

USING THE POWER OF THE INTERNET TO NETWORK

If you've been trying to grow your business by attending as many "meet and greets" as you can, you'll be happy to discover a better way: social networking. Online social network sites, whether they are networks like Facebook or Twitter, or social news sites like Digg, offer a myriad of opportunities to meet and greet people all around the world, instead of just your little corner of it.

These days, getting online can help you market yourself by increasing your business exposure and helping you create core groups of friends and acquaintances online without having to even gas up your car. You can build a demographic of people interested in your products and services, and you can learn where these people congregate too. The power of the Internet can work exponentially to build exposure as people start to gather online and network virtually.

MAKING CONTACTS

The backbone of a good marketing campaign is the contact list, and it's no different on the Internet. Without a contact list, you don't know who is interested enough to buy your products. Typically, the list can be composed of people who have already bought your products, or who expressed interest in your business by being put on a mailing list. Online, your email manager can hold your contact list, and on social networking sites, it can be your fans or friends that join you or follow you online. It can be anyone within your demographic who has a potential to be a customer later too.

Unlike a list that people sign up to in a retail store, online people are going to look at your profile first to decide whether they want to befriend you or subscribe to your blog. You have to have some way to sell yourself online, and that's typically through the profile and content of your website. And, you have to make it easy for them to sign up.

INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Before you can even start to network or create a contact, you have to introduce yourself. In real life, you would look someone in the eye as you firmly shook their hand, and told them who you are. Online, you have to try

to do the equivalent, except that you don't actually meet the other person. It's all virtual.

So, you want to make a good impression, even when you are not online, because you never know when someone will stop by. For that, you need to put some careful thought into your profile and always include a picture of yourself. You wouldn't try to meet a prospective customer with a bag over your head or a picture of a cartoon pasted on it in real life, and doing that on the Internet just makes it seem you don't want to be genuine.

Authenticity on social networks is highly valued, and the more you project the image of who you really are, the better chance that you will link up with people who share your values and interests. This is particularly important online, where anyone can become your friend, even if they may have no interest whatsoever in who you are, or what you do. So, you need to focus your profile information and anything that you put online to develop the demographic that you want.

DEMOGRAPHICS

You want to make sure everything you do helps you to tie into the demographics that are most likely to help your Internet marketing, if that's your aim. For that, you have to already have a good idea of who has an interest in your products and services. Then, increase your exposure with that crowd by joining groups, attending online events, and befriending these people. Go where this group goes and make your presence felt online by commenting, adding a link, and being personable.

You can also attract your demographic by helping to disseminate information helpful to this group, even if it's not your own copy. You can post URLs and keep people updated on things that interest them. Then, they will come to your profile when they want news on particular topics of interest to them.

NETWORKING

Once you know you're attracting the right people into your fold, you can start to network some more online. You can join blogs or create your own blog. You can create a sales page on Facebook. You can hold a non-profit fundraiser online. You can get noticed by the mainstream media. You might even go viral. Any activity that you do online ends up being residual content that stays up for the life of that website, adding to your credibility and fan base. Every year, you can end up making more and more contacts, just through the sheer power of inertia, in that something that you put in motion will stay in motion until a greater force stops it.

But, this doesn't just happen all by itself. In order to network successfully, you have to adopt a strategy that is going to get you noticed. You have to be consistent in posting and keeping up with people who comment, fan, befriend, or follow you online. When you are first starting up, it is going to take some time to promote yourself online, but once you start getting the hang of it, it becomes easier and easier.

PROMOTION

Online promotion is as hard or as easy as you make it. Having a little money to start can significantly reduce the amount of time you spend promoting your content and yourself online. Otherwise, you will have to be the person adding information and keeping up with everything. But, even then, promotion online is far easier than promoting yourself in a real life situation, because the power of the Internet increases your visibility.

Think about trying to get noticed in at a convention where 300 vendors are all competing for the few thousand of people who show up. All the noise and distraction might make it likely that you end up with fifty people noticing you, if you just stand in your booth and wait for people to walk by. If you decide to add some element that increases your attractiveness, like a giveaway contest at your booth, then you might end up attracting 100 or more, doubling the amount of attention. Now, if you have four or five sales people in your booth and they each go to different areas of the floor and peddle your booth's offerings, they might persuade more people to visit, as they promote the giveaway contest. But, still, you are going to be limited by how many people actually walk to your booth and how many people enter your contest, to determine how many contacts you make that day.

