

Stay Social!

Social media usage is constantly changing, and it can certainly be overwhelming to keep up with it all. Here's an update on what's new in social media and how you can utilize it so you, and your business, won't be left behind.

BY MASON DAY

Remember when people used to say that social media was a fad? Well, now that Facebook is over 10 years old, hopefully people are starting to see that the concept of personal digital interaction on a global scale isn't going anywhere. Even though it hasn't disappeared and the concept is the same, many social media platforms have changed over the years.

In the beginning everything was free, and businesses could talk to whoever they wanted. Now, that's not quite the case. Let's take a look back and see what's happened so that we know what we need to be doing now and make sure we aren't stuck in the past!

FACEBOOK

Then: Despite what some people think, Facebook was not the first social network. Remember Myspace? Facebook, however, was the first social network to establish itself as a lasting platform that could hold itself together as buzz faded away.

In the beginning the platform was just a bunch of college kids looking to share and connect. You actually had to have a university email address to log on. This quickly changed and everyone from pre-teens to AARP members were signing on.

Businesses slowly began realizing they too could get involved. They could join, and get people to "like" them, and they could push content (ads) out to all of their fans. Even better than that, when fans interacted with posts, all of their Facebook friends would see and the door to that business or brand was opened organically.

Now: The demographic has changed slightly, but the platform is still the powerhouse. The network is less about what is happening every single minute in someone's life, and more about sharing important memories and events.

As the age of the Facebook user has increased, the network has seen an increase in usage as a news sharing platform.



Facebook is likely still the main social network for a lot of businesses; however, they aren't reaching the people that they used to. To truly maximize the potential of Facebook, it's now a pay-to-play game. If you want to reach a large audience of targeted users, you have to pay for advertising.

TWITTER

Then: Twitter broke onto the scene in 2006 as a great way to livestream your life. People were logging on to keep track of up-to-the-minute news and to see what their friends were saying about it. People followed celebrities in droves just to see what Justin Bieber had to say about his new album or the latest trends.

Businesses found it as a good way to reach out to individual customers, and to also keep people updated on things that were newsworthy, but not necessarily blog worthy. The average Twitter user followed a hundred or so accounts and actively read what they had to say.

Now: The average lifespan of a tweet is under 20 minutes. Unless all of your customers are logged in at the same time, and you know what time that is, you likely aren't reaching them unless you are tweeting 20 or more times a day. However, the network is still great for communicating about events and current trends.

The platform made the hashtag (#) relevant. Also, because of the nature of the network, it's still a great way to facilitate customer service. It's easy to talk directly with customers and

fans on a one-on-one basis. Sure, the world can see your conversation, but if you're good at customer service, that's a good thing!

FOURSQUARE

Then: Foursquare started as a social "game" in 2009. People could check into places and earn points or "become mayor." It was fun if your friends were on it, and sometimes businesses offered deals to people that checked in. It was a fun way for businesses to interact with people that they knew were loyal customers.

Now: The platform is struggling to pick up the pieces of what it once was. Numbers are way down and people simply don't find the "game" to be as fun as it once was.

PINTEREST

Then: It may be hard to believe, but even Pinterest is five years old. The digital scrapbooking platform has seen great growth while remaining relatively unchanged.

Pinterest is all about creative content. Recipes, how-to projects, and inspirational photos are the most common sites.

It's a great place for businesses in a visual industry (like ours) because it's the easiest site for pictures to "viral," and every picture a business posts can be directly linked back to that business's website.

Now: Pinterest hasn't really made any major changes. One thing that they have done for businesses is open up an advertising platform called "Promoted Pins."

By kicking a few dollars at great content, a business can get in front of thousands of people, and they can target specific metro areas closest to them as well. It's a network where advertisers are seeing high rates of return.

INSTAGRAM

Then: Instagram is also five years old this year. When it first came out the app was a pretty fun way to share pictures, but wasn't anything too notable. Until it was acquired by Facebook.

Now: Instagram is THE social media platform for millennials. It's the new Twitter, but better!

The app offers a constant stream of visual stimuli. It's also the easiest network for our industry to utilize. All it takes is a photo of a beautiful plant with a sentence and some hashtags ... and boom! Perfect post. A network that is still growing.

NEWCOMERS

Social media is changing. Though the bigger networks won't disappear anytime soon, it's clear that niche networks are becoming the new way to connect. Platforms like Snapchat, Houzz, and GrowIt! are all poised to attract more and more users that fit targeted demographics. Remember that it never hurts to try out a new network, and often the reward is much greater when you get on board early.

As we move forward into the next decade of social media, keep an eye open for platforms that align with your target customers. Those are the places where you need to spend your time and money.


Stay social! *gpn*

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