels. Social media communications mirror these features. They are a way to get straight to the point, instead of wasting time with the 'niceties' of traditional communication. They are short and informal. The focus is on the contents of the package, not the packaging.

Who needs privacy – rightly or wrongly, we are used to sharing information about ourselves that previous generations would never dream of doing. Whether it is CCTV in our high streets and public buildings, ID cards, Smart cards for public transport, direct mailing lists – we are used to 'sharing' ourselves. We're used to being watched. It's magnified online, where people don't think twice about sharing or communicating with people in a way they would not do in real life.

Personal profile – social networking sites usually have in-built rewards systems that reflect your 'standing' in that virtual community. With Twitter, it's the number of 'followers' you have; on Facebook it is all about 'friends', while on LinkedIn it is 'connections.' Call it ego if you like, but it's a great way for people to increase their profile and, sometimes, their credibility. After all, who knows if one of your connections could be your next customer.

Staying connected – whether we like it or not, one result of the rise in communications devices and channels over the past decade is the vicious circle it creates. There are more and more ways of keeping in touch with our colleagues and of communicating with people, which means we spend much more of our time doing precisely that. We've all seen the people on holiday, mobile phone glued to their ear on the beach or by the pool, or



'CrackBerry' addicts, manically checking their emails every hour of the day. If we're not connected somehow, we feel we're missing out.

It is highly unlikely that social media will ever replace face-to-face meetings, the telephone, or even email, as a mainstream business tool. But it does represent a major shift in the way we communicate with each other. It's not a golden bullet for winning new business. It's not a replacement for making appointments to go and meet people. But done right, it just might be another way of making contacts that turn into meetings, and meetings that turn into new business.

Can social marketing websites like LinkedIn really help grow your business?

Making the best of social networking tools means knowing what to do and when to do it. There is undoubted potential to create serious business benefits by better use of social media. But at the same time, if you're not sure how best to use it for your business, your risk wasting hours of your time on social networking strategies that generate little or no return.

Here's Gauge Marketing's Top Ten Tips on how to make the most of LinkedIn, probably the social media tool with the most new business potential:

1. Make sure your profile includes a photo

People do business with people - and they are more likely to do business with people they can see and feel some sort of empathy with. Make sure it is a decent one, though. Putting up a ten-year old amateur snap of yourself looking like a mafia kingpin or badly dressed insurance salesman could do more harm than good.

2. Write your profile clearly and succinctly

Stick to short paragraphs and sentences. People who view your profile don't want to have to wade through long paragraphs of turgid, jargon-heavy text.

3. Sell yourself

Your profile is an opportunity to communicate your expertise, your credibility, your experience, to potential new customers or referrers. Don't waste it. You want to appear focused. Include an 'elevator pitch' on what makes you good at what you do. Point out relevant skills. Explain your experience. Distinguish yourself from the competition.

4. Get recommendations

At least five or six if possible. Potential business partners want to be reassured that you're credible, professional and trustworthy – and nothing says it louder than testimonials from other people you have done business with.

5. Give recommendations

A good way to get recommendations is to give them first. Look at who you're connected to and, where appropriate, offer to write a recommendation for them. Don't make it too gushing, though, as it will lose credibility. The more genuine the recommendation, the more likely it is to be returned.



6. Be responsive

Check your Linked In in-box regularly. If someone sends you a message, reply in good time, like you would on email. It's simple politeness and good etiquette. After all, who knows where that next lead could come from?

7. Update your status regularly

You don't have to update it every day, but refreshing your status two or three times a week let's people know that you're busy and what you're working on. And if you're busy, the inference is that you're good at what you do.

8. Join a Group

Find a group that is related to your industry (or your target market) and join it. It's a great way to make useful connections and keep on top of what people in the industry are talking about.

