

Top 7 Characteristics of Successful Brands on Social Media

With the volume of competition that businesses face in the world of social media, it's never been more important to stand out and develop a unique identity and value proposition through strategic branding. While it's obviously important to offer a quality product or service, effective branding is often at the heart of the companies that thrive.

According to Jerry McLaughlin, "brand is the perception someone holds in their head about you, a product, a service, an organization, a cause, or an idea. Brand building is the deliberate and skillful application of effort to create a desired perception in someone else's mind."

Let's explore the common characteristics of successful brands, so you can build your social brand strategy accordingly:

1. AUDIENCE KNOWLEDGE

The best brands have a thorough understanding of the demographics of their target market, what their interests are, and how they communicate. Unless it's a mega chain like Wal-Mart, most businesses have a specific target audience they're pursuing. Understanding the target market is critical because it provides direction for the tone and reach of a social media name in a campaign, along with the overall identity of a brand, while helping to create an organic, human connection between a business and its audience.

Trying to appeal to everyone (ie, ignoring the concept of a target market) can be counterproductive, causing a company's brand to become diluted. Finding the right branding approach requires first understanding the target market.

2. UNIQUENESS

Establishing a brand identity requires something distinctive. For instance, Apple has become known worldwide for their innovative products and minimalistic, aesthetic appeal. When it comes to service companies, Domino's Pizza used to guarantee that their pizza would arrive in 30 minutes or it'd be free. In terms of a selling point, TOMS shoes donates a free pair of shoes to a child in need for every pair of shoes that are bought.

Creating an identity on social media doesn't demand

a revolutionary idea. It simply needs to have one special thing that separates it from the competition. In reality, it's possible to be "a one trick pony" as long as that trick is really good. Once a company figures out what that is, it can concentrate on it and should gain recognition on social platforms.

Do you know what your unique product, service, or selling point is within your niche? If not, start there when building your branding strategy.

3. PASSION

While it's certainly possible to build a social following in the short-term without passion, it's almost impossible to sustain it in the long run. When you examine massively successful people like Steve Jobs, they all have a serious passion that keeps propelling them to work hard and continually deliver greatness. That passion leads to enthusiasm and genuine joy, which is infectious.

Consumers often become just as enthusiastic about a product or service, leading to word of mouth advertising and referrals. Passion also helps businesses persevere through inevitable setbacks.

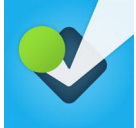
4. CONSISTENCY

When consumers come back to a business for repeat sales, they usually expect to receive the same level of quality as they did the first time. Restaurants and their food and service quality are a great example of this.

No one wants to deal with a social brand they can't rely on for consistency. Otherwise, why would they follow that brand in the first place? With so many industries being saturated with competitors, inconsistency is often enough of a reason for consumers to take their business elsewhere.

That's why it's so important to adhere to a certain quality standard with a product or service. An example of a brand who offers amazing consistency is McDonald's. This powerhouse of the fast food world provides patrons with a menu that's consistent across the world. Whether someone orders in Florida or China, they know that a Big Mac is going to taste the same. Take that level of consistent quality to your social media posts, and you'll endear your customers to your brand.

Which Network Should I Use?

 PINTEREST	 YOUTUBE/VINE	 LINKEDIN	 TWITTER/FACEBOOK	 GOOGLE+	 FOURSQUARE
Visually-appealing products, such as food or clothing.	Any product or service.	B2B companies, primarily.	All companies should participate.	All companies should participate; boost in search engine rankings.	Locally-serving, brick-and-mortar companies.

7 Types of Social Media Networks to Leverage

If there's one message that you take away from this section, I hope it's that a one size fits all approach to social media marketing isn't effective. Instead, it's important to use real data and audience insights to inform your choice of network and evaluate your campaign's progress over time. That being said, your marketing decisions need to be made within the broader context of the social media landscape and how it's developing.

As trends emerge, general data about what's working is shared and user interest spikes in specific networks, it's important to be aware of these data points. Your exploration of whether they apply to your business is the most important part of the process. However, with this in mind, here are seven social networks (and types of networks) every social media marketer should consider when working to identify the right networks for your audience and business goals.

1. PINTEREST & OTHER IMAGE-BASED NETWORKS:

While Pinterest may be primarily a tool to connect with consumers, it plays a role in the B2B world as well. Other popular social media platforms with a visual spin include Visual.ly and Instagram. The lessons for succeeding on visual networks are simple:

- *Find the visual angle to your brand.* Whether that's showcasing your products or your zany behind-the-scenes office culture, taking a visual approach can supplement all your other branded work.
- *Leverage data and case studies* to create infographics and other visual explorations of your work.

