

## A SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE FOR FLORAL RETAILERS AND WHOLESALERS

### The Big Picture

#### Traditional vs Social Media Marketing

Marketers today are experiencing one of the most profound shifts in the business environment since the introduction of television advertising. As the television viewing audience grew, marketers were able to reach millions of consumers and introduce them to innovative new products. The result was increased demand for consumer products that fueled more growth in an already expanding economy.

In contrast to the post-war economy, current economic conditions are restrictive. The influence of a challenging economy is changing buying behaviors. Recent studies show over 80% of all consumers do not trust larger companies, and are therefore more to do business with local business they can trust. This is why every Fortune 500 corporation now has a presence on social media, as they seek to build relationships with customers, ultimately earning their trust. They know that a business that has a connection to the customer is more likely to earn their trust.

Florists and growers, like other small businesses, are ideally positioned to take advantage of the influences of social media to capitalize on their relationships within local communities. Properly implemented, social media can extend and amplify current marketing practices, while also to some extent replacing them, thereby more effectively using marketing dollars.

#### Every small business is now a media company

Consumers have a voice and they are being heard. Social media has led to the democratization of media, making the collective voice of millions of consumers increasingly powerful. The challenge for businesses is to leverage that power by favorably engaging it with their business brand.

Small businesses that have grown through personal relationships in their local communities should be discovering this new opportunity for networking and marketing is one for which they are ideally suited. The new opportunity social media brings works to build relationships that build sales – which is how most small businesses have grown to where are today. Yet, social media accomplishes that more quickly, easily, and with greater amplification. And it is doing this at a time when consumers are hungry for information, interaction, and inclusion.

The Internet has given consumers full access to information – and businesses have the same access. Thanks to social media, every small business today is—or should be—its own media company. Your business also has a voice and responsibilities to the communities you serve. Your business is now a publisher, broadcaster, commentator, and educator. Recognize your responsibilities as a media company and make contributions that add to the conversation and clarify the truth.

## **Content Marketing and Business Experience**

Progressive small businesses are actively educating their constituents by sharing relevant information that communicates, clarifies, engages and otherwise solves problems. This practice has come to be known as content marketing.

Consumers are hungry for insider secrets that they can only learn from business owners who know what is happening behind the scenes. They want a deeper understanding and connection to the company with which they do business. They are searching for this information online, and if your company happens to be sharing its expertise, you position yourself as the go-to expert in your local community.

Technology aside, the most important thing about social media is that it is humanizing businesses – making them friendlier and more trustworthy. Most customers today prefer to do business with companies run by “real” people that they can relate to. Not only does content marketing amplify the expertise and reputation of your business with laser accuracy, but the engagement that social media brings works to create connections between your business and new prospects that can be engaged with your sales process.

## **Engaging with Your Communities**

To understand how to operate your business in this social media influenced environment is to be especially aware of the humanizing aspects of the platform. One could argue that understanding the influences of social, and designing your business around them, is a requirement for using social media effectively. Using social media can bring you closer to customers and others who are interested in what you have to say.

Looking at this another way, when you start to consider the larger picture – that social media is much more than a tool; you will learn how to use it more effectively. Tools are just implements for getting a job done. Yet, when one takes the time to learn more about the context in which they are used, those results will indeed be enhanced, and more effective.

Businesses should go beyond social media technologies to rethink and redesign themselves around the principles of social – the very things that have worked to grow your business before the advent of this new medium that is transforming how we all do business in a post-mass marketing environment. The most vital skill for making social media work is the wisdom that comes from years of business experience. That experience, and the people skills that are derived from it, are essential for building the essential social context that is necessary for first being discovered online, and then later leading to personal engagement.

## **Social is Now Central to Business**

People are hardwired to connect and engage with others. This is why it is important to understand the influences of social media on business in general, as well as using it to better understand and serve your customers. Integrating social media practices into your marketing more than adding a new layer to dress up old practices to make them fresh and relevant.

Here are the relevant social qualities that are now part of the fabric of our business environment. Integrate them into your business processes to make it relevant for your customers.