Using that same analogy, you now are one of millions of websites on the Internet trying to grab some attention. Sounds impossible, doesn't it, especially if you don't have a task force of sales people to direct traffic to your site. So, what do you do? Well, you simply go to various corners of the Internet where you know people in your demographics congregate, and you place a sign with a link back to your virtual booth (website). If you can hire affiliates to help you do that too, you have one heck of a powerful promotion machine set up to drive large amounts of traffic back to your offerings.

Now, what if you got all your friends, fans, people who followed you to do this all for free? Social networking can do that for you, if you know how to promote on social networks in a fashion that is compelling and friendly. Just be sure to offer them something that is of value and you will be able to exploit the network of friends and people who link to you in a way that seems almost magical – all for free. So, now your contact list isn't just for potential customers, but it's also to start generating an unpaid sales force by

appealing to the social networking aspect of information gathering and dissemination.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLES USING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Now, that you understand what you are trying to do when you are on a social networking site, let's offer some specific examples. Just keep in mind that we won't be able to cover every possibility as the permutations are endless and limited only by your creativity. Every day, someone thinks up a new way, using a new social networking site, that enables them to boost their traffic stream exponentially and then the crush to the exit door is on. It's like a fire has been set and Internet marketers around the world seem to pick these strategies up almost telepathically, but most likely, they are out on webmaster and Internet marketing forums where new strategies are being discussed. So, let's start with some very quick examples on very well known social networks and give you a few that aren't as well known to get your creative juices flowing. Pretty soon, you will understand the basis is always the same, and you can do it with any site. To recap,

1. Create a landing page for your offer or website,
2. Creatively market to get contact information,
3. Promote your link on social network sites,
4. Try to get others to promote for you too, for free.

FACEBOOK

You can set up a profile fairly easily on Facebook and hook into all the people you know just by downloading your email address book. They will be invited to friend you and once they do, you have a good basis to start generating more friends. So, create a compelling and attractive profile that falls in line with the demographic you are trying to attract. Then, once you have a core group of friends, so you don't look socially inept, you can start to try and figure out how to get more contacts within your specific demographic so that you can start promoting your offerings.

Before we start to get into that, just be aware that spamming people or soliciting them directly is against the terms of the service agreement. You will have to start to engage in the art of the soft sell in order to be able to work within Facebook. One key to making more friends is not to put up a profile that labels you as an online Internet marketer right away. People do check out the profile to figure out why you want to friend them, and if they

see that, they are likely to run the other way. Make it authentic, but be more casual, friendly, and less business oriented.

Okay, you've joined and now you want to start building exposure. Again, the key is to get more contacts into your contact list. You'll be limited to 5,000 in Facebook, so make it good, but there are other ways to go beyond that limit and remain on Facebook. One thing you don't want to do is ADD TOO MANY FRIENDS AT ONCE. This is a red flag to the Facebook administrators who will ban your account for being a spammer. So, let's repeat:

When adding friends, choose only 20 or 30 a day so as not to get yourself banned!

BUILDING CONTACTS IN FACEBOOK

Here are few ways to start building contacts in your demographics to increase your online exposure:

Join the right networks – When you first start, Facebook will ask you to pick a network(s), which will either be a school or a geographical location. Pick an area where you are thinking of doing the most business, or where you have the most contacts. Once in that network, you can get friends from there by browsing profiles that area available for people within that network.

Leverage friends of friends – So, you've signed up, gotten a few friends, and noticed that (wow!) one of your friends has thousands of friends. Take a look at the friends list and see if you know of any or if they are in your network. Then, ask them to friend you. Remember to keep it slow and steady, less than 20 or 30 a day.

Join groups – Join groups and then post to the wall. Befriend group members in the same group. There are even groups for people with no friends who want more friends, but that's not targeted to your demographic. You should pick a group that is targeted to your demographic.

Have fun! - Set up applications and join fun games and activities that expose you to more people online. It's best to pick an application that has something to do with your niche, so that you are attracting the right core group. So, if you were interested in marketing green products, you might join the L'il Green application to meet more people there by maintaining their online plants. There are literally thousands of applications you can investigate and leverage to create more friends on your targeted list.