- *Expand your understanding of branding.* It goes beyond your logo and website, and instead helps answer the question, "How can I visually tell the story of who we are, who we serve and what impact our products and services have in the world?"

2. VIDEO NETWORKS SUCH AS YOUTUBE AND VINE: If you're interested in video, there's never been a better time to use it as a medium to connect with customers. Businesses have a wide range of options available via video, but I recommend the following with recent social media trends in mind:

- Experiment with different video lengths, from ultra-short Vines to more in-depth video content.
- Cross-promote video content on mainstream networks leveraging the latest video oriented tools. These include Twitter Cards and featured videos on LinkedIn profiles.
- Try both scripted and unscripted videos. Sales copy can translate in a powerful way to the video medium, while moments of genius can emerge when the camera is rolling in unscripted moments.

3. LINKEDIN: LinkedIn remains the top network for business-focused social media marketers. Having an active presence isn't enough; marketers need to think about creative ways to leverage innovative features like:

- *Target the Decision Makers:* Numerous features on LinkedIn let you connect directly with decision makers. This is your chance to bypass gatekeepers and connect directly with the people making purchasing decisions and critical recommendations.

- *RowFeeder*

This is another platform designed to measure performance that has caught the attention of notable media companies like Tech Crunch, BBC and Mashable. Their slogan is “social media monitoring and analysis made easy,” and their concept revolves around searching for hashtags or search terms. The data can then be exported to a spreadsheet, charts, or graphs for convenient viewing.

RowFeeder is a bit simpler than the previously mentioned platforms, and can only be integrated with Facebook and Twitter. Nonetheless, it’s helpful for tracking your campaign in detail and seeing how your brand is performing against the competition. Businesses primarily use RowFeeder for:

- Brand Monitoring – tracking what your audience is saying about your brand, products, and competitors
- Campaign Measurement – analyzing factors like reach, participation, and engagement
- Contests & Promotions – tracking Twitter contests that use hashtags
- Market Research – monitoring the conversation for a specific topic, market or multiple topics

- *Social Share Buttons*

Finally, a simple way to determine how much your content is getting shared on various social media sites is by installing social share buttons. For WordPress-based websites, there are many plugins available, which only take a few seconds to install. Once set up, you can see how many times a piece of content has been shared on different networks. More social shares translates to more exposure, and can be a litmus test for determining what sort of content or topics are popular among your audience.

Social media campaigns are much more powerful than the usual ads run on websites. For starters, most campaigns are cost-effective, when the only costs involved are the human resource and time. Social campaigns are often more personal, because they occur on a platform that’s trusted. And with metrics in hand, social campaigns can be enormously fruitful.

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features, no mention of price, no professional voice actors with emotional voice-overs, or even information on how to buy a Mac. Each ad aims to make one point, and one point only: one way in which Macs are better than PCs.

To streamline and simplify your content marketing, think about what your customers actually need to know, and get rid of the rest. Some questions to ask yourself:

- What is our most compelling value proposition?
- What are the most significant benefits of our product to consumers?
- What is the minimum amount of information we can provide to our website visitors to help them make a decision?
- How can we present this information in a simple, uncluttered way?

According to Pat Spenner of CEB, the primary goal of your website or ad copy should be to simplify the decision making process for your customers. You can do this in 3 ways:

1. Help your customers trust the information you provide: One of the best ways to do this is through providing customer ratings and reviews.
2. Help your customers learn about your product: Provide no-nonsense, simplified and streamlined product information that's relevant to each stage of the buying process.
3. Help your customers weigh their options: Be transparent about comparing products and brands so they can make an informed purchase decision.

These days, in a crowded, noisy field of ads and content, less is more. How can you simplify your website copy and advertising to stand out among content that's loud, flashy or overly-complex? How can simplicity work to your advantage among the competition?

6 Steps to Defining Your Target Audience for Your Content Marketing Campaign

Clearly defining your audience makes all the difference when you're creating content. If you're writing a piece about social media management tools, how do you frame it correctly? The answer, of course, all depends on who you're writing for.

Any of the following are reasonable approaches or working titles:

- The basics of social media management software
- Advanced social media management software hacks for entrepreneurs
- An introduction to social media management tools for analysts
- The top 5 free social media management tools
- Social media management tools for a 30 minutes a day social media plan for administrative assistants

What's the major factor that defines whether what you write is hitting the target?

Your audience.

Beginning every campaign with a strong understanding of your audience is one of the best ways to ensure your success. Here's a step by step process to help you do that.

