

Adding social media to business strategy

The launch of Social Media Week (SMW) this week around the world, celebrated social media's trends, best practices and impact on business, society and culture.

According to Steve Jones, head of strategy of Fontera Digital Works, SMW highlights the profound impact social media has on society and the opportunities these platforms can create for South African businesses going forward.



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Growing fast

"In South Africa, social media is growing faster than ever before and has evolved from being a peer-to-peer communication device to a platform where current news, opinion and brand credibility is built and shared. Businesses not yet making use of these communication channels are missing out on tremendous opportunities."

He says that if managed correctly, social media can help businesses market themselves to a strategically targeted audience making use of a relatively cost effective budget. "The challenging part of managing a business is attracting the correct types of clientèle which are interested in purchasing the products or services on offer. Social media websites such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn and Pinterest present an opportunity for businesses to grab the attention of potential customers while instantaneously building the brand's image.

"Social media also provides businesses with insight into their target audience, which helps to strategically target the audience correctly. Information about your audience's profile, location and interests is a major advantage and helps in avoiding the incorrect audience."

There are many tactics that businesses can make use of to market themselves, including the creation of brand profiles on social networks, such as Facebook fan pages and creative advertising via branded podcasts and apps. "Word of mouth is the most powerful sales tool. Individuals often trust the opinions of their 'Friends' or 'Followers' more than traditional print and broadcast advertising mediums and therefore an influencer 'liking' or interacting with a brand on Facebook can influence others to do the same."

Strategy needed

Many South African businesses still do not have a social media strategy in place. "A business should first have a proper strategy in place to make progress. The first step is to invest in social media consultants who have the experience and 'know how' to launch a business on the most relevant social media platforms. You would not hand the keys of your car to someone who cannot drive, and similarly should ensure that social media staff are properly trained.

"Once applicable social media platforms have been identified, it is a good idea to create an editorial calendar that includes key phrases and topics, rich content, themes, and industry events. When it comes to maintaining a social media page one of the most important factors to take into consideration is ensuring that commentary, be it tweets or posts, are interesting conversation starters. Furthermore, don't overload your audience with information as it will often just become noise to them."

He also warns that in the internet age response-time expectations cannot exceed one hour during work hours. "Respond to comments in real time. The purpose of social media is to communicate in the 'now'," he concludes.

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