PROMOTING YOUR OFFERINGS ON FACEBOOK

Whether it's a website landing page, a blog with affiliate marketing, or any other type of product or service you want to promote, you start with the contact list. Then, you use the features of the site to help get the word out by starting to use the features that tend to be more "newsy" and viral. For Facebook, these features start the ball rolling quite nicely:

Status updates – There is a feature where you get to broadcast to your friends what you are doing. You can also add links there to different pages on the Internet. Try to include valuable information and not just a link to a sales page, because it can get you some unwanted notice from the admins. But, other than that, you can use it to lead traffic back to your website, blogs, articles, and any other content you want to promote on the web.

Comment on other people's updates – What's the point of sending out information only to your own friends? Why not hook into other friends and add a link where appropriate? When you comment on the status, it goes into the newsfeed and their friends see it too. It also gets put on their wall. Just don't spam or solicit overtly and you should be fine.

Share a link, post – Like some web post you saw online? Why not share the link or post on your wall? Your friends will see it in the newsfeed and it will stay on your wall too.

Upload photos and comment – Photos tend to gather much more attention than text. So, add some good photos and link them to your niche or market. If they get commented on a lot, they can go viral fairly quickly.

Create your own application – It's not as hard as it sounds since it's basically just a collection of images. Then, you add it to the application market place and wait for others to install it. You can put your URL in various places and gather a lot of promotion this way.

Promote a blog on Facebook – There are a number of people who have set up blog networks on Facebook and can be a great way to network your blog with other bloggers, create more friends from subscribers, and promote the heck out of your blog. If your blog has advertising on it, you can even make some nice change.

TWITTER

Twitter is the nanobyte social network for people with attention-deficit disorder. Seriously, it is a very curt way to keep in touch with people by sending 140 character messages that can be "followed" by interested parties all over the Internet. This may seem like the weirdest form of social network, but it has landed people jobs in a matter of hours in a tight economy, and in some cases, given people a virtual peek at a mass media event from a first-hand up-to-the-minute account of serial messages aptly labeled "tweets."

BUILDING CONTACTS ON TWITTER

In order to build your contact list on Twitter, all you have to do is either add your email list to search for them on Twitter, or you can search by name. You can also just start with one friend you know, who knows mutual friends and then start following them. Generally, when you follow someone, they do you the courtesy of adding you to their follow list too. But, if you don't know anyone on Twitter, and you only have a few friends there, how do you expand your list, and more importantly make it targeted to a specific demographic?

The answer isn't obvious because Twitter has no groups or categories that people join. You can use the search box at the top right corner of Twitter to search for locations, words, or names that might show up in a Twitter profile, but not everyone really goes as far as to make a good profile.

Another way to do this is to use a tool called TweetScan. There you can search topics, people, places, and everything. This looks for these items within the tweets and so you can find better demographics this way. And, if you're not sure, when you add a person, whether they're a friend of a friend or found through some other tool like TweetScan, all you have to do is follow conversations for a while to figure out if they really are in your demographic.

PROMOTING YOUR OFFERINGS ON TWITTER

Here again, you can't spam people. You're going to use some of the same strategies, though, to get more exposure. Exposure here would be the number of people following your tweets, not the number of tweets you follow. So, to promote yourself, you have to join the conversation! You want to start posting some interesting conversation related to the demographic you are trying to target in 140 character chunks. The more people who get interested in your feed, the more people follow you.

There are groups that you can join also outside of Twitter that get many of their members from Twitter. This would be a perfect example of getting into an area where you can harvest followers. All you have to do is find such groups, join them, and then get them to follow you too.

Since there are no obvious groups on Twitter, you can find some that specialize in grouping Twitter feeds by category topic or location, and they also allow you to add your URL there too! That's a perfect way to promote your Twitter feed. Once such place is a wiki called Twitterpacks and is located at <http://twitterpacks.pbwiki.com>.

Since you're limited to 165 characters, it becomes even more important to make the links you post in the tweet as small as possible. You can do this using services like <http://www.tinyurl.com> which converts longer URLs into more manageable links. This is indispensable if you are tweeting about some new post or site you've updated with your marketing offerings. Just remember not to do this all the time, or you'll be labeled a spammer and your followers will dump you pronto, probably not soon after they report you to the administrators. So, while you can do this off and on, doing it 100% of the time is a sure way to get your account bumped. The same is true if you follow too many people at one time or add too many followers at one time. These are classic red signals that you are a spammer and unwelcome in social networking sites. So, keep it real and keep it cozy.