1. WHO ARE THEY?

Every solid audience profile starts with a fundamental understanding of who your audience is. Demographic profiles are limited in their potential to uncover motivations and buying patterns. But they're a great launch point for any discussion. For example, consider the following five people:

- A single male in his early twenties renting an apartment in NYC and making more than \$100,000 a year
- A married mother of four in Wisconsin that is a stay-at-home parent and has a total family income of less than \$40,000 per year
- A divorced father of two residing in Alaska, on a farm, with a net worth of several million dollars
- A couple in their thirties with no children, living in Boston, coping with unemployment

23. **Recommend a tool:** Share a (preferably free) tool or resource you think your followers would find useful.
24. **Share a favorite book:** Similar to #23, share a book recommendation your fans or followers would appreciate.
25. **A day in the life post:** Give a recap of a typical day in the life of a graphic designer, author, CEO, etc.
26. **Recommend your favorite products:** If you're an e-commerce site, share a list of your top sellers or highest-rated products. If you're a service provider, share a list of the products that help you succeed in your business.
27. **Share random tips:** Periodically post a random tip or trick your followers would find useful. Hint: using random tip numbers adds interest to your post (e.g. Tip #256: _____)
28. **Link to your most popular blog post:** Give a brief intro to the post and explain why it's your most read and shared post.
29. **Provide a recommendation:** Share the love by recommending a business you've worked with successfully in the past.
30. **Share a work/life balance tip:** Your social media followers want to know you're a real person with the same struggles as them. Share a tip you've learned for balancing work, life and family.
31. **Ask for advice:** Pose a hypothetical question and ask your followers what they would do in that situation.
32. **Take a trip down memory lane:** Share photos of old logos, websites or your very first product.
33. **Random posts that show you're a real person:** For instance, what you had for dinner last night or what you're doing this weekend.
34. **Share popular Reddit topic:** Visit Reddit's Trending Subreddit page to find popular and trending topics to post about.
35. **Recommend someone else to follow on social media:** Share a link to someone else's social media profile and encourage your fans to 'like' or follow them.
36. **Share a Pinterest board:** If your customers are on Pinterest (hint: if your demographic is educated, high-income females, they probably are), share a Pinterest board via Facebook or Twitter.
37. **Share a comic or meme:** Getting your customers to laugh with you is a great way to start building relationships.
38. **Post a video testimonial:** Share a video review; or better yet, ask your social media followers to submit their own video testimonials.
39. **Recommend a colleague on LinkedIn:** Encourage your connections to reach out to someone who acts as a valuable resource to your business.
40. **Host a photo contest:** Ask for photo submissions and then get your fans to vote. Share the winning photos.
41. **Share a trending Twitter topic:** Use Topsy to find content that's popular and trending on Twitter.
42. **Hold a debate on social media:** This can go downhill pretty quickly, so be sure to stay on top of it!
43. **'Caption this':** Post a photo and ask your fans to come up with creative or funny captions.
44. **YouTube video:** Find a cute or inspirational video and promote it to your fans or followers.
45. **Tag another Facebook page:** Generate some good karma by helping to promote another business.
46. **Share breaking industry news:** Stay on top of what's going on in your industry or niche by using Google Alerts.
47. **Share country-specific holidays:** Wish your followers from around the world happy holidays (a full list of worldwide holidays can be found here).

You never know what will catch people's eye in their streams, so it's imperative that you're consistently delivering valuable content and links so that you not only land in their stream but they also want to follow you to get more.

More social media updates will help you get more exposure in people's social media streams, which will also help increase the number of shares you get, further broadening your reach. Just make sure you don't sacrifice quality for quantity; useless or boring updates will get your brand ignored or blocked eventually.

your reach, brand awareness, and audience. Tools like WeFollow are great for helping you identify key influencers by keywords.

Follow these influencers and interact with them; build a relationship and soon they'll start helping you achieve your social media goals. Remember, social media is all about being social; don't be afraid to reach out and build relationships! Let's look at this in a little more detail.

6. BUILD YOUR FACEBOOK PROFILE TO ATTRACT MORE USERS TO YOUR PAGE

Facebook's tricky in that you can add friends through your personal profile, but not to your business page. So you can use your profile as a sort of funnel to get people to Like your page. Friend people that fit your target demographic, just like you would on any other channel. Then after you've built up a relationship with them, invite them to Like your page.

7. MAKE YOUR SOCIAL ICONS PROMINENT ON YOUR WEBSITE

This is the simplest way to get more followers, and yet so many business owners overlook it. People expect to see those social icons at the top of a website page, so make sure yours are obvious and that the links work. There's nothing worse than when people click on icons with dead links.

