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The social media community is a lot like a real-world neighborhood where people ask their friends for referrals to a hairstylist or mechanic or roofer. But businesses can use social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram proactively to market products and services in dynamic, interactive ways to the people who want them.

In that sense, social media is more potent than a website where people can learn about a business but can't interact with the owners or other customers. Websites are a lot like online brochures, and they're just as static. And few people see them if they don't know what to look for or if the business doesn't rank high on search engines.

Established social media platforms allow the types of engagement that animate social media marketing. They let businesses start a conversation with a prospective customer that could lead to a sale.

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS

Marketing begins when a business identifies the target market and plans how to reach the people who populate it. Social media marketing accentuates the "social" part of that relationship.

Unlike other types of business marketing, however, social media isn't the place to come on strong with a sales pitch; most people don't check Facebook or LinkedIn accounts because they're starved for commercial advertising. People visit social media sites to converse and connect, just as they mingle at networking events to meet potential clients, collaborators or mentors.

Social media workshops

Written by gallupsun

Thursday, 25 March 2021 17:14

So a business's social media face has to be friendly and genuine. And it has to be consistent. If a business launches a Facebook page but the most recent post is five years old, customers will assume the business is defunct, doesn't care about nurturing its social media audience or doesn't know how to use this powerful outreach tool.

Fortunately, a business can reboot its social media marketing at any time. If it has too many profiles to keep up with them all, it can downsize to a manageable number — striving for quality over quantity. If the business hasn't identified its audience, it can get clarity, decide what to say to followers, and plan how to stay in touch.

For example, a coffee shop can use Facebook to share stories about special events it is having, or invite people to observe its unique brewing process. A nonprofit can use LinkedIn to invite other businesses to cosponsor a local event or create a strategic partnership. A photographer can share images on Instagram and link followers to her online store.

TRAINING AVAILABLE

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