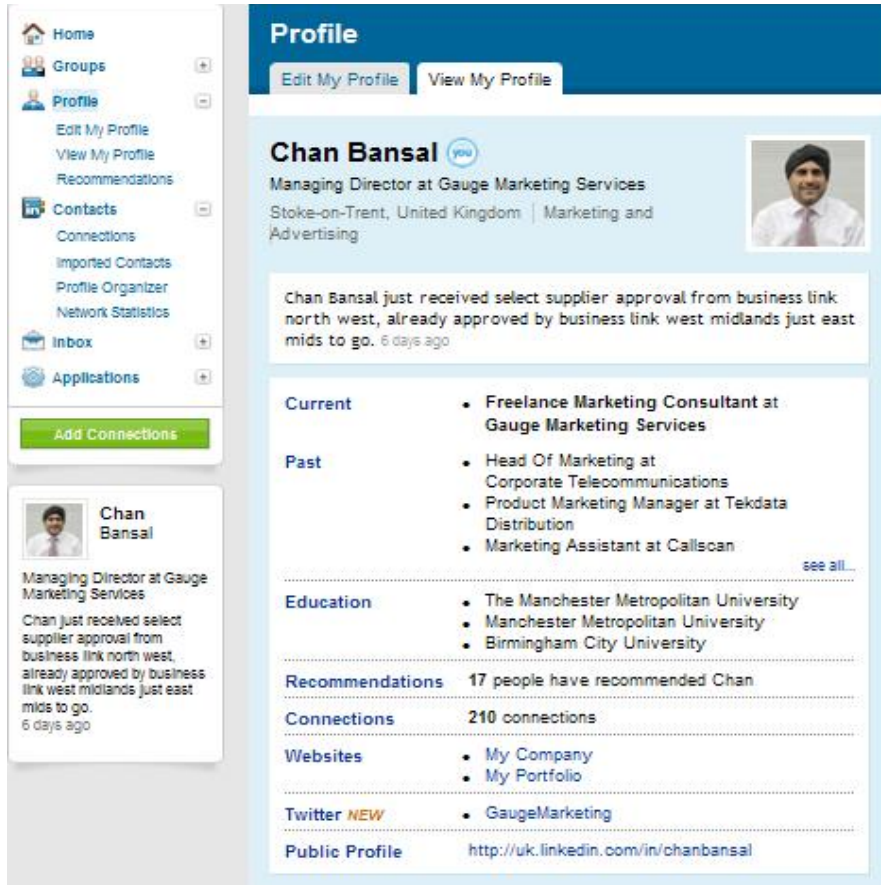
9. Be vocal

Once you've joined a group, make sure to contribute. Comment on discussions. Start your own threads. Ask questions. Get your name out there rather than just lurking and listening to what others are saying. It all adds value and gives you more exposure.

10. Don't go connection crazy

This is where a lot of people get it wrong. It is not about having thousands of connections to people you barely know. It is about having good quality connections that can really make a difference. Around 70 connections still connects you to a network of around 750,000 people. Even if only 10% are targeted customers that is still 75,000 people. The goal should be to get 90 to 100 good and relevant connections.

Overleaf is a snapshot of our Managing Director's LinkedIn profile.

The screenshot shows a LinkedIn profile for Chan Bansal. The profile is titled 'Profile' and includes buttons for 'Edit My Profile' and 'View My Profile'. The main header identifies Chan Bansal as the Managing Director at Gauge Marketing Services, located in Stoke-on-Trent, United Kingdom, with a focus on Marketing and Advertising. A recent activity update states: 'Chan Bansal just received select supplier approval from business link north west, already approved by business link west midlands just east mids to go. 6 days ago'. The profile lists his current role as 'Freelance Marketing Consultant at Gauge Marketing Services' and his past roles as 'Head Of Marketing at Corporate Telecommunications', 'Product Marketing Manager at Tekdata Distribution', and 'Marketing Assistant at Callscan'. His education includes 'The Manchester Metropolitan University', 'Manchester Metropolitan University', and 'Birmingham City University'. He has 17 recommendations and 210 connections. His websites are 'My Company' and 'My Portfolio'. His Twitter handle is 'GaugeMarketing'. The public profile URL is 'http://uk.linkedin.com/in/chanbansal'.

For more information about how we can help your business to tap into the benefits of social media, contact Gauge Marketing Services today on 01782 646777 or email us at info@gaugemarketing.co.uk.



About Gauge Marketing Services

Gauge Marketing Services is an outsourced provider of marketing services to B2B clients.

We work for a range of clients across the North West, West Midlands and East Midlands and from a number of industry sectors. Although we have particular expertise in the IT and Telecoms markets.

We can work remotely, acting as your complete outsourced marketing department. We can help your existing marketing department cope with excess demand, so they are not overstretched. Or we can work with you on a project-by-project basis - so you only use us when you need us.

For us, size doesn't matter. Whether you are new start-up business that needs general marketing advice, or a large corporate looking for fresh ideas, no job is too large or too small. Whatever your marketing needs, we can help.

By outsourcing your marketing, you allow yourself to concentrate on what you do best, while we focus on what we do best - delivering innovative, effective and measurable marketing campaigns.

We also work with manufacturers to find and appoint good fit distributors, dealers and resellers partners in the UK.