8. INCLUDE YOUR PROFILES IN YOUR EMAIL SIGNATURE

Another way to make it easy for anyone who emails you to connect socially is to include the links to each of your social channels right in your email. Also include them in your company newsletter.

9. JOIN LINKEDIN GROUPS

Groups help people with common interests gather together. Find the ones your target audience spends time in, and start contributing valuable insight and content there. You can link to other members, and will likely see others do the same to you if you're truly providing valuable information.

10. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDUSTRY INFLUENCERS

Finding and building relationships with industry influencers is an excellent way to quickly expand

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While Twitter is a great tool for meeting people from the comfort of your office, it can also help with your in-person networking opportunities. Many conferences and trade shows now include hashtags assigned specifically to the event. Using that hashtag, you can identify and follow people in your industry worth meeting while you're on site. Once you've made those connections, you'll have a great reason to connect on Twitter later and stay in touch.

An even better way to make lasting connections is to note the list of attendees in the weeks leading up to the event and connect online. If you're already following a keynote speaker or workshop leader prior to the conference, you'll have a great jumping-off point when you approach that person at a mixer or find yourself seated next to him or her at lunch.

4. OFFER VALUE

While a large part of getting social media influencers to follow you is engaging with them directly, you also need to focus on building up your own social media presence so you can offer value to the influencers that you want to follow you. One of the best ways to accomplish this is through creating your own high-quality content, such as well-researched blog posts that provide new value, or an infographic that presents data about your industry in a new way, providing new insights.

Whatever medium you select, you should be creating valuable content regardless of your online marketing goals; not just when you're trying to get people to follow your brand (though frequent and quality content publication is by far the most effective way). By doing so, not only will you get social media influencers to follow you, but you also stand a chance of encouraging them to share your content with their audience.

Over time, this can lead to a supportive environment where your posts are shared with multiple people through their own networks, helping you reach even more customers than you would have been able to reach on your own. Furthermore, the relationships you built with these influencers along the way will yield many more benefits than simply the expanded brand reach on social media channels; you'll develop a network of industry experts who want to know how they can help you. And there's no better advantage to a business than having a strong network of powerful supporters.

How to Run a Successful B2B Social Media Marketing Campaign

Many marketers think of social media in the context of B2C companies: after all, 4 in 10 consumers buy products that they've favorited, liked, tweeted or pinned on various social networks.

Yet, according to a recent study from MarketingProfs, 87% of B2B marketers use social media platforms in their content marketing efforts. In fact, of 13 tactics proposed from the content marketing arsenal, social media was the most popular.

Now that we've covered most of the basics of social media strategy for B2C and traditional companies, let's dig a little deeper into strategies that B2B companies can utilize.

NEXUS OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE B2B BUSINESS MODEL

Take a close look at the nexus of B2B business models and the primary function and benefits of social media. By understanding where these two most effectively connect, it becomes easier to see where marketers can invest their time to see the best results in B2B social campaigns.

The B2B buying process is a demanding one. When purchases can run into hundreds of thousands of dollars and people's careers can be put on the line when a bad purchase is made, it's easy to see why B2B transactions often require a complex buying cycle.

It's within this context that the concept of the buying funnel really takes root. Content marketing allows for businesses to connect to the target market and provide content that's relevant to their stage in the buying cycle. Social media channels are a critical element of content marketing.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA & INBOUND MARKETING

For many marketers, the relationship between social media and inbound marketing is not 100% clear. Most would say that the purpose of inbound marketing is to create great content and promote it through various channels. Social media is one of those channels, but it also plays a secondary role: it amplifies the impact and reach of content that's published in other places. A common example of this would be promoting a recent blog post via social media channels in order to raise awareness of the blog post.

So, when we talk about the relationship between social

1. As the landscape becomes more crowded, social media's ability to amplify the reach of your content can't be overstated. Every content marketing strategy should include a secondary dissemination loop, and social media needs to play a key role in that. Is your content easily sharable on social media? Are you promoting your B2B content through your own networks? Have you taken a deep dive into understanding the ecosystems of your key networks — for example, using hashtags on Twitter to extend your reach?
2. Some networks are a natural (and growing) fit for B2B companies. LinkedIn is the obvious choice, with Twitter a close second. Slideshare is also rapidly gaining market share. Niche networks that cater to your customers are also worth getting to know, as they can be a source of highly qualified leads.
3. Google authorship will play an increasingly important role in getting eyes on your content. Even if there's not a direct sales benefit to participating in Google Plus for your business now, the indirect benefits, such as Authorship Markup, are powerful enough that I'd advocate taking the network seriously.
4. If you haven't taken your social media marketing into the visual realm, it's time to begin experimenting. Images (think Pinterest and Instagram), video, and the rise of micro video are opening whole new content avenues. As mobile technology continues to outpace more traditional computer use, even in the business context, B2B companies with a mobile-visual strategy will be positioned to come out ahead of their competitors.

