

Five social media pitfalls that SMEs should avoid

 By [Steven Cohen](#)

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Social media is a powerful tool for the small business owner. It can help you to build customer relationships, improve your search engine optimisation, and create a buzz about your business.

Yet unwary small businesses can harm their businesses more than they help them if they don't have a strategy about how they will manage their social media accounts and their social conversations with customers. Here are a few mistakes that SMEs should avoid as they roll out their social media plans.

1. Underestimating the work load

At first blush, this social media thing looks easy. All you need to do is post some short-form content everyday as well as check your social networks for mentions of your business and responses to your posts, right?

But you'll soon discover that posting interesting content and keeping pace with activity from your fans and followers will absorb plenty of your time. Build time to manage your social network accounts into your schedule or make sure that you have someone you can trust in your team to take care of it for you.

And as tempting as it may seem, don't try to be everywhere. You don't necessarily need to be on LinkedIn, Google+, Facebook, Pinterest, AND Twitter. Start by choosing two networks and do a good job on them before branching out onto other sites.

2. Lacking a content plan

Signing up for an account with Twitter or Facebook is the easy part. Once you have a presence on social media, you need to post regular content to make the most of it. There's nothing worse than a social media account that is never updated, except perhaps one outdated with a bland automated feed.



Think about what sort of content you'll post and when, aligning it with your plans for promos, PR and marketing. Prepare content in advance - perhaps create a schedule of posts at the beginning of the week and draw them up in advance.

Producing content can be expensive if you ask a professional, and time-consuming if you do it yourself. Look at what content you can use from your website or newsletters in social media, and don't be shy to "curate" relevant content from

other sources, too (see point 4).

3. Managing your business and professional social presence as one

The lines between the personal and professional often blur in the world of social media. Depending on your personal brand and the image you want to project for your business, it may well be beneficial to run one Twitter or LinkedIn account for yourself and for your company. But think carefully about the image you wish to project for your business as well as how your customers will respond.

Will your customers be charmed, irritated or bored to know that you're a father of two with a fondness for golf? And what are the dangers for your business of posting something personal and controversial on a company profile? Tread carefully - take your real-world relationships with your customers as a guideline for how to project your personal and company brands in social media.

4. Hard-selling

One of the biggest mistakes that SMEs make in social media is to see it as a sales tool. Yes, it can help you to grow awareness of your product, bring traffic to your website, and get sales leads, but don't think of it as a place for hard-selling.

Customers will not follow you on social media for sales pitches. They will follow you to find relevant information that they can use in their day to day lives. That means you can benefit from being an advisor to them rather than blasting them with advertising.

For example, don't throw ad copy about why your solar heating is the best at your followers. Rather, link them to resources about living with load-shedding or choosing the right solar solution to minimise power costs.

If you find independent content that reflects your thinking, don't be shy to share it if you think your customers will find it interesting. This positions you with the customer as an expert and a trusted advisor rather than as a pesky salesperson.

5. Not preparing for a crisis

If you're on social media, customers will talk to you and about you. At some point, you will encounter someone who is unhappy with your service or your product. Sometimes, the customer will be right but reasonable, and you'll be able to sort the problem out.

Other times, you may encounter someone who is belligerent, after a freebie, or simply having a bad day. Think about what sort of complaints and criticisms customers could voice about your business online, and how you will respond to them. Often, if you're responsive enough, you can turn a complaining customer into one of your biggest advocates. But if you ignore a small criticism, it can easily turn into a full-blown crisis for your business.

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