**1. Visibility** - What makes social media so effective for small businesses are the countless ways for enhancing your visibility. Creating a distributed presence on multiple social networks using multi-media is essential for building a presence that ensures the relevance of your business.

**2. Authenticity** – Consumers want to have a relationship with your company. They want to know what's going on behind the scenes. They are curious and that curiosity has to be fed for those relationships to endure.

**3. Accessibility** – The web gives everyone more access to people, companies, and causes. This has conditioned consumers to expect to have open access to your business – and especially with you if you happen to be the owner, CEO, or one of the leaders in the business.

**4. Community** –It is no longer possible to be a successful business without having a meaningful connection with the communities you serve. Communities are the new markets. They equally serve the needs of businesses and the people within them. This is why businesses that are locally engaged have distinct advantages.

**5. Personalization** – As everyone gets more comfortable with social media, personalization will become a necessary an increasingly necessary quality to make your business messaging attractive. Personalization adds context to what is being communicated. What is being said is often less important than who is

saying it, in what context, and for what implied purpose. The distrust of advertising is also fueling the need for more personal communications.

**6. Relevance** – When you build relationships in communities and personalize your business, you enhance your opportunities for alignment with your ideal customers – those that find your solutions to be most relevant. Furthermore, you minimize the possibility of attracting customers that are not right for you, which simplifies your life while enhancing your business profitability.

**7. Media** – There has never been a better time to be a business marketer, especially for start-ups and small businesses with limited budgets. Now that you control your media presence, you can use your creative skills to more readily accomplish your business objectives, while also enjoying both the flexibility and control that social media affords anyone who is willing to commit to using it well.

## **Branding and Social Context**

Ford Motor Company Chief Marketing Officer Jim Farley recently quoted research that indicates 40% of all consumers do not trust large companies. This is precisely why Ford has made a concerted effort over the last 5 years to embrace both social and social media – shifting marketing dollars from traditional media channels to social channels. A notable success was a \$15,000 investment in [a video](#) that earned nearly 40 million views within the first few months after its posting. Compare that payoff to a roughly \$3 million dollar investment in a Super Bowl ad that may result in 10 million impressions. Small investments in social media campaigns well done can have a profound impact.

When you give your customers content that is interesting and entertaining, educational, or useful in some way – they will share what happens after that is more than likely something that serves to create conversations that will provide clues to what your customers appreciate about your brand – and how you can give them more of it. This is something that is not possible with traditional marketing.

Ford Motor is doing well these days because they have designed their business around social. As Ford CMO Jim Farley notes: “Cars are social objects.” Think about that. When you get a new car that you are really excited about you want to share your joy with your friends. You want to take them for a ride. That’s marketing that is driven by the customer – the one who really owns the brand.

The customer may not always be right, but they will always have a voice – and that gives them influence over your brand. Traditional marketing and advertising was a process in which the enterprise controlled the brand. They had the facts, the expertise, and the resources with which to shape the brand identity. Now customers can communicate their message equally well. It doesn’t matter if they are right or wrong in their beliefs, they will still be heard.

If cars and trucks are the social objects for Ford Motor Company, what are the social objects of your business, the products and services that when enthusiastically shared will bring you more business? Design your business around social and your customers will do your marketing for you – that’s what it means to let your customers own your brand. Flowers and plants are also social objects. People like to share what they received as a gift or bought for themselves with their friends. These naturally social products are ideal content for social media.

### **Build Your Social Marketing Platform**

“The social version of anything is more engaging and will outperform non-social.” That’s a direct quote from an interview with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg at the 2010 Web 2.0 Summit. He noted that we are all hard-wired to connect and engage with other people. Knowing this, why not consider giving them a platform for expressing themselves.

While Ford obviously has resources to more readily accomplish this, your small business can do the same with a blog or Facebook page. All you have to do is set a few guidelines, encourage the conversation, and be an active participant. This requires an investment in time, but is nonetheless doable. If you happen to be the leader of your business, you can enlist others from within or outside of your company to publish content – just as long as you are the one personally handling the engagement.