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Chapter 7

INDIVIDUAL SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNEL BEST PRACTICES

Twitter

The good news about Twitter is that even though it went public in 2013, it didn't jump the shark as many had predicted. Instead, the network has continued to grow, with an increased focus on the sophistication of its advertising platform. One recent article from AdWeek provided interesting analysis about the intersection of video and data on Twitter. Technologically, they've continued to innovate with the launch of Twitter cards, leading to more media rich user experiences.

If you're having trouble conceptualizing the evolution of Twitter as a microblogging platform in the context of 2014 trends, think about it this way. The tools available to marketers and advertisers using Twitter are becoming more sophisticated; so is the framework that content marketers are using to relate to Twitter as a platform. Success on Twitter is no longer about a series of specific tactics; instead, it's related to thinking strategically about how to leverage Twitter as part of your broader online marketing and social media efforts. Let's explore strategies for how to do that.

INTEGRATE YOUR TWITTER ACTIVITY WITH YOUR CONTENT MARKETING

On the surface, this recommendation can be oversimplified: for example, you may immediately think about the need

to share all of your key articles with your social media channels (which of course, you should, but without creating a one-way "shouting" dynamic).

But strategically integrating your Twitter activity with your broader content marketing efforts requires a different mindset. Instead of seeing Twitter simply as a platform to promote your content, ask sharp questions about how your content marketing strategy supports your Twitter success:

- What aspect of your content marketing plan is dedicated to ultra short-form content? What content are you creating that's optimized for this format?
- If you do an audience segmentation of your followers on Twitter, what types of content resonate the most (e.g. quotes, photographs, shared news, jokes, etc.)? The answer to this question can drive your content sharing and content creation decisions.
- What is your strategy for connecting to the broader eco-system of Twitter? Are you using the platform to connect with influencers, join bigger conversations, and gain critical exposure in your niche?

In a way, you can think of this as an extension of the way

Pinterest

There's a lot of talk about Pinterest and Instagram today, and for good reason. For many businesses, it's possible to develop a following on these image-based sites and drive high amounts of traffic to your site. It isn't as difficult as you may think, either.

Consider the following example.

If a mom-and-daughter-run website can harness the power of pinned images on Pinterest, your business and well-planned strategy can too. As reported by Entrepreneur.com, a mom and her then-15-year-old daughter started PopCosmo – a site they envisioned as being a teen trend spotting site focusing on their local area.

A single image mashup the daughter posted on Pinterest drove 10,000 visitors to their website in a single month. Now, they're averaging 120,000 pageviews per month:

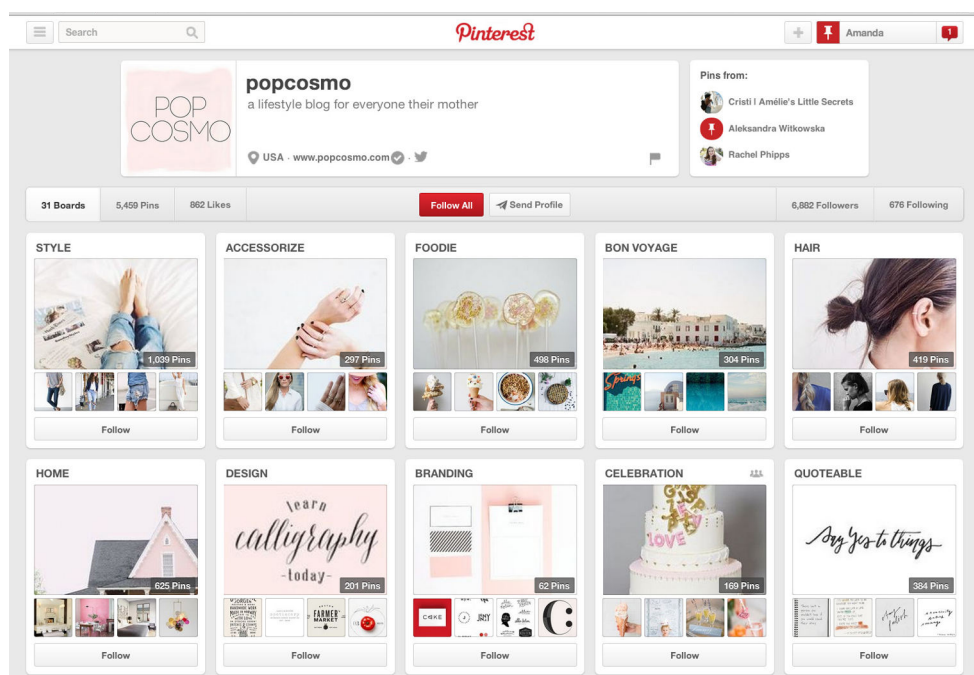
It's true that the vast majority of websites that would naturally appeal to the demographics of Pinterest. If you don't think your site would quite fit in, maybe you're right, but there's still benefit to be had; it really comes down to creativity and effort behind the campaign. Social media marketing is one of the three pillars of a successful SEO campaign, and Pinterest is a big player in the social media realm right now.