To automate some of your promotions, you can use tools like TweetDeck and Tweetlater, at <http://www.tweetdeck.com> and <http://www.tweetlater.com> respectively. These tools will allow you to schedule your tweets, shorten your URLs automatically without going to tinyurl and they can help you manage your followers by sending out autoresponder direct messages and following anyone automatically who follows you. That's a whole lot of work that you don't have to do, and yet it gives you the feel of being present within the social network as often as you want, without having to sit at your computer while doing it.

SOCIAL BOOKMARKING

Often, people don't understand the power of social bookmarking. They think it's rather strange to sit and submit URLs to bookmark sites. They don't see the point, until those sites start to bring in readers and traffic back to the original URL. Then, the light bulb goes on, and they are trying to locate as many social bookmarking sites out there as they can and trying to tag and submit whenever possible. Here we'll discuss some of the great social bookmarking sites out there AND also how to automate the process for you and your readers, so that you put your online exposure into hyperdrive.

Here are some of the best social bookmarking sites out there:

Digg

This is a social news site where you add content that is rated by other people online. The higher your rating, the more likelihood you land on

the front page of Digg and get massive Internet exposure. And, it never hurts to get just a few thumbs up on your content either. This is located at <http://www.digg.com>.

Newsvine

Some of the major mainstream media are trying to incorporate some social discussion boards into their stories. You can sign up for an account and you can also submit bookmarked pages to them. This one is located at <http://www.newsvine.com>.

Sometimes it seems like there are more social bookmarking sites than there are pores on our skin, and we can't possibly link into all of them. However, you can get a tool that allows you to submit to at least 47 of the major social bookmarking sites in 10 to 20 minutes, by automating the entire process. This can really ramp up your exposure, and it keeps you from having to learn every new interface and social bookmarking site out there.

So while social bookmarking doesn't really help you to make contacts, it's an excellent tool for promotion purposes.

SOCIAL GROUPS, NETWORKS

You can also join any number of individually owned or non-profit groups and social networks that are sprouting up all over the place. Try to pick ones that have the same market niche as your website offerings. Once you join, you need to actively participate, in order to be valued as an expert or person of interest and to get more attention. So, there are a few things you need to keep in mind as you are out traveling the social network highway.

BE AUTHENTIC

Social networks are not for putting out a fake marketing image. That quickly gets you disrespected and dropped as a friend. Put up a good photo of yourself as next to no photo, icons and cartoons, tend to also draw very little attention. It makes it seem as if you're hiding behind a mask and people relate better to images of other people instead of pictures that have no personal meaning.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION TONE CASUAL

This isn't a marketing presentation, nor a slick sales trick. It's a relationship between you and another human being. So, keep the conversation style friendly and casual. By all means, do not post or write anything that is going to reflect badly on you, no matter how irate someone else might be. Instead,

you do have the option to drop people who are flammers or trying to bait you into arguments.

MAKE YOUR LINKS INTERESTING

Your links are what are going to drive traffic back to your offerings, so make them interesting. Don't just say, "Click here." No one is going to do that. Instead, comment briefly on the link in a casual, conversational, tone and let people find out for themselves if it's what you think. For instance, you can say, if you are selling mortgage loans, "Top 10 reasons you're decline for a mortgage" and then offer the link. If you do this in a status update, you will find that people having this issue will click into it. And, if your page also has a program they can join to fix their credit or get approved, hey, that's great, right? You've just solved a customer's problem and made some money too!

SHOW OFF YOUR EXPERTISE

It's funny, but in real life, you'd be the bore of the party if you just spouted off everything you knew or offered URLs to places with pithy information. Online, you become the party hound with this style because people are HUNGRY for relevant and timely news that provides real solutions to their life. They wouldn't be on there otherwise. If you can prove that you are the expert in your particular market niche, people will come to you when they have a problem, look things up in your blogs, your website, your social networking profiles or email you directly. So, be sure to be accessible and be sure to show off your expertise too.

APPEAL TO IDENTITY

Lastly, the #1 reason people like social networks is because it appeals to their identity. They get to talk about who they are, what they like, and what makes them tick. Exploit that and really listen to what your friends and connections are saying to you. You can even set up polls to get their input on what they like best about their cars, if you are selling cars online, what feature of health drinks are the best (vitamins, taste, exotic, minerals) and offer them a free discount coupon on the next purchase of you Acai berry juice that you sell online. The trick is to get them to start talking about themselves and then offer some way to tie that into your market niche. Doing that, you will have tons of people lining up to give you not only valuable market feedback, but probably taking you up on your offer to buy a can of your health drink too. And, they will love you for it too.