There are many ways to use Pinterest for positive-ROI benefit. If you want to get started with it, here are a few tips to keep in mind:

BE SELECTIVE: Don't pin every single product in your store, every image from your blog, etc... Pin the best ones.

USE TEASERS: Don't give all the goodies away in one image or one image description. Create pins that relate to your products or service and give just a little info to guide them to your site for more.

ADD 'PIN IT' BUTTONS: Just as you integrate social networks and sharing buttons on your website, be sure to



add buttons that make it easy for other people to pin your images. Add a follow button for your Pinterest profile, too.

USE COUPLES IMAGES: Use lots of images on your site so there's more for people to pin. Remember that you can pin videos, too.

PIN OFTEN, PIN VARIETY: Pin often. The more you pin, the more people who are likely to see one they like and re-pin, like, follow or comment. Remember that unlike other social networks, images on your boards have a long shelf-life. They aren't buried as easily as a Tweet. Don't just pin your own images, though. Repin, like, follow and comment other pins/pinners that are relevant to your industry or might be interested in your business at some point. Be personable.

PIN INTERESTS: Most people on Pinterest don't want to "see marketing". They want to find what they're interested in and they want to "see people". So as you have time, make boards on topics that interest you and pin and interact on those boards too.

PIN VERTICALLY: By vertically, I mean that literally... use images that are taller than they are wide. Because of Pinterest's layout, it will attract more eyeballs. Using dark borders on your image or adding text (think memes) can also help.

PIN MASHUPS: Take several examples of something and combine them into a vertical image showing each on in a

angle or spin can you put on the topic at hand? How can you tailor it to your audience? When you come up with a schedule for your posts (see #1), keep these questions in mind to avoid rehashing the same old content and ideas.

3. YOU'RE FOCUSED ON RECEIVING RATHER THAN GIVING

A trap most of us fall into (at least sometimes), is focusing more on what our followers can do for us, rather than the other way around. There's a time and place on social media for promoting your products, but these should only make up a very small portion of your social media activity.

How to Avoid This: One of the best ways to keep your focus on your customers is to have a clearly-articulated mission statement that guides all your content creation and promotion. Write out your mission statement, and keep it in a place you can see it when you're at your computer. Take Starbucks' mission statement for instance: To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time."

When you let your customer-focused mission statement guide your content creation, your social media content can't help but meet the needs and desires of your target market.

4. YOU'RE NOT USING THE RIGHT NETWORKS FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

You can post the most engaging content, but if it's not finding your target audience, what's the point? Many businesses choose the social networks they prefer, without determining if that's actually where their audience wants to connect with them.

How to Avoid This: Do some research into where your target market is hanging out. There are a number of ways you can do this: First, do some research on the key demographics of each of the social networks. This recent study by PewResearch is a great place to start. Second, ask your current customers where they prefer to connect with you. You can set up a quick survey using Survey Monkey or KwikSurveys, and post it on your site or send it out to your email subscribers.

5. YOU'RE IMPERSONAL

Sometimes big brands can get away with generic, impersonal posts...particularly since we know that a majority of people still cite coupons and discounts as

the #1 reason they follow a brand on social media (who cares if a post is impersonal as long as you're saving 30%?).

But for most businesses, being impersonal will turn away followers and make them disinterested in your posts, your brand, and your company. One of the core purposes of social media involvement is humanization of your brand, which builds loyalty, awareness, trust, traffic, and conversion rates.

How to Avoid This: Here are a few tips for connecting with your audience in a more authentic, personal way:

1. Sign your name occasionally so your fans and followers know there's a real person behind your posts. This is especially useful if you have a social media team. Barack Obama is famous for doing this when he personally posts Tweets to his Twitter account.
2. Don't be all business all the time. Don't be afraid to post a personal photo, opinion or anecdote from time to time. This will help you stand out by bringing a strong human element to your brand. Your followers aren't one-dimensional, and they don't expect you to be either.
3. Don't overcomplicate things. Focus less on strategy, and more on being real with your audience. When you make a mistake, admit it. Put yourself in the shoes of your audience and give them what they want. In his book *Human to Human: #H2H*, Bryan Kramer writes, "Communication shouldn't be complicated. It should just be genuine and simple, with the humility and understanding that we're all multi-dimensional humans, every one of which has spent time in both the dark and delightful parts of life." Focus less on being a marketer, and more on being human.

It's time to move beyond just knowing what makes for great social media engagement, and actually do it. Hopefully this post has given you some ideas for how you can be more proactive, consistent and real on social media...and increase your engagement levels as a result.

post one day? Or you devote a whole day to social when you should've been doing other work? It needs to be a regular part of your schedule or else it'll become an ineffective distraction.

4. NOT USING THE TOOLS AVAILABLE TO YOU

The interfaces included with all the popular social networks are perfectly fine for posting and interacting with people. But they're not the most efficient. In fact, it's a much better idea to use a more robust social tool to tackle multiple networks at once. Something like Hootsuite, Sprout Social or Buffer will do the trick.

5. USING TOO MANY TOOLS

Social media tools can be awesome in terms of the amount of time they can save you. That being said, using too many can become a distraction. Choose a favorite and stick to it. Keep it simple!

6. TRYING TO DO EVERYTHING YOURSELF

As your social media efforts grow, the number of tasks you'll need to complete each day will also increase. Plus,

"Research shows that 'when you're interrupted, you don't immediately go back to the task you were doing before you were interrupted.' In fact, workers tend to take on two additional tasks in between the interruption and returning to whatever it was they were doing before."

- Dr. Gloria Mark

an expanded social presence tends to go hand in hand with increased business. There may come a point when you simply have too much on your plate to handle it all on your own. Should that time come, it's perfectly okay to outsource some tasks, such as post-scheduling and analytics monitoring. You'll still be in control of what's said, you'll just have some help getting that message to your audience.

7. FAILING TO SCHEDULE POSTS IN ADVANCE

Speaking of scheduling posts, failing to do so can put a major strain on your workload. Business owners can't be present on social media sites at all times of the day. This is the kind of time suck that discourages business owners so much they want to toss out the idea of social media marketing altogether.

8. GETTING CAUGHT UP IN REAL-TIME CHATTER

Conversation and engagement is everything that makes social media marketing great. But getting wrapped up in trivial conversations can distract from your larger social goals and your regular tasks. Keep your social conversations tight and focused to avoid wasting time.

9. LETTING EVERY NOTIFICATION DISTRACT YOU FROM WORK

This time suck probably affects every industry. While it's important to respond to people that mention you in tweets or comments, you don't necessarily have to reply that second. In fact, responding to every single tweet, mention, comment, or message you get when you receive it means you're being pulled away from some other task repeatedly. This lays a major blow to productivity and fuels the corporate idea that employees just goof off on social media.

According to Yast.com, Dr. Gloria Mark, an associate professor at the Donald Bren School of Information and Computer Sciences at the University of California, found that on average, workers are interrupted

every three minutes. Many of those interruptions are small and take only seconds or minutes of our time, but bigger and more important interruptions occur roughly four times per hour.

"Research shows that 'when you're interrupted, you don't immediately go back to the task you were doing before you were interrupted. In fact, workers tend to take on two additional tasks in

between the interruption and returning to whatever it was they were doing before." According to the same article, "Another study by Dr. Mark shows that, in an effort to make up for distractions, individuals try to work harder and faster at the expense of personal wellbeing and – to some extent – the quality of their work."

10. FAILING TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

A strong part of the value of participating on social media is building a relationship with your audience while humanizing your brand through real engagement and conversion. But if you don't bother to respond to people who've taken the time to reach out, you could be wasting your social media efforts entirely.

37. Investigate the optimal number of times you should be posting to each platform: For instance, did you know that businesses who post to Twitter 30-35 times per week outperform those who tweet 10-20 times per week?
38. Keep your tweets short enough that others can retweet them without cutting out important info like your username.
39. Create a live Google+ Hangout on Air, and then promote it to the rest of your audience (either as a free opt-in incentive or as part of a paid membership program).
40. Have a plan in place for responding to questions and complaints on social media: Up to 42% of your followers are expecting a response within 60 minutes.
41. Shorten your links on Twitter: bit.ly will get you the most retweets.
42. Avoid using human faces in your Pinterest photos: Images without faces get shared more often.
43. Perfect the art of the selfie using a tool like FaceTune: It will let you take even the most unflattering selfie and turn it into a profile picture you'll be proud to display!
44. Tag other pages in your Facebook posts (where relevant) as a way of reaching out to influential businesses in your niche.
45. Use vertically-oriented images on Pinterest: They tend to outperform horizontally-oriented ones.
46. Find the most popular posts, videos and infographics on social media using a tool like Swayy, and then share with your audience.
47. Join a Facebook group in your industry to find and connect with potential customers: Just be sure to become a valued member of the group, not just someone who constantly self-promotes.
48. Be realistic about what you should expect from your social media efforts: In Social Media Examiner's 2014 Social Media Marketing report, respondents noted the 3 main benefits as increased exposure (92%), increased website traffic (80%), and developing loyal fans (72%). Only 50% reporting improved sales as a benefit.
49. Be present consistently: Don't be like the annoying relative who only shows up when he needs something!
50. Consciously decide what you want your social media voice to be: Casual? Funny? Corporate? Be consistent across platforms.
51. If you haven't already set up Google Authorship....do it. Now. It's only going to get more important for online visibility and SEO. Here's how to do it.
52. Investigate who your most engaged fans and followers are, and acknowledge them publically.
53. Integrate your Twitter activity with your content marketing strategy: One way to do this is to ask yourself how you're integrating super-short form content into your strategy.
54. Optimize your social media profiles by incorporating keywords into your business bio and description.
55. Use links within your tweets for the best chance of getting retweeted.
56. When posting to Facebook, be aware that you don't have to use the default image, headline and subtitle: Simply click on them to edit before posting.
57. Using emoticons in your social media posts has been shown to increase engagement.
58. Don't be afraid to retweet your own tweets: It can help you reach followers that didn't see them the first time.
59. Use Twitter Cards: They can help to significantly increase engagement. For more on this, see my post The Definitive Guide to Using Twitter Cards.
60. Ask your Instagram followers to share photos of themselves using your product, and then vote for the best picture.
61. Did you know Google+ allows you to add some formatting to your posts? You just need to know how: * bold *, _ italics _ - strikethrough - (just remove the spaces).

62. You don't have to reinvent the wheel: Don't be afraid to incorporate content curation into your social media strategy.
63. Received a positive comment or testimonial? Share it with your social media followers (just do it sparingly).
64. Participate in other people's social media conversations, rather than always starting your own.
65. If you want to connect with influencers in your niche, be sure to share their content...it's one of the best ways to get on their radar.
66. Schedule your posts from your mobile device using a free app like Everypost.
67. Clearly define your #1 social media goal: Is it engagement? Website traffic? Sales? Make sure everything you do on social media is helping you accomplish this goal.
68. Use a tool like Spredfast to see how many people you've reached with your social media efforts.
69. Remember that social media is about building a community: This is the best way to build long-term profitable relationships.
70. Use an RSS reader to track trending topics in your niche: Then create social media content based on what you've found.
71. Monitor how much time you actually spend on social media...you may just be surprised. A tool like Rescue Time can help with this.
72. Focus on what your followers need to hear, rather than on what you feel you need to tell them.
73. Use a social media calendar to plan out themes and posts for the upcoming month.
74. Make a plan for your social media efforts: Where will you post? How often? Then be consistent.
75. Be a listener: You can get a lot more accomplished when you actually listen to what people are saying, rather than pushing your own agenda.
76. Realize that social media can be a long-term endeavor: Don't expect immediate results. Once your followers begin to really trust you, that's when your efforts start to pay off.
77. Keep your tweets short: Research shows that tweets with 100 characters get the most engagement.
78. Look through the social media profiles of potential employees: This will give you real insight into their character and level of industry knowledge.
79. Employ the art of storytelling in your social media efforts.
80. Make sure all your images are watermarked, so that if they get pinned without attribution, you still get credit.
81. Have a social media crisis plan in place: Who will be responsible for dealing with major social media mistakes? How exactly will they respond?
82. When possible, keep your Facebook posts to 40 characters or less: Jeff Bullas' research found this is the magic number for eliciting the most engagement.
83. Use fill-in-the-blank posts on Facebook: They receive 9x more comments than other post types.
84. Post to Instagram around 3-4 pm EST: This is when most users are checking their account.
85. Try posting to social media 'after hours': Some businesses have reported that their highest engagement levels occur in the early morning or late at night.
86. Resist the temptation to use your personal Facebook profile for business: Not only is it against Facebook's guidelines, it's a great way to annoy your friends.
87. If you've been paid to write or promote a post on social media, be sure to disclose it, or risk violating FTC rules.
88. Respond quickly and professionally to negative feedback: Use it as an opportunity to shine when it comes